

A SUPERB SELECTION

25

MODERN STORIES OF

MYSTERY

AND

IMAGINATION

[THE OTHER WORLDS]

EDITED BY PHIL STONG

A spine-chilling collection of the best stories of fantasy and horror since DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN



25



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MYSTERY AND IMAGINATION



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EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
PHIL STONG

GARDEN CITY PUBLISHING Co., INC.

GARDEN CITY, NEW YORK

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MODERN STORIES

OF

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AND

IMAGINATION

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

PHIL STONE

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*Acknowledgment is made to the following periodicals in which some of these stories first appeared:*

WEIRD TALES

ASTOUNDING STORIES

AMAZING STORIES

WESTMINSTER MAGAZINE

ESQUIRE

THRILLING WONDER STORIES



# THE OTHER WORLDS

## FOREWORD

SOME forty years ago a young Negro named Bennings woke up in his mother's little house on the river bottoms at the edge of Keosauqua, Iowa, in a very curious frame of mind. He ate his breakfast in silence and then went out to the shed and got a hammer and a pocketful of nails.

"Lob," said his mother, Minnie, "what are you foolin' around with? Mr. Neis will be waitin' for you to help out at the mill."

Lob looked over at the great, gaunt structure of cut limestone on the river bank and shook his head. "I ain't goin' to the mill today."

"You ain't goin' to the mill!" Laundry and the mill were the essentials of the Bennings economy. Lob was general handy man around the place. He shovelled coal under the boilers, handled grain sacks and was general utility man on milling days. "Quit your jokin' now and get down there to work."

"I ain't goin' to the mill today. I'm goin' to fix the pickets on the fence."

"There ain't no hurry about those pickets. Why ain't you goin' to the mill?"

"Because," said Lob, "last night I dreamed I was fixin' the pickets on the fence and a hearse went by and went down to the mill. Old hearse ain't goin' to bring me back from the mill."

A few hours later the mill boilers let loose and killed the proprietors, two of the Neis's, with ghastly immediacy and completeness. Before Lob had finished patching his fence Charley Dodds' hearse went by on its way to the mill to gather what was left of the victims.

The old shell of the mill has been torn down in the past ten

years but all through my childhood it loomed blank-eyed and desolate, gloomily towering over our favorite swimming place, the old, massive, stone-bound locks. Once in a while we would explore it; several high waters had swept through the lower floors and left thick layers of black alluvium; we tiptoed up decrepit stairs and over sagging floors, past ruined bins and the moldy skeletons of the grain chutes until we came to the high loading loft where we peered out from under the gallows beam that had once supported the pulley for lifting the grain sacks—peered out from darkness and ruin and mold at a warm, green sunlit world; we felt, ourselves, like the revenants of those men so suddenly thrust from the green warmth of living into the ruinous and rotting darkness.

There are a hundred people or so alive who know that Lob, in spite of his general steadiness and his family's exigent need for his earnings, skipped one day's work at the mill because he had dreamed that he saw a hearse going down there.

\* \* \*

One very hot summer day, my wife called me at my office at *Editor & Publisher* in the Times Building in New York City and asked me to walk up to Ed. Balzerit's office on Fiftieth Street and pick up her beach robe, which Betty had borrowed the week before.

I had a great deal to say about this project. In the first place, the Balzerits' lived about thirty steps from us on Eleventh Street, and Ed could take the robe there; in the second place, there was no possibility that we would go swimming before the week-end; in the third place, my wife had another beach robe, and so on and so on. Virginia was inexorable and even passionately so, for once; it sounded as if the beach robe were a coronation gown and the Archbishop of Canterbury was waiting.

At five o'clock, grumbling low curses, I went up and got the robe. I was probably crossing Forty-third Street when the subway train which I would otherwise have taken, scattered pieces of passengers all over the I.R.T. tracks. When

I got home, after a long, hot walk, I woke my wife from a nap; she had been crying in her sleep.

Now one of the pleasant things about the lady who shares my fortunes is that, without being at all bovine, she is no more neurotic than a Carnation cow.

“For God’s sake,” I said passionately, shaking a gallon of sweat from my face and hurling down the cursed robe, “what is the matter with you? It’s me (grammar is contemptible at such moments) who ought to be bawling. I had to get your blankety bathrobe and then I had to walk the whole blank blankety blank way home.”

“I know,” she said. “Where was the wreck?”

She had been napping almost from the minute the wreck occurred; there were no extras out and no way she could have known about the accident except by direct report of someone who had got downtown before I could—as a matter of fact she had been asleep all the time. Her subconscious might have caught something from the shrieking of ambulances into St. Vincent’s, even in her sleep, but her subconscious would have had to be an unusually clever one to tell her about that disaster—there were about twenty people killed as I remember—a half hour before the wreck when she urged a completely unreasonable errand in a completely unusual and Xantippic manner to keep me off that train.

## II

These are the only occurrences within my own experience, outside of some poker runs, that have struck me as impressive evidence of premonition; even in these I do not assent to intervention from The Other World, for in the New Science we have a suggestion of how “premonitions” might occur by some rare extension of our numerous undefined but ordinary psychic potentialities. Too much fantastic literature now is engaged with the idea, recently become respectable, that Time is a dimension and that all events exist simultaneously on a plane—the other favorite figure is a spiral—

over which we move in the figuratively limbed dimensions, without being able to glimpse a dimensional entity, or cut across the spiral dimension.

It may be perfectly true that Time is a Being is Time, as the Bergsonians said. Time things confuses me; so we will have no more new physics and philosophies should change one can imagine that some critical and might transcend our conventional faculties of perception of such high events through faculties yet furnished enough data for serious examination.

I very definitely do not believe that departed spirits hang around as ghosts and I have never yet seen one who was not the most transparent kind of criminal, but I can see a little case for some of those that are called—for want of a scientific term—is yet present—simply “psychic.” I have seen the silent transference of thought demonstrated to my favorite relatives—beyond any suspicion of a medium or a power which could not be questioned. She has been seen of coming into a room and performing a task without communication. There are a great many who can manage this, of course, but the proof of the genuineness I am concerned, is that she can be made to do things which are thingless things when she does not even know she is doing them. Her gift is on foot.

The “gift” is so pronounced that in her hands it is used to torment her by suddenly impelling her



## FOREWORD

Almost everyone has had the "Speak of the Devil" experience often enough to suspect that presences are recognized by impacts less defined than mere sense.

Because such matters are still in the center, or a suburb, of sober philosophy or research, I have neglected altogether in the collection which follows. It is not that pre-perception may sometime be metaphysicalized; it is a cheap and ancient figure, but "psychic" independent of our ordinary senses are not nearly to us as wireless telegraphy would have been to any one much before the time of Volta and the differentiation of dynamic and static electricities. The notion that such impacts are electrical is well enough; perhaps they are another effect as strange to us as Hertzian waves or cathode rays would have been to our great-grandfathers; strange to them they may not be to our grandsons.

The first requirement of a good fantastic story, as the magazines who specialize on these things require—fact—is that it should not be even remotely possible of the fact that I have made three or four exceptions to the rule in the stories that follow, it seems to me that each story should be consistent within its own definition and these definitions should be incredible.

Thus, in our first story, "The Considerate Host," is by all odds one of the best short stories of the year in which it was published, our condition is "ghosts living very much in the manner that they would have lived if they had been granted an extension of ten years. We smile and say, "All right." and then

The enjoyment of such stories as these rests on one's acceptance of an initial law which is completely irrational but which is put down in a calm and matter of fact manner as an obvious circumstance which you must accept if you are to play the game and have any fun out of it.

Having put down this first rule for writing these stories, I suggest that it is also a first rule for reading the stories. Any one who starts out by saying, "But this is impossible," should be deprived of all Grimm, Lewis Carroll, Bierce, Wilde, Poe, Hoffman, Dickens, Shakespeare—and so on and so on—and put to work chopping wood by the cord or running a comptometer. He'll never be President or succeed in medicine, law or most of the interesting imaginative pursuits.

For those nearsighted people who believe that a fantasy is a brittle thing, God wot, whose principal appeal is to weak minds or mildly addled ones willing to make the concession described for the sake of a sensation, I may say first that no story in this collection requires such concessions as are regularly made to Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, Philo Vance, Lupin and the whole gallery of super-dicks who, aside from their remarkably unreasonable performances in general behavior, are gifted with the extra-perception which invariably attracts their attention to circumstances of hidden significance, as if they were in rapport with the murderer. At one time I went through a short season of detective mysteries but I found that they strained my credulity and so I returned to fantasies.

As far as that is concerned, anyone with the least experience, in the world and in narrative structure, could take almost any novel, good or bad, and give a brief analysis of what the author says happened, from his premises, and what would much more probably have happened without the patient guidance of the literary parent. As far as being "fairy tales" is concerned the fantastic stories are quite as worthy of serious reading as the works of William Shakespeare, P. G. Wodehouse or Ernest Hemingway—to collect, casually, from three strata and manners.

I have occasionally glimpsed one of the most popular magazines of our time which has built up a tremendous circulation by the simple repetition of standard formulas of which its audience apparently never wearies:

- (1) Sports—hero pulls some trick and gets the girl.
- (2) Military (navy or flying)—Ditto.
- (3) Crime—Ditto.

In all of the following stories there is no "hero gets the girl" story, *per se*.

Of course, there have been plenty of fantastic love stories, but somehow the casual fantasy does not often tolerate the overshadowing presence of the perennial fantasy. I think Frank Stockton wrote more of these than most standard authors—his, "Two-Horned Alexander" is to be commended, especially—but his fantasy in his best stories was generally an applique on a human situation, rather than a fantasy in itself, though he did some good ones in the pure school.

We must make the evident differentiation here between the story in which ordinary human relationships are affected by a fantastic development, and stories in which fantastic premises are worked out in realistically human terms. Both deserve to be called fantastic stories but the difference is that between such stories as "Markheim," which is not really fantastic at all, but merely allegorical, and "The Monkey's Paw," or "The Bottle Imp," or "Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." In one the trick is disclosed to end an ordinary story; in the other the story is told from a fantastic premise.

The modern school, especially in America, whose style August Derleth accredits to Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, has gone in largely for the homely tale which winds up with a fantastic or so-called supernatural turn in the last paragraph or sentence. Ambrose Bierce, in his leisurely moments, was an exponent of this story; with his native sense of economy he stripped the yarn of the niceties and details in which Mrs. Freeman and Mrs. Wharton indulged and finished a story with a revengeful rifle shot, or the print of a dead woman's three-toed foot, or, in his Owl Creek classic, with the informa-

tion that the character whose adventures the reader has been following has just died of hanging.

These turns do not seem to me to get the most out of fantasy. Without some structurally dubious forewarning some of the tales would be dull indeed. Suppose one ended the Owl Creek story with the man in his wife's arms and a casual remark that he has had a deuce of a time to escape from the Union soldiers: There is nothing but a small tale. Does the fact, belatedly revealed that all of the circumstances of the narrative have occurred between the dropping of a body and the stretching of a rope magically convert this structure into a valid drama? No, the effect of the story is solely in the "snapper"; it is much the same as if one learned in the last scene of Hamlet that Hamlet was a ghost, too, like his father.

The fantasy for my money, as we purists say, is one in which the fantastic premise is known to the reader from the start of the story. Two of the most entertaining novels I have read recently are of this *genre*, "The Flying Yorkshireman," and "The Sword in the Stone." Oh, yes, these things are quite respectable in the book publishing business—still by far the most liberal field of literary expression. Even motion pictures and radio are somewhat ahead of the standard magazines in the field of fantasy—"Dracula," the very great picture called "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," the very silly one, "King Kong," "Tarzan of the Apes," and so on.

In spite of Orson Welles, the Martian invasion is not one of H. G. Wells' better imaginative stories and in spite of hundreds of imitations in the magazines of fantasy or so-called "scientifiction," "The Time Machine" doesn't seem to me to amount to a great deal, either, except that it was first or early in the field of capitalizing a new notion in physics. The stories by H. G. Wells which are not generally imitated are such elegant little ideas as the story of the magic shop, the man who could do miracles, and the time accelerator.

Nor must the fantasy run completely wild. The story in which all things are possible seems to me extraordinarily dull because there is no conflict. Mr. Wells has taken care of this

item in "The Man Who Could Work Miracles" by limiting the imagination of the hero; establishing a governor on the limitless powers of the hero by not giving him enough sense to use them. Curiously enough, two of the most popular narratives in the field of "Scientifiction" (a word coined by the magazines which do fancies based on current scientific hypotheses—rocket ships, fourth dimensional stuff, and so on) are subject to this error. To me, E. E. Smith's "Skylark" stories and the "Superman" episodes, besides being clumsily written are as dull as ditch-water because there is no possible way for the hero to lose out. When the pilot of the Skylark finds himself in a difficulty he quickly works out a ray, formula or dimensional trick which is more invulnerable—and if you think that "invulnerable" is not subject to modification you should read the stories—than the one that has failed him. "Superman" has only the handicap of not wanting to reveal himself to human beings as the ineluctable force he is—this is not enough to produce a truly dramatic struggle, even if the narrative thread were not flimsy and cheap.

Many crimes are entitled to call Mr. Wells and Jules Verne "Papa." They did not know what they were starting, of course, but neither did Peer Gynt when he bred an imp on the Elf King's daughter by mere desire. Mr. Wells, Verne and Poe started the space flights, time machines, overgrown insects, transplanted brains—possibly Bassett Morgan set the pattern in this last matter—ray weapons, etc., which have been altered and reiterated in scientifiction times without end—no Amen. In this book I have indulged in scientifiction only—with one exception—when the scientific twists were new and amusing. "The Adaptive Ultimate" considers a commonplace in biology—the ability of an organism to adjust itself to an environment. The author has done no more than to extend and accelerate this phenomenon, which occurs in its more usual routine every time we cut a finger, with the results represented in the story.

The exception to the rule will be included as an apology in the preliminary note to the second section—the story is "The

Fourth Dimensional Demonstrator," which is not as fresh a variant as one might desire, but seems to me the best of several stories using the same general idea.

Of the other stories in the first section, one can say of "Escape," and "The Woman in Grey" that they are, as far as I know, not related in conception to any stories I have ever read before; that they are in first rate literary condition, and that they have a wry humor which seems to me the final testing of a certain type of story.

"The House of Ecstasy" has more of this, without any very distinguished plot apart from the problem it sets up for all of us. Was it truly you or was it I who visited that house? It wasn't I, I'm sure, because my house is three miles from the nearest cigar store.

\* \* \*

It is needless to reiterate that most of our very greatest writers in every age have indulged in these fancies. But without disturbing the classics it may be added that even in our times some very respectable gentlemen have taken moments out to do excellent bits for the little magazines that timid people hide under their arms for fear of being thought eccentric. August Derleth, who has given me assistance on this book, is the serious author of a series of folk-novels about his region in Wisconsin, and four volumes of verse. John Taine and A. Hyatt Verrill are not represented because their best things are too long for an anthology—Taine is the pseudonym of a mathematics professor in one of the largest universities of the Pacific Coast; Verrill is an archaeologist whose history is recited at length in "Who's Who In America." E. F. Benson who died this year, too soon—any time would have been too soon—is not here because his best fantastic stories have already been included in many anthologies. He was an author in many manners, of course, the best of them, to my mind, being the magnificent comedies of "Lucia." Fletcher Pratt's serious studies in contemporary history are very well known; he apparently rests from them with fantasies and mysteries.

The book naturally avoids such people as Machen, Blackwood, Morgan, Dunsany and so on since nearly all of their best stories are available in collections or anthologies. This is an attempt to collect and preserve some yarns that may or may not be inferior to those of the gentlemen mentioned, but which might be lost because of obscure publication or because of the very occasional performances of the authors.

## III

The stories are divided into three groups. The "Strange Ideas" are simply short story notions involving the fantastic that I had never heard of before. In selection, of course, some little attention was given to the writing of these ideas, in order to reduce a possible seventy from some five hundred odd copies of magazines, to the comfortable number included here.

The second group, "Fresh Variants," is of much the same genre, except that the ideas of origin are of earlier use, though pleasantly and ingeniously diverted into new channels and conclusions.

The third part, "Horrors," is the most conventional—it is simply the old quivery or shivery story in its best new presentations. It derives from M. Valdemar and the Black Cat.

There are some omissions in this book which I hope are significant. There are no ghost stories resting simply on their merits as ghost stories—the sort of story that winds up like this: —"My dear fellow, it was pure hallucination," said the doctor. "You have overworked and your nerves are suffering."

"Very well," I said, "but you know that before I shot him, Sir Devillish Nawsty had chopped off his trigger finger to escape the draft!" (At this point we must by all means have italics.) *"Then what THING left this imprint of a thumb and three fingers on my trachea!!!???"*

"The doctor stared and then idly chewed and swallowed his cocktail glass."—(End quote from a story which, God willing, I shall never write.)

There is one slight error in the last line—it would not have

been a cocktail glass because in fanciful stories and mysteries all doctors and detectives drink only Scotch and soda or vintage wines.

Ambrose Bierce, to my mind the best ghoster who ever lived, did one of his poorer stories about a lady ghost who left footprints which lacked some toes, but the best ghost story Bierce ever did, and one of the best that anyone ever did, has no ghost in it. It tells with almost cruel deliberation and detail of the slow drawing together of two gentlemen who, for excellent reasons, are going to mistake each other for ghosts. I have read only three or four stories with valid ghosts which have given me the small aesthetic enjoyment, possibly masochistic, of psychic uneasiness; this one, sans ghost, ran my pulse up a number of beats which I neglected to count at the time.

Another type of story omitted is the vampire story. Montague Summers has done a more than exhaustive treatise on these creatures, which has the possibly unconscious charm and humor of seeming to take their existence seriously. He has a nearly complete nomenclature, set of gaming rules and materia medica for the vampire, vrykolakas, and the rest. Anyone with a taste for the vampire can find the most nearly authentic histories of recorded vampires in this book.

It is precisely because Bram Stoker did the excellent novel "Dracula" on this subject that no maundering imitations of his interesting bloodsuckers are worth the paper on which they are printed.

Werewolves and all were-creatures are also excluded. "Dracula" took care of that, too.

The reader is permitted to make up his own story, if he cares for these things, and the endings are supplied herewith:

The vampire—

With trembling hands we threw back the lid of the coffin inhabited by the extremely late—say two hundred years or so—Countess Grimova Lapitupsky. (*Italics, please.*) *The body was as fresh and flushed with the warm hues of life as if the Countess were merely sleeping.* I stood spellbound by her



beauty—two hundred years is nothing for a beautiful vampire, but clothes are not vampires and play out in a century or so. I stood spellbound—

The old priest (preferably Greek Orthodox) looked at me severely. "We have our duty, my son."

He passed me the sharpened ash (the woods vary) stake.

"No, no," I murmured, hesitating, as I poised the cruel point over the lovely ivory bosom. (The technicians call this last touch Lech Appeal and there is too much of it in vampire stories to be quite healthy.)

The ponderous mallet fell, driving the needle-tipped *ashlar* and my thumb-nail into the beautiful demon's heart. A terrible scream and a great spate (it had better be a spate in a vampire story) of fresh blood gushed from wound and mouth alike.

"*Gospadar e tvorets,*" said the Papa solemnly.

And then as I turned sadly away, a beautiful smile of peace rested for an instant on the lovely face before the Countess fell into dust.

The werewolf—

Carefully we retraced my steps through the snow to the spot where I had fired the silver bullet at the monstrous white wolf that had terrified the Hungarian village of Kamanoi-Ostrow. Tearing, fumbling, leaping, paying no care to the sharp brambles which caught and tore at our garments and our unprotected faces we came to the place where a great red pool of blood made a blotch on the white snow.

"Ah," said my companion. "Your shot scored."

He pointed to the great tracks of a wolf that led unevenly from the spot. A mile—two miles—three kilometers—and there lay the great white wolf in the snow.

(The italics.) *But then, even as we watched, the outlines blurred and changed and we looked at the white body of my betrothed, my Chichornia, dead and at peace, with my silver 75mm. bullet in her heart.*

There are no interplanetary stories, simply because in the magazines available there are not a dozen such stories with even mild originality or amusement value. They fall into several common classes: (1) Scientific monsters from Mars or Sirius, attempting to conquer Earth, are frustrated, à la Wells, by the local fauna or the weather but usually by the fauna, represented in the person of a very young scientist who has made a necessary weapon just at the right moment, after all the millenia; (2) World's first interplanetary travellers land on the moon or some planet and find the beautiful Queen Goop in desperate straits because of the rebellion of the lustful, blackbrowed Duke Quork and his legions of trained *gesundheits*, something like dinosaurs and something like burnt leather pillowcases celebrating the original Chicago World's Fair. The young leader of the earthmen conquers Quork in about fifty pages and marries Goop; (3) the youngest lieutenant of the Interplanetary Police has trouble with pirates; (4) a spaceship hits a cosmic rift and slides into the Fourth Dimension with subsequent developments of (1), (2) or/and (3).

There are four or five other very common ones—ants that get as big as men or men who grow as small as ants, etc., is another which is almost as common as the interplanetary items cited. Voyages through a human being's bloodstream are frequently conducted by people who have been shrunk to 1/4200th of an inch either as an experiment or by some mad and diabolic scientist.

This is quite enough to make the point. In this pabulum of reiterated nonsense, however, there appear with almost incredible frequency, stories that are original, stories that are brightly written, stories that present extensions of engaging philosophies, and neatly constructed stories of dramatic impossibilities.

For the curious reader, the lode is very well worth working.

\* \* \*

This is as good a place as any to shake a finger at the editors—then if they care to use a carefully placed thumb and

waving fingers at this editor no damage has been done and no blood shed. Two of the stories in this volume have never been published before because they suffer the dreadful stigma of intrinsic humor. Some of the very best fantastic stories have been humorous stories—a whole volume of “Humorous Ghost Stories” was collected some years ago, containing some of the better tales of Daudet, Irving, Brander Matthews, Oscar Wilde, Hoffman (a neglected and very delightful writer), Mark Twain and so on.

“Wonder Stories” and “Amazing” frequently use a fairly funny story but such stories are never “weird”; they are “scientifiction.” Street & Smith’s “Unknown” leans toward humorous fantasy and it has had exceptionally good stories as a matter of style and structure; it is unfortunate that “The Enchanted Week-End” by John MacCormac and “The Roaring Trumpet” by Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp are too long for this collection; the former being at least a “novella” and the latter a short novel.

I believe the editors could profitably request more humorous “weirds.” All of these fantasies are fairy tales of a kind and most of the greatest fairy tales are good-humored. Let us by all means have the stark and terrible, and the serious but ingeniously technical imaginative story, but what have become of Rip Van Winkle, Oscar Wilde’s poor old ghost whose bloodstains were regularly erased with a patent American stain remover, Tam o’ Shanter, the King of Mice and also Benet’s wonderful King of the Cats?

I do think that Miss Swain’s excellently sustained story of the old lady who kept up her pleasant gossip over the backyard of the Infinite, and Mindret Lord’s biographical dilemma richly deserved publication before they got it here. But grins and grims seem to coagulate like blood types, with the wrong letters for most of the editors.

Conversely, as Tweedledum, or was it Dee?, would say, there are occasionally some very good stories of this class in the “slickles,” but there is not much chance for a story which goes humorously “off the rocker.” Michael Fessier wrote for

"Esquire" the delightful story included in this collection of an undefined apparition—not supernatural—who made gifts in his own way, which was magnificent, when he could, and accepted them with meek grandeur but no humility when he found gratitude as a positive virtue instead of the cancellation of a spiritual I.O.U.

Frank Luther Mott's "The Man With A Good Face" has been reprinted too many times in "best" stories for inclusion here. Wilbur Daniel Steele and a great many more have printed occasional stories in the enormous or polite national magazines, but that is not their ordinary product and their readers never learn to be connoisseurs in this field.

The Edgar Rice Burroughs stories have probably had wider circulation than any of the fantastics of our time but they are not fantastic stories in any sense beyond an extension of Kipling's "Jungle Tales" idea in the Tarzan things, and the use of blue gloops and green gloops in the interplanetary cowboy yarns.

Numbers of people have written modernizations of myths, or myths translated to modernity; of these, the most sympathetic in immediate writing seems to me to be Mr. del Rey's "Pipes of Pan."

PART I  
STRANGE IDEAS



## THE CONSIDERATE HOSTS

By THORP McCLUSKY

MIDNIGHT.

It was raining, abysmally. Not the kind of rain in which people sometimes fondly say they like to walk, but rain that was heavy and pitiless, like the rain that fell in France during the war. The road, unrolling slowly beneath Marvin's headlights, glistened like the flank of a great backsnake; almost Marvin expected it to writhe out from beneath the wheels of his car. Marvin's small coupé was the only man-made thing that moved through the seething night.

Within the car, however, it was like a snug little cave. Marvin might almost have been in a theater, unconcernedly watching some somber drama in which he could revel without really being touched. His sensation was almost one of creepiness; it was incredible that he could be so close to the rain and still so warm and dry. He hoped devoutly that he would not have a flat tire on a night like this!

Ahead a tiny red pinpoint appeared at the side of the road, grew swiftly, then faded in the car's glare to the bull's-eye of a lantern, swinging in the gloved fist of a big man in a streaming rubber coat. Marvin automatically braked the car and rolled the right-hand window down a little way as he saw the big man come splashing toward him.

"Bridge's washed away," the big man said. "Where you going, Mister?"

"Felders, damn it!"

"You'll have to go around by Little Rock Falls. Take your left up that road. It's a county road, but it's passable. Take your right after you cross Little Rock Falls bridge. It'll bring you into Felders."

Marvin swore. The trooper's face, black behind the ribbons of water dripping from his hat, laughed.

"It's a bad night, Mister."

"Gosh, yes! Isn't it!"

Well, if he must detour, he must detour. What a night to crawl for miles along a rutty back road!

Rutty was no word for it. Every few feet Marvin's car plunged into water-filled holes, gouged out from beneath by the settling of the light roadbed. The sharp, cutting sound of loose stone against the tires was audible even above the hiss of the rain.

Four miles, and Marvin's motor began to sputter and cough. Another mile, and it surrendered entirely. The ignition was soaked; the car would not budge.

Marvin peered through the moisture-streaked windows, and, vaguely, like blacker masses beyond the road, he sensed the presence of thickly clustered trees. The car had stopped in the middle of a little patch of woods. "Judas!" Marvin thought disgustedly. "What a swell place to get stalled!" He switched off the lights to save the battery.

He saw the glimmer then, through the intervening trees, indistinct in the depths of rain.

Where there was a light there was certainly a house, and perhaps a telephone. Marvin pulled his hat tightly down upon his head, clasped his coat collar up around his ears, got out of the car, pushed the small coupé over on the shoulder of the road, and ran for the light.

The house stood perhaps twenty feet back from the road, and the light shone from a front-room window. As he plowed through the muddy yard—there was no sidewalk—Marvin noticed a second stalled car—a big sedan—standing black and deserted a little way down the road.

The rain was beating him, soaking him to the skin; he pounded on the house door like an impatient sheriff. Almost instantly the door swung open, and Marvin saw a man and a woman standing just inside, in a little hallway that led directly into a well-lighted living-room.

The hallway itself was quite dark. And the man and woman were standing close together, almost as though they



might be endeavoring to hide something behind them. But Marvin, wholly preoccupied with his own plight, failed to observe how unusual it must be for these two rural people to be up and about, fully dressed, long after midnight.

Partly shielded from the rain by the little overhang above the door, Marvin took off his dripping hat and urgently explained his plight.

"My car. Won't go. Wires wet, I guess. I wonder if you'd let me use your phone? I might be able to get somebody to come out from Little Rock Falls. I'm sorry that I had to——"

"That's all right," the man said. "Come inside. When you knocked at the door you startled us. We—we really hadn't—well, you know how it is, in the middle of the night and all. But come in."

"We'll have to think this out differently, John," the woman said suddenly.

Think what out differently? thought Marvin absently.

Marvin muttered something about you never can be too careful about strangers, what with so many hold-ups and all. And, oddly, he sensed that in the half darkness the man and woman smiled briefly at each other, as though they shared some secret that made any conception of physical danger to themselves quietly, mildly amusing.

"We weren't thinking of you in that way," the man reassured Marvin. "Come into the living-room."

The living-room of that house was—just ordinary. Two overstuffed chairs, a davenport, a bookcase. Nothing particularly modern about the room. Not elaborate, but adequate.

In the brighter light Marvin looked at his hosts. The man was around forty years of age, the woman considerably younger, twenty-eight, or perhaps thirty. And there was something definitely attractive about them. It was not their appearance so much, for in appearance they were merely ordinary people; the woman was almost painfully plain. But they moved and talked with a curious singleness of purpose. They reminded Marvin of a pair of gray doves.

Marvin looked around the room until he saw the telephone

in a corner, and he noticed with some surprise that it was one of the old-style, coffee-grinder affairs. The man was watching him with peculiar intentness.

"We haven't tried to use the telephone tonight," he told Marvin abruptly, "but I'm afraid it won't work."

"I don't see how it *can* work," the woman added.

Marvin took the receiver off the hook and rotated the little crank. No answer from Central. He tried again, several times, but the line remained dead.

The man nodded his head slowly. "I didn't think it would work," he said, then.

"Wires down or something, I suppose," Marvin hazarded. "Funny thing, I haven't seen one of those old-style phones in years. Didn't think they used 'em any more."

"You're out in the sticks now," the man laughed. He glanced from the window at the almost opaque sheets of rain falling outside.

"You might as well stay here a little while. While you're with us you'll have the illusion, at least, that you're in a comfortable house."

What on earth is he talking about? Marvin asked himself. Is he just a little bit off, maybe? That last sounded like nonsense.

Suddenly the woman spoke.

"He'd better go, John. He can't stay here too long, you know. It would be horrible if someone took his license number and people—jumped to conclusions afterward. No one should know that he stopped here."

The man looked thoughtfully at Marvin.

"Yes, dear, you're right. I hadn't thought that far ahead. I'm afraid, sir, that you'll have to leave," he told Marvin. "Something extremely strange——"

Marvin bristled angrily, and buttoned his coat with an air of affronted dignity.

"I'll go," he said shortly. "I realize perfectly that I'm an intruder. You should not have let me in. After you let me in

I began to expect ordinary human courtesy from you. I was mistaken. Good night."

The man stopped him. He seemed very much distressed.

"Just a moment. Don't go until we explain. We have never been considered discourteous before. But tonight—tonight . . .

"I must introduce myself. I am John Reed, and this is my wife, Grace."

He paused significantly, as though that explained everything, but Marvin merely shook his head. "My name's Marvin Phelps, but that's nothing to you. All this talk seems pretty needless."

The man coughed nervously. "Please understand. We're only asking you to go for your own good."

"Oh, sure," Marvin said. "Sure. I understand perfectly. Good night."

The man hesitated. "You see," he said slowly, "things aren't as they seem. We're really ghosts."

"You don't say!"

"My husband is quite right," the woman said loyally. "We've been dead twenty-one years."

"Twenty-two years next October," the man added, after a moment's calculation. "It's a long time."

"Well, I never heard such hooley!" Marvin babbled. "Kindly step away from that door, Mister, and let me out of here before I swing from the heels."

"I know it sounds odd," the man admitted, without moving, "and I hope that you will realize that it's from no choosing of mine that I have to explain. Nevertheless, I was electrocuted, twenty-one years ago, for the murder of the Chairman of the School Board, over in Little Rock Falls. Notice how my head is shaved, and my split trouser-leg? The fact is, that whenever we materialize we have to appear exactly as we were in our last moment of life. It's a restriction on us."

Screwy, certainly screwy. And yet Marvin hazily remembered that School Board affair. Yes, the murderer *had* been a fellow named Reed. The wife had committed suicide a few days after burial of her husband's body.

It was such an odd insanity. Why, they *both* believed it. They even dressed the part. That odd dress the woman was wearing. 'Way out of date. And the man's slit trouser-leg. The screwy cluck had even shaved a little patch on his head, too, and his shirt was open at the throat.

They didn't look dangerous, but you never can tell. Better humor them, and get out of here as quick as I can.

Marvin cleared his throat.

"If I were you—why, say, I'd have lots of fun materializing. I'd be at it every night. Build up a reputation for myself."

The man looked disgusted. "I should kick you out of doors," he remarked bitterly. "I'm trying to give you a decent explanation, and you keep making fun of me."

"Don't bother with him, John," the wife exclaimed. "It's getting late."

"Mr. Phelps," the self-styled ghost doggedly persisted, ignoring the woman's interruption, "perhaps you noticed a car stalled on the side of the road as you came into our yard. Well, that car, Mr. Phelps, belongs to Lieutenant-Governor Lyons, of Felders, who prosecuted me for that murder and won a conviction, although he knew that I was innocent. Of course he wasn't Lieutenant-Governor then; he was only County Prosecutor. . . .

"That was a political murder, and Lyons knew it. But at that time he still had his way to make in the world—and circumstances pointed toward me. For example, the body of the slain man was found in the ditch just beyond my house. The body had been robbed. The murderer had thrown the victim's pocketbook and watch under our front steps. Lyons said that I had *hidden* them there—though obviously I'd never have done a suicidal thing like that, had I really been the murderer. Lyons knew that, too—but he had to burn somebody.

"What really convicted me was the fact that my contract to teach had not been renewed that spring. It gave Lyons a ready-made motive to pin on me.

"So he framed me. They tried, sentenced, and electrocuted

me, all very neatly and legally. Three days after I was buried, my wife committed suicide."

Though Marvin was a trifle afraid, he was nevertheless beginning to enjoy himself. Boy, what a story to tell the gang! If only they'd believe him!

"I can't understand," he pointed out slyly, "how you can be so free with this house if, as you say, you've been dead twenty-one years or so. Don't the present owners or occupants object? If I lived here I certainly wouldn't turn the place over to a couple of ghosts—especially on a night like this!"

The man answered readily, "I told you that things are not as they seem. This house has not been lived in since Grace died. It's not a very modern house, anyway—and people have natural prejudices. At this very moment you are standing in an empty room. Those windows are broken. The wallpaper has peeled away, and half the plaster has fallen off the walls. There is really no light in the house. If things appeared to you as they really are you could not see your hand in front of your face."

Marvin felt in his pocket for his cigarettes. "Well," he said, "you seem to know all the answers. Have a cigarette. Or don't ghosts smoke?"

The man extended his hand. "Thanks," he replied. "This is an unexpected pleasure. You'll notice that although there are ash-trays about the room there are no cigarettes or tobacco. Grace never smoked, and when they took me to jail she brought all my tobacco there to me. Of course, as I pointed out before, you see this room exactly as it was at the time she killed herself. She's wearing the same dress, for example. There's a certain form about these things, you know."

Marvin lit the cigarettes. "Well!" he exclaimed. "Brother, you certainly seem to think of everything! Though I can't understand, even yet, why you want me to get out of here. I should think that after you've gone to all this trouble, arranging your effects and so on, you'd want somebody to haunt."

The woman laughed dryly.

"Oh, you're not the man we want to haunt, Mr. Phelps. You came along quite by accident; we hadn't counted on you at all. No, Mr. Lyons is the man we're interested in."

"He's out in the hall now," the man said suddenly. He jerked his head toward the door through which Marvin had come. And all at once all this didn't seem half so funny to Marvin as it had seemed a moment before.

"You see," the woman went on quickly, "this house of ours is on a back road. Nobody ever travels this way. We've been trying for years to—to haunt Mr. Lyons, but we've had very little success. He lives in Felders, and we're pitifully weak when we go to Felders. We're strongest when we're in this house, perhaps because we lived here so long.

"But tonight, when the bridge went out, we knew that our opportunity had arrived. We knew that Mr. Lyons was not in Felders, and we knew that he would have to take this detour in order to get home.

"We felt very strongly that Mr. Lyons would be unable to pass this house tonight.

"It turned out as we had hoped. Mr. Lyons had trouble with his car, exactly as you did, and he came straight to this house to ask if he might use the telephone. Perhaps he had forgotten us, years ago—twenty-one years is a long time. Perhaps he was confused by the rain, and didn't know exactly where he was.

"He fainted, Mr. Phelps, the instant he recognized us. We have known for a long time that his heart is weak, and we had hoped that seeing us would frighten him to death, but he is still alive. Of course while he is unconscious we can do nothing more. Actually, we're almost impalpable. If you weren't so convinced that we are real you could pass your hand right through us.

"We decided to wait until Mr. Lyons regained consciousness and then to frighten him again. We even discussed beating him to death with one of those non-existent chairs you think you see. You understand, his body would be unmarked;

he would really die of terror. We were still discussing what to do when you came along.

"We realized at once how embarrassing it might prove for you if Mr. Lyons' body were found in this house tomorrow and the police learned that you were also in the house. That's why we want you to go."

"Well," Marvin said bluntly, "I don't see how I can get my car away from here. It won't run, and if I walk to Little Rock Falls and get somebody to come back here with me the damage'll be done."

"Yes," the man admitted thoughtfully. "It's a problem."

For several minutes they stood like a tableau, without speaking. Marvin was uneasily wondering: Did these people really have old Lyons tied up in the hallway; were they really planning to murder the man? The big car standing out beside the road belonged to *somebody*. . . .

Marvin coughed discreetly.

"Well, it seems to me, my dear shades," he said, "that unless you are perfectly willing to put me into what might turn out to be a very unpleasant position you'll have to let your vengeance ride, for tonight, anyway."

"There'll never be another opportunity like this," the man pointed out. "That bridge won't go again in ten lifetimes."

"We don't want the young man to suffer though, John."

"It seems to me," Marvin suggested, "as though this revenge idea of yours is overdone, anyway. Murdering Lyons won't really do you any good, you know."

"It's the customary thing when a wrong has been done," the man protested.

"Well, maybe," Marvin argued, and all the time he was wondering whether he were really facing a madman who might be dangerous or whether he were at home dreaming in bed; "but I'm not so sure about that. Hauntings are pretty infrequent, you must admit. I'd say that shows that a lot of ghosts really don't care much about the vengeance angle, despite all you say. I think that if you check on it carefully you'll find that a great many ghosts realize that revenge isn't

so much. It's really the thinking about revenge, and the planning it, that's all the fun. Now, for the sake of argument, what good would it do you to put old Lyons away? Why, you'd hardly have any incentive to be ghosts any more. But if you let him go, why, say, any time you wanted to, you could start to scheme up a good scare for him, and begin to calculate how it would work, and time would fly like everything. And on top of all that, if anything happened to me on account of tonight, it would be just too bad for you. *You'd* be haunted, really. It's a bad rule that doesn't work two ways."

The woman looked at her husband. "He's right, John," she said tremulously. "We'd better let Lyons go."

The man nodded. He looked worried.

He spoke very stiffly to Marvin. "I don't agree entirely with all you've said," he pointed out, "but I admit that in order to protect you we'll have to let Lyons go. If you'll give me a hand we'll carry him out and put him in his car."

"Actually, I suppose, I'll be doing all the work."

"Yes," the man agreed, "you will."

They went into the little hall, and there, to Marvin's complete astonishment, crumpled on the floor lay old Lyons. Marvin recognized him easily from the newspaper photographs he had seen.

"Hard-looking duffer, isn't he?" Marvin said, trying to stifle a tremor in his voice.

The man nodded without speaking.

Together, Marvin watching the man narrowly, they carried the lax body out through the rain and put it into the big sedan. When the job was done the man stood silently for a moment, looking up into the black invisible clouds.

"It's clearing," he said matter-of-factly. "In an hour it'll be over."

"My wife'll kill me when I get home," Marvin said.

The man made a little clucking sound. "Maybe if you wiped your ignition now your car'd start. It's had a chance to dry a little."

"I'll try it," Marvin said. He opened the hood and wiped



the distributor cap and points and around the spark plugs with his handkerchief. He got in the car and stepped on the starter, and the motor caught almost immediately.

The man stepped toward the door, and Marvin doubled his right fist, ready for anything. But then the man stopped.

"Well, I suppose you'd better be going along," he said. "Good night."

"Good night," Marvin said. "And thanks. I'll stop by one of these days and say hello."

"You wouldn't find us in," the man said simply.

By Heaven, he *is* nuts, Marvin thought. "Listen, brother," he said earnestly, "you aren't going to do anything funny to old Lyons after I'm gone?"

The other shook his head. "No. Don't worry."

Marvin let in the clutch and stepped on the gas. He wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible.

In Little Rock Falls he went into an all-night lunch and telephoned the police that there was an unconscious man sitting in a car three or four miles back on the detour. Then he drove home.

Early the next morning, on his way to work, he drove back over the detour.

He kept watching for the little house, and when it came in sight he recognized it easily from the contour of the rooms and the spacing of the windows and the little overhang above the door.

But as he came closer he saw that it was deserted. The windows were out, the steps had fallen in. The clapboards were gray and weather-beaten, and naked rafters showed through holes in the roof.

Marvin stopped his car and sat there beside the road for a little while, his face oddly pale. Finally he got out of the car and walked over to the house and went inside.

There was not one single stick of furniture in the rooms. Jagged scars showed in the ceilings where the electric fixtures had been torn away. The house had been wrecked years be-

fore by vandals, by neglect, by the merciless wearing of the sun and the rain.

In shape alone were the hallway and living-room as Marvin remembered them. "*There,*" he thought, "is where the bookcases were. The table was *there*—the davenport *there*."

Suddenly he stooped, and stared at the dusty boards and underfoot.

On the naked floor lay the butt of a cigarette. And, a half-dozen feet away, lay another cigarette that had not been smoked—that had not even been lighted!

Marvin turned around blindly, and, like an automaton, walked out of that house.

Three days later he read in the newspapers that Lieutenant-Governor Lyons was dead. The Lieutenant-Governor had collapsed, the item continued, while driving his own car home from the state capital the night the Felders bridge was washed out. The death was attributed to heart disease. . . .

After all, Lyons was not a young man.

So Marvin Phelps knew that, even though his considerate ghostly hosts had voluntarily relinquished their vengeance, blind, impartial nature had meted out justice. And, in a strange way, he felt glad that that was so, glad that Grace and John Reed had left to Fate the punishment they had planned to impose with their own ghostly hands. . . .

## THE MAN IN THE BLACK HAT

*He had a habit of appearing out of nowhere, and of going back again just as suddenly.*

By MICHAEL FESSIER

I HAD my money on the black and the stock market stopped at red. So, after holding me upside down and shaking the last dime out of my pocket, they turned me loose. San Francisco isn't such a bad place to be broke in. You walk around and look at things and you forget your trouble. It's only at night when you're trying to sleep in a dark room that things get tough. A dark room in San Francisco's the same as a dark room in New York or New Orleans if you can't sleep and happen to be broke.

I know. I've been there.

San Francisco's the best place to walk in I know. You just start out in any direction and eventually you bump into something interesting. If you go one way, you wind up at the Embarcadero where the ships are coming in; another and you find yourself in Chinatown; another and you're at Fishermen's Wharf smelling crabs cooking in pots on the sidewalk.

This day I was walking along Van Ness Avenue. Second hand dealers had cars parked halfway across the sidewalk. Signs on the windshields said, "This car for \$100" or "This car for only \$25 down." I laughed to myself, thinking how I was broke and couldn't even buy gasoline for a motorcycle. Still I read the signs and wondered which car I'd buy in case I had the money. All of a sudden I noticed a sign that didn't make sense. It said, "This car free. Inquire upstairs, Room 402." Other people glanced at the sign and kept on going. They figured it was some kind of advertising gag. So did I but I didn't have anything to do and I stuck around looking at the sign. It was on a brand new Luxury 12 you couldn't touch

for less than \$4000. I backed against a plate glass window and tried to figure the thing out. No matter how hard I tried I couldn't make it add up. Other cars were on the curb and they had sales prices on them. That was okay. Two and two make four. But here was one that looked like somebody was trying to give away. That way two and two didn't make four. It didn't make anything.

I'm curious like all other gamblers. I walked up a flight of stairs and knocked on the door of 402. Somebody told me to come in. I stepped inside and a small man with a grey goatee raised his head. He wore a black hat of soft felt like I used to wear when the horses ran right or the stock market chart didn't look like a cross-cut saw.

"You the fellow put the sign on the Luxury 12 downstairs?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

"Well," I said, "what's the gag?"

"No gag at all," he said.

He was looking at me out of eyes that didn't see me. They were solid grey, no iris or anything. Just grey. They gave me the willies.

"Then, in that case," I said, "I'll take it, if you don't mind."

"Not at all," he said.

He handed me a pink slip already signed.

"What else is there to this?" I asked.

"Nothing," he said.

"Thank you," I said.

I couldn't think of anything else to say.

"Don't mention it," he said.

Then I wasn't there any more. I mean, I was standing in the room but so far as he was concerned I was a million miles away. He ignored me so completely I felt I wasn't there, myself. I left.

The key was in the car. I backed it over the curb and drove it to the Luxury agency.

"What'll you give me for this car?" I asked the manager.

"Why do you want to sell it?" he asked.

"So's I can eat," I said.

He began looking around for a cop.

"You mean to say you haven't enough money to eat on and yet you're trying to peddle a brand new \$4000 car?" he asked.

"Yep," I said.

"Let's see your pink slip," he said.

I handed it to him.

"Where'd you get this car?" he asked.

"Man gave it to me," I said.

Just then a cop passed near the door and the manager whistled. After the cop understood, he whistled for another cop. One cop stayed with me and the other went back to talk with the old man. He came back with a surprised look on his face.

"The guy's right," he said. "That old geezer in the White Building give him the car. I ast 'im why and he said it wasn't none of my business."

He turned to the cop that'd been guarding me. "Come on, Pete," he said, "we can't arrest a guy because he run into a lunatic."

After a lot of haggling they gave me \$2400 cash for the car.

I took the money and played the stock market again. This time I played the red. I couldn't lose. All you had to do in those days was bet stocks would go down. When everybody else said they were at rock bottom, I bet they'd excavate and they did. The old man'd changed my luck. Funny thing was nothing seemed strange to me. I'd make words with my mouth and tell myself that the old man wasn't real and that the goofiest thing that ever happened was me getting a car for nothing like that. But the words didn't mean anything. Something inside me took the whole business for granted.

When the stock market got so low it wouldn't even fluctuate, I took my winnings and bought a trip for myself. I went down to Florida and cleaned up a few thousand shooting dice and betting on the races. After that I went to New York.

One night I turned a corner and almost bumped into the old man. If I had said anything out loud about it I would

have said, "It's a surprise to see YOU here." But I wasn't surprised and I knew it. It seemed perfectly natural to see him, except that he was broke. His black hat looked the same and his grey goatee was trimmed and his clothes weren't unpressed or anything but I knew he was broke. Nobody can fool me when they're broke. They can dress in a brand new outfit and ride in a \$12,000 car behind a chauffeur but one look at them and I know they're flat.

"Hello," I said. "Remember me?"

His grey eyes turned toward me with about as much expression as marbles.

"Certainly," he said. "How are you?"

"As jake as Jamaica ginger," I said. "Mind walking a ways with me?"

He fell into step with me and I led him around the corner to where my car was parked. It was a \$5000 Imperial I'd bought a couple of days before.

"This car," I said, "is free."

His eyes didn't show any feeling but his lips smiled a little.

"What's the gag?" he asked.

"No gag at all," I said.

"Then, in that case," he said, "I'll take it if you don't mind."

"Not at all," I said.

I took the pink slip out of my wallet and held it against the windshield while I signed my name. I handed it to him.

"Thanks," he said.

"Don't mention it," I said.

He got in the car and drove it away.

The next time I met him was at the automobile races near San Leandro in California. I drove into the infield and parked against the fence. Another car just like mine parked alongside me. I had some sidecars mixed in a thermos bottle and I opened it to take a drink. As I lifted it to my lips I looked across at the other car and there was the old man lifting a thermos bottle to his lips. I held my bottle out to him and at the same time he held his out to me. We crossed hands and took each other's bottles. It was like we'd rehearsed it.

"How," he said.

He drank.

"How," I said.

I drank.

His were sidecars too only his cointreau was the real stuff and mine wasn't.

He looked at me once with those funny grey eyes and then started watching the races. I don't know when he drove away. He was gone when I looked up.

Three months later I was in Monte Carlo. I did pretty good for awhile. Then the little ball started ducking my numbers and colors. I lost steadily for three weeks. Finally I stood at the table and watched a croupier with a face like a polished boot rake in my last franc notes.

I turned away, trying to grin but it felt like a fuzzy worm was crawling around in my stomach. It's one thing to be broke in the States, but another to be broke in a foreign port. The worm tasted of quinine.

Somebody tapped me on the shoulder. The old man, black hat, grey goatee and expressionless eyes, was standing there. I didn't feel a bit surprised. Not a bit. It seemed I'd been expecting him.

"You dropped something," he said.

He held out a roll of notes to me.

"Careless of me to drop something I didn't know I had, wasn't it?" I asked.

"Quite," he said.

I took the notes.

"Thanks," I said.

"Don't mention it," he said, "and if I were you I'd play the black, 13 and 9."

All of a sudden he was gone.

I played the black, 13 and 9, I played them heavy and won heavy. I walked away from that table with enough money to last me a year and I don't live in second class hotels.

I didn't think about the old man. I was afraid to. You look at the stars and don't think about them and they're beautiful.

You look at them and try and figure out how come they buzz around and never bump into each other and pretty soon they've got you locked up with the other nuts. That's the way I felt about the old man. If I took him for granted, he was just a quiet old fellow with a grey goatee, a black hat and funny eyes. If I started figuring out how come, I'd go crazy.

I took my winnings and went to Paris and got bored. Paris was like a carnival to me. A lot of electric lights and women and noise and life but nothing you can take seriously. Any moment I expected them to pull down the canvas and play the next town, leaving a vacant field behind. I wondered why I'd come.

Then I knew.

It was in what they call the Latin Quarter.

A mob was boiling and whirling down the sidewalk, shoving people off into the street. The people'd pick themselves up, join the mob and shove others off into the street. In the middle was a gendarme. He had the old man by the collar. His black hat was mashed and his goatee was mussed but his eyes were expressionless.

"Any of you guys talk English?" I yelled at the mob.

"Sure, what's the matter?" a young fellow with a big black bow tie said.

"What'd that fellow do?" I asked.

It never occurred to me to ask the old man himself.

I caught the young fellow's arm so's the crowd wouldn't separate us.

"Murdered a guy," he said.

A French police patrol drove up and they put the old man inside.

"Did you see it?" I asked the young fellow.

"Sure," he said. "The old guy just walked up to a fellow in a high silk hat, pulled out a gun and let him have it. They say the guy in the silk hat was a government official."

The next day I went to the American consul.

"He's an American," I said. "You've got to do something."

"Yes, and he killed a member of the Chamber of Deputies,"



the consul told me, "and what would you suggest I do about that?"

"Something," I said, "or strings are liable to be pulled in Washington. One's apt to jerk you right out of this office." I was bluffing.

"I'll make inquiries," he promised.

When I went back the consul told me he couldn't do anything.

"I don't even know that he's an American," he said. "He says he hasn't any nationality. Even if he were an American I couldn't do anything. He admits he killed the deputy."

"Why?" I asked.

The consul shrugged like a Frenchman.

"He says he didn't have a reason," he said. "That's all the police can get out of him except that he didn't know the man he killed, hadn't seen him before and hadn't even heard of him."

The thing didn't surprise me. The old man gave away an automobile to a stranger for no reason whatsoever. Why shouldn't he kill a stranger for the same reason? That added up. It made sense but I couldn't get anyone to see it. They listened to my story and threatened to have me thrown in jail, too. I didn't know what to do. They wouldn't let me see the old man. They said he claimed he didn't know me and didn't want to see me anyway. I don't know if they were telling the truth, I suppose they were. I had to give up.

I hung around Paris for three months and then caught a boat for home. I went down to the bar and ordered a whiskey sour as we left the dock. Just as I finished it the man in the black hat appeared again.

"Have one on me," he said, taking his place alongside me.

If you put your finger in boiling water you'll get scalded. But if you put it in molten metal that's a hundred times hotter you won't feel anything. Surprise is that way. If I had seen anything that was merely terrifying I would have shrieked like a woman. But I saw the man in the black hat and I was calm.

Maybe I was too stunned to be frightened or alarmed. Anyway I spoke calmly.

"You were being taken to jail the last time I saw you," I said.

"I escaped," he told me. "What will it be?"

"Whiskey sour," I said. "How did you manage it?"

"Two whiskey sours," he called to the bartender. "Why, I just walked away from there," he said to me.

I took my drink and started to lift it to my lips. Then I set it down carefully so's it wouldn't spill.

"Look here," I said, "this can't go on forever, you know. One of us is crazier'n hell and even if it's a tie I don't like it."

His head was turned half away from me but his grey marble eyes swung around and stared into mine. He shrugged and his eyebrows lifted.

"Something?" he asked.

Something in my brain clicked and I remembered. I drank the whiskey sour.

"My God!" I said. "*Something?* Why, they executed you. They cut your head off with a guillotine."

His eyebrows lifted again.

"So?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, "I read it in the papers."

"That's their notion of it," he said. "Have another?"

"Give me the bottle," I said to the bartender.

I took a drink and kept my hand on the bottle. He took it from me and poured himself a drink. He tossed it down without taking his eyes off mine.

"Damn it! They *did* execute you," I said. "They cut your head off and you died. I know they did. Don't tell me they didn't."

"All right," he said, "have it your own way."

I took another drink and thought awhile. Then I gripped the bar with both hands.

"All right," I said, "I'm ready. I've got to know sooner or later, so let's have it. Who are you?"

"Don't you know?" he asked, never taking his eyes off mine.

"I'm asking," I said.

"All right," he said, "I'll tell you."

A drunk came by and lost his balance. He threw his arms around me and almost dragged me down. When I got rid of him the man in the black hat was gone.

I couldn't find him anywheres on the boat.

I'm in the United States now. I keep traveling around but I know it isn't going to do me any good. Someday, someplace, I'm going to meet the man in the black hat again. I know he'll tell me.

And I don't want to be told.



## NAKED LADY

By MINDRET LORD

MARION VAN ORTON finished packing her dressing-case, opened her purse to make sure that her steamer tickets were still there, took one last look in the mirror and then descended the wide, polished staircase of the Van Orton mansion for the last time. Gorham, the butler, met her at the door.

"Madam will be gone for the week end?" he asked.

"Including the week end," Mrs. Van Orton amended.

The town car was waiting at the curb. He helped her into it and stood waiting at the door while she settled back comfortably. She looked up questioningly.

"Will Madam leave any message?" Gorham asked.

"Oh," she sighed, "just say I've gone."

"For an indefinite stay, Madam?"

Languidly, Mrs. Van Orton motioned to the chauffeur. "No," she said. "Just say I've gone."

The purring motor drew away. Only Gorham's eyes moved as he watched it turn the corner. With a start he recovered himself and closed his mouth. "Well!" he said as he walked up the stairs. A greater degree of volubility had returned to him when he reported the incident to the cook.

Just for the moment, Gilda Ransome's life had crystallized into one desperate wish: if she couldn't scratch her thigh, this instant, she would go stark, raving mad. A few hours earlier she had thought that if she didn't have breakfast life would be insupportable. Hunger was bad enough—but this itch!

"You may rest now," said Mr. Blake, the well-known designer of the fleshier covers of the naughtier magazines. He turned away and lit a cigarette. Gilda applied her nails to her skin as she went behind a screen and drew on a dressing-gown.

She began to think about her hunger again. She was not

hungry because she was on a reducing diet—she needed neither reduction nor addition. Every artist for whom she had posed had agreed that her figure was “just the type”—presumably the type that sells magazines. And her face was certainly no less attractive than her figure—which is an emphatic statement.

She felt starved because influenza had kept her idle for three weeks and during that time her money had run out. She had never been one to save.

Later in the day she fainted while trying to hold a tiring pose. Mr. Blake was very much annoyed, and he determined that in the future he would use stronger, if less perfect, models.

In the West Indies there were many, many men who would have testified to the cleverness of Jeremiah Van Orton. As a lad of twenty he had come to Curaçao from Holland, and for forty-five years thereafter he had remained in the Indies. Then he had decided that he was too rich and too old to go on working. That was his first mistake. If he had kept his nose to the grindstone, he would not have come to New York. He would not have met Marion Martin, the actress. He would not have made a fool of himself.

Van Orton sat huddled in front of an open fire and thought the matter over. In this climactic hour he paused to review his life and works.

Vivid flashes of memory confused his efforts to keep his thoughts orderly. A tongue of flame licked around a log in the fireplace. A thread of scented smoke curled into the room. . . . A night in the Haitian jungle—when was it? Twenty—thirty years ago? A black wench was dying. “For no reason,” the doctor said; “for superstition. Voodoo.” . . . Marion Martin had been convincing. She had said that she was tired of young men—men whom she could not respect. She had said a man was not in his prime until sixty or seventy. Until then, he was callow, unproved, not worthy of admiration or love. He knew nothing of metropolitan people. He had been attracted to her and, presently, he had believed and loved her. . . . What was

that about the natives destroying with such care every finger-nail cutting, every hair? One had to be careful—voodoo was strong in the West Indies. . . . He had given Marion his honorable name and a million dollars besides. Even if she hadn't pretended to love him, he might have done the same. She had given him the illusion of youth. He had thought of a future with her, for her. He might have lived for ever!

And now he was nothing but an old fool who was going to die. But so was she. Oh, yes, so was she!

The idea of following his wife to wherever she might come to rest and murdering her there never occurred to Jeremiah Van Orton. He was too tired and feeble for such a melodramatic rôle. One did not spend a lifetime in the Indies for nothing. He was clever; except for this little interlude of marriage, he had always been clever. He would find a way, a good way—a safe way for him, an unpleasant way for her.

Jeremiah Van Orton could always think better among his beautiful collection of paintings. He went to the drawing-room and drew up a chair before a Hobbema landscape. There he remained until he had planned all the details of his vengeance.

In the restaurant of the Hotel Lafayette, Michael Bonze sat across the table from his friend, Pierre Vanneau, and cursed the age in which they both were born.

"What does art mean in the Twentieth Century?" he asked rhetorically. "Nothing! People talk about the dynamic beauty of a new stream-lined toilet seat or the Empire State Building. Or take Surrealism: daubs—damn it!—daubs by clumsy, color-blind house-painters! Picasso eats while I starve! Cocteau is the white-haired boy while I worry myself bald! People don't want things to look like what they are—they want them to look like the sublimation of the mood of the essence of the psychological reaction to what they might be if they weren't what they are. Oh, I know it sounds like sour grapes, but I wouldn't mind if it weren't for the fact that I'm a painter with greater talent than any of them. If I were living in Henry the

Eighth's time, people would now be collecting Bonzes instead of Holbeins. Damn the Twentieth Century!"

"Look," said Vanneau, "have you ever painted a beautiful young girl? You know—curves and flowing hair and so on?"

Bonze slapped his big hand down on the table top and the dishes jumped. "Are you trying to be insulting?" he bellowed. "Do you take me for Henry Clive?—or—or Zuloaga, maybe? No! No, I haven't painted any pretty valentines of beautiful young girls!"

Vanneau murmured into his coffee cup, "Rubens did. Tiepolo did. Titian did. . . ."

"Oh, shut up!" said Bonze. "You know what I meant. People won't take that sort of thing from a modern artist—it isn't art. Art is old, wrinkled-up men, or nauseous arrangements of dried fish and rotten apples, or anything sufficiently ugly and nasty."

"How do you know that is so?" Vanneau asked. "What modern artist has dared to paint a *pretty* picture? I don't know of anyone since Greuze, and his picture sold well enough."

"Well——" Bonze began doubtfully.

"And look," Vanneau continued, "in this jaded age, sex appeal is important. Important? It is everything!" He spread out his arms in an all-embracing gesture. "And what do you create for an avid public? A public that waters at the mouth at the very mention of nudism or Mae West? You give them old men and dried fish! Don't weep on *my* shoulder—you give me a pain!"

Bonze was still feeling a little sorry for himself. "I give Meyergold, the critic, a pain, too. Today, he came to the studio and said he didn't think I was ready, just yet, to have a show. He stayed about fifteen minutes. Damn him!"

On the morning following his wife's departure, Jeremiah Van Orton engaged the services of a Mr. Moses Winkler, a student of biology, who was promised double payment if he could manage to get through his work without asking questions. He was led into a lady's boudoir and told that he must



go over the entire room with a microscope in order to collect every human remain, no matter how small or apparently unimportant.

Mr. Van Orton watched every move he made. Somehow, Moses did not like the eagerness with which the old man greeted each new find. It made him quite nervous.

When Moses finished his work he was able to deliver to his employer a surprising number of small envelopes, on each of which he had written a description of the contents. One held grains of dust from a nail-file; another, an eyelash. On a brush in the bathroom he had found a few flakes of skin. A minute drop of blood had been discovered on a handkerchief in the laundry basket. . . . The list went on.

Moses was paid and dismissed. He was glad to go.

Van Orton added the envelopes to a collection he had made of all the photographs of his wife that she had left in the house. He looked long at the relics before locking them safely away.

"It is not a great deal," he muttered to himself, "but in Haiti I've known them to do it with less—much less."

Within a month, old Mr. Van Orton had become the scandal of Sutton Place. Every day, from nine until six, a constant stream of handsome young women entered and left his house. Much to Gorham's bewilderment and disapproval, it had become his master's custom to sit in the drawing-room and interview the young ladies, one by one. Discreet inquiries elicited the fact that they were artists' models answering a newspaper advertisement.

"What," Gorham had asked the cook, "does the old reprobate want with a model? And if he wants a model, why is he so hard to satisfy? He must have seen two hundred of them already and he's not kept one over ten minutes."

It was the cook's considered opinion that Jeremiah Van Orton was an indecent, dirty old man who should be put away where he couldn't do any harm.

The procession of applicants ended when Gilda Ransome was ushered into the drawing-room. Gorham was called and told that no more models would be seen. He breathed a sigh

of relief and stole a glance at the young lady who had been chosen from among so many. Gorham had a shock—for a second he had thought she was Mrs. Van Orton. It was a startling resemblance.

Michael Bonze sat in his studio window and looked at the dreary square with bare trees and muddy streets. It was a picture of his mood. His money was running low and he was thinking that he ought to be putting in a stock of canned baked beans instead of buying a half-case of gin. There was nothing he wanted to paint. He hated painting and art patrons and critics.

A sedate foreign limousine came splashing along the street below and stopped at the door to his studio building. The sight didn't make him any happier. "Art patron!" he said with a wealth of expression in his voice.

In a moment there was a knock on the door, and Michael opened it to admit Jeremiah Van Orton.

"You are Michael Bonze?" he asked.

Bonze admitted his identity, although, just then, he was not particularly proud of it. The caller presented his card with the question, "You have heard of me?"

"Yes," said Bonze; "I've heard you have quite a large collection of Flemish paintings. Will you take a chair?"

Van Orton launched into his business at once. "I have come to see you," he said, "because I want a special kind of painting which you do better than anyone I know."

"Thank you!" Michael murmured and crossed his fingers behind him.

"Not that I like the sort of painting you do," the old man continued, "on the contrary, I dislike it intensely. It is dull, spiritless—I might say, insipid."

"Oh, do say 'insipid'!" said Michael. "Also say 'goodbye,' sir, at once!"

"Come, come!" said Van Orton, calmly. "This is no time for compliments. I am not here to discuss art but to make you a proposition which you will find highly beneficial, financially."

Bonze had a sudden vision of rows of canned baked beans, and he held his tongue.

"For a particular reason, which is none of your affair, I wish you to paint a life-size nude of a model I have selected. The pose makes very little difference, but I suggest that you have her reclining on a chaise-longue. For background you may use drapery or anything you please—it is of no importance."

Bonze asked, "Would you mind telling me why I should have been chosen for this work?"

"Because your painting is so realistically accurate that not even a colored photograph can compare with it. I don't consider it art, but it will serve my purpose."

After all, a man had to have some pride. "I'm not interested," said Bonze.

No shade of disappointment crossed the old man's face. "No, no," he agreed, "of course not. But you would, perhaps, be interested in fifteen thousand dollars, a third payable now?"

Michael resisted an impulse to jump up and kiss the beneficent bald head. "Write the check and send me the model," he said. "I'll start today."

"Good!" said Van Orton. "But now I must lay down two important conditions. First, I will give you a number of photographs of a young woman who bears some resemblance to the model you will use. I want you to study the pictures very closely, because your painting must look more like them than like the model."

"But why," Michael protested, "why can't I simply paint a portrait of the subject of the photographs? It would be a lot more satisfactory and easier."

"If the job were as easy as that, I wouldn't be paying you fifteen thousand dollars." Van Orton reached in the pocket of his coat and withdrew ten or twelve little envelopes. "The second request that I must make is this," he continued. "Each of these packets contains a pinch of powder. They are plainly marked, 'hair, nails, skin, lips,' and so on. Now, when you mix your paints for these various details, you must add these powders as indicated. You are a man of honor?"

"Certainly!" said the very mystified painter.

"You will give me your word that this will be done according to my instructions?"

Michael nodded.

"Very well. Here is my check for five thousand dollars. Hurry your work as much as you can with safety and let me know the instant it is done." Van Orton went to the door. "I brought the model with me in the car. I will send her up with the photographs. Good day!"

Bonze collapsed into a chair as the door closed.

Spring has come to Venice and the Piazza San Marco has a freshly washed and burnished look. Mrs. Van Orton sits at Florian's on the edge of the square, sipping a Pernod. She feels that God's in His Heaven and Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries.

Mrs. Van Orton has a figure that looks well in anything, but its effectiveness increases in inverse ratio with the amount of clothing she wears; hence, to some extent, Venice and the Lido. When she walks along the beach, this summer, the women will turn away and the men will turn toward her. The women will say, "Who is that doll-faced American in the daring bathing-costume?" The men are discreet on the Lido—they will say nothing. But they will look.

And spring has come to Washington Square. The old trees are beginning to think about their Easter clothing. Probably they will decide that the well-dressed tree will wear a very light and delicate chartreuse. Feathers, too, may be worn.

Michael Bonze looked up from his painting. "Darling," he said, "you're the best work I've ever done. And you're just about finished."

"Thank goodness!" said Gilda Ransome. "May I move, now?"

"Go ahead," he said. "Get up and we'll make some coffee."

He put down his palette and brushes and helped her into her kimono, kissing, as he did so, the back of her neck.

"I wonder," he said, "if I could have done such a good portrait if I hadn't fallen in love with you. I owe a lot to old Van Orton. If it hadn't been for him—and for Pierre Vanneau——"

"Why Pierre Vanneau?" she asked.

Michael smiled in memory of his annoyance. "It was he who first suggested that I paint beautiful women. I was furious."

"So shall I be," said Gilda, "if you dare to paint any woman but me."

"Never fear!" he laughed. "There will be no one but you. I'll paint you as everything from Medusa to the Virgin Mary."

"I *might* make a Medusa," said Gilda.

Later in the day, the picture was finished to the immense satisfaction of both artist and model.

The next morning Michael arose before Gilda was awake. He wanted to look at the portrait in the cold light of dawn. Without, he told himself, undue self-praise, he found it good—very good. Maybe it wasn't modern, maybe the style wasn't original, perhaps it wasn't spontaneous. But the draftsmanship, the color, the texture, the composition—that was all perfect. No one could deny it. It would take no violent stretch of the imagination to conceive the beautiful creature rising from her couch and stepping lightly down from the canvas to the floor.

Bonze thought it wasn't fair that this, his best work, was destined to be hung in a dark, lonely house, among a lot of gloomy Flemish paintings, for the exclusive pleasure of a solitary old Dutchman. After all, Art was for the masses. If Meyergold could see this, he'd sing a different tune. If it weren't for the money, he'd never let Van Orton have the picture—the insulting old idiot! He wouldn't appreciate it, anyway. It wouldn't have made any difference to him if the picture had been good or bad. All he wanted was a likeness.

On the heels of this reflection, Bonze realized in a flash of inspiration how he could keep his picture. He would make a copy and give *that* to Van Orton. Naturally, it wouldn't be so good as the original, but what of that? He hadn't promised to deliver a masterpiece. Of course, there was the matter of those

little packets of powder—he'd used it all in the original—but—well, it was silly, anyway.

He woke Gilda with a shout and told her his plan. "I'll have the thing finished by the end of the week. Then I'll get my check and we'll go right down to the City Hall and be married."

Gilda looked at the clock on the bed table. "Is this a nice hour to propose to a girl?" she groaned and pulled the covers over her head.

Whistling loudly and cheerfully, Michael started to work.

Jeremiah Van Orton crouched before the likeness of his wife lying nude upon a chaise-longue. He had never seen her so. She had always kept him at arm's length. But now she was near—near enough to touch with the finger tips, or a long pin, or a keen-edged knife.

Though never for a moment did he take his mad gaze from the portrait, he did not neglect the task at which he worked. Methodically, he sharpened on a whetstone a number of efficient-looking probes and knives. The scrape of the steel and his panting breath were the only sounds in the darkened room. Incessantly, he moistened his opened lips with his tongue. His heart pounded in his ears.

Jeremiah knew that the excitement of the execution was killing him, that he must hurry. He got to his feet and addressed the painting in a high, cracked voice.

"Marion," he said, "I hold your life in this image by virtue of your skin and blood. Do you understand? This is you!"

He tried the point of a blue steel probe against his thumb. His voice rose to a shriek.

"You are going to die, Marion, my love, wherever you are!"

His bloodshot eyes fixed themselves in a hypnotic stare as he approached the portrait. Great veins throbbled in his shriveled neck and temples.

"Excellent!" said Mr. Meyergold. "Really excellent! I must say, my dear Bonze, you surprize me!"

He looked around with an expression frequently worn by owners of dogs that are able to sit up or shake hands. He assumed an air of patronizing pride. He reasoned that he had played an important part in the development of this young artist by his stern and uncompromising rejection, until now, of everything he had done. He turned again to the picture and nodded. Bonze was a good dog and it was no more than fair to throw him a bone—he had earned it. "Excellent!" he repeated. "What do you call it?"

"I call it," said Michael, racking his brain for a likely name, "I call it 'Naked Lady.'"

Mr. Meyergold glanced up sharply. "Naked Lady." He rolled it around on his tongue. "Good! Oh, very good! A fine distinction. This is no ordinary nude; no allegorical Grecian goddess to whom a yard of drapery more or less makes no difference." He thought that an awfully good line for a review and decided to make a note of it the instant he left. He laughed in appreciation of his wit. "Oh, no, this young lady is shy and embarrassed without her clothing." He went on enlarging the idea in the hope that he would hit upon another useful line. "Here you've caught a lady in a most undignified situation. I get the impression that your 'Naked Lady' is very much annoyed with us for looking at her."

In her cabin on the beach, Marion Van Orton was changing from her bathing-suit to an elaborate pair of pajamas. Suddenly she had a distinct impression that she was being observed. She jerked a bath-towel up to her chest and swung around. Apparently there was nothing to account for her fear. But she *knew* that someone was minutely examining her. Hurriedly, she pulled on her pajamas and ran from the cabin, fully expecting to surprize some rude man in the act of staring through a chink in the wall. There was no one near.

In spite of the heat of the day, she went back into the cabin and wrapped a heavy cloak tightly about her. Still the miserable feeling persisted.

"My goodness!" she said to herself, "I feel positively naked!"

A month later, Marion Van Orton had cause to remember that day on the Lido. She was sitting in the Excelsior Bar, reading a *New York Times*, two weeks old. She had really been looking through it to see if there were any more news of the death of her husband. For a few days the papers had been full of "Millionaire Husband of Actress Found Dead." When she had first heard of it she had wondered which of the paintings it was that had been found slashed to rags and tatters, and she wondered what had happened before his heart failed that had made him want to ruin one of the pictures of which he had always been so proud.

There was nothing more in the *Times*. The story had been squeezed dry and dropped in favor of an expedition to the South Pole. Finishing a rather dull announcement of the forthcoming exhibit of paintings by an artist who had just married his model, Marion turned to her handsome companion.

"Some people insist," she said, "that more important things happen in New York than here, or anywhere else. But look at this paper; there isn't an interesting or important thing in it. It's all too, too boring for words."

And then, quite suddenly, that awful nightmarish feeling returned to her. She was entirely naked and people were looking at her, criticizing her, appraising her. As she crossed her arms at her throat, her eyes darted about the room, searching for the guilty Peeping Tom. She could detect no one, but she knew, she *knew* that to someone her clothing was perfectly transparent.

Without excusing herself to her startled friend, Mrs. Van Orton jumped up and rushed to her room in the hotel. She locked and bolted the door. The sensation was growing stronger every moment. She pulled down the shades and turned off the light. But it was no better. She ran into the clothes closet and shut the door. Even there, there was no escape from the certain knowledge that she was bare and defenseless before a crowd. She drew the hanging dresses tightly around her and shrank into a corner of the closet. She felt she was going mad.



## THE HOUSE OF ECSTASY

By RALPH MILNE FARLEY

*This happened to you, this incredibly strange adventure  
in the house of the hypnotist. Don't you remember?*

THIS actually happened to you. And when I say "you," I mean *you*—holding this magazine now, and reading these very words. For I know something about you—something deeply personal—something which, however, I am afraid that you have forgotten.

You're puzzled? You don't believe me? Read on, and I'll prove it to you—you'll see that I am right.

To begin with, where were you at eight o'clock on that warm evening of August 4, 1937?

You don't remember? Oh, but I hope you will, my friend. For, as you read on, you will realize the importance of remembering every detail of that eventful night.

The weather was warm and muggy. It made you restless in the house, until finally you went out for a little walk—down to the store at the corner, to buy a package of cigarettes—to take the air. Nothing of importance, you thought.

A young fellow stopped you, asked for a light. Undoubtedly you have forgotten this too, for you are so often asked for a light. And in the dusk of that muggy evening there was nothing to stamp this young fellow as any different from hundreds of others.

You gave him a match; and as the match flared up in the darkness, you studied his clean-cut whimsical features. Rather attractive, he seemed to you.

You said to yourself, "Here is a man I'd like to know."

Then you lit your own cigarette, and noticed that the young fellow was studying you. You hoped that he too was favorably impressed by what he saw.

"Rather a warm night," he said in a pleasing voice, as he fell into step beside you.

So the two of you discussed the weather for a few moments, walking aimlessly along.

Having thus broken the ice, the stranger asked, "Are you doing anything this evening?"

Somehow this question put you on your guard. What was his racket, anyway? You glanced sharply at his face, at that moment illumined by a street-light which the two of you were passing. But what you saw completely reassured you.

"No," you replied. "I'm not doing anything. Why?"

He laughed a bit embarrassedly.

"Well, you see, there's a clever seer and mystic, who lives just a couple of blocks from here. I was on my way to his house for a *séance*, when I met you. I'd feel a little less creepy if you'd come along."

It sounded intriguing. But——

"What does he charge?" you asked.

The young man laughed—a pleasant friendly laugh. "No charge at all," he replied. "A *real* mystic doesn't prostitute his weird abilities by making money out of them. Only charlatans do that!"

"Okeh," you said, relieved that there was no fee. "I'll try anything once."

"Come on," he invited.

He led you to one of a block of identical three-story brown-stone fronts—no one would ever have imagined what it held. A massive butler answered the door. He looked you suspiciously up and down; then stepping aside, he solemnly ushered you and your friend into a small reception room, where a hunchbacked dwarf of indefinable age arose to greet the two of you. His hairless yellow skin was stretched parchment-like over his skull. His eyes were quick-shifting, black and beady. His slit mouth leered, first at your companion and then at you.

"Well?" he asked in a high-pitched querulous voice, shifting his eyes back to your companion.

"Master," the young man replied, bowing stiffly, "here is the person whom you directed me to bring."

"You have done well, my pupil," quavered the dwarf, his hunched shoulders shaking slightly as at some concealed jest. "You may go."

Astonished and indignant, you turned quickly to confront your guide. But a subtle change seemed to have come over him. In the bright light of the reception room he did not look as pleasing as he had looked on the street.

His dark eyes were set at a decided slant. His black brows were thick and tufted. His ears, nose and chin were pointed. And his sleek black hair was brushed up on each side of his forehead into two little peaks, almost like twin horns.

"Why, you said——" you began indignantly.

"What I *said* is of no matter," he replied with a shrug and a nonchalant wave of one slender hand. Turning on his heel, he stalked out of the room.

You wheeled to follow him; but behind you a sharp voice croaked "Stop!"

Invisible hands seemed to reach out from behind and turn you around, and march you back to the toad-like squatting Master.

He smiled a slitted grin, evidently intended to be ingratiating.

"Why should you flee, my dear fellow?" he murmured. "I am about to do you a favor."

"But—but——" you began.

"Silence!" he snapped. His face was stern. His claw-like hands, on the ends of scrawny arms, reached out toward you in a fluttery gesture as he crooned, "Sleep! Sleep! You are in my power. You will do as I command. Sleep! Sleep!"

A delicious languor spread over you; and, although your mind remained abnormally clear, all control over your own body gradually slipped from you.

The Master's parchment face relaxed into a friendly grin once more.

"You are going to enjoy this," he croaked gleefully, rubbing

his taloned hands together. "The ecstasy is going to be all yours. For, alas, my poor crumpled body cannot thrill to the pleasures of the flesh, except vicariously. So I have summoned you here, in the hope that a few crumbs may drop from the table of your enjoyment, for me to pick up."

"Yes, Master." The words came to your lips through no volition of your own.

The little dwarf grinned delightedly, and his hunched shoulders shook with suppressed chuckles.

"This is going to be good!" he chortled. "Come. Follow me."

Like a sleep-walker, you followed him out of the little reception room, down the broad hall, up a flight of stairs, and into a large room with softly carpeted floor, and pictures and mirrors on the wall. The only article of furniture was a couch.

On that couch sat a beautiful young girl, clothed in a gown of some filmy blue material. Her skin was a creamy olive shade, her hair blue-black and lustrous, her face piquant and oval, her lips full and inviting, and her figure slenderly mature.

But her eyes (so you noted) almost spoiled the picture. They were lusterless and dumb, like those of a stunned animal. You momentarily wondered if your own eyes were not the same. And, when she moved, she moved slowly, swimmingly, as in a slow-motion picture.

"Get up, my little dear," croaked the hunchback, rubbing his hands together, and grinning with anticipation.

The girl arose, her sightless sleep-walking eyes on his penetrating ones.

"Yes, Master." Her tones were flat and dead, and yet they carried the hint of a bell-like quality.

"Here is your partner, my little dear," he continued, with a leer, waving one skinny talon toward you, as you stood sheepishly, striving to free your paralyzed muscles from his hypnotic spell. "Stand up, my little dear."

"Yes, Master."

She rose obediently, and faced you. Somehow, in spite of the dull animal look in her wide eyes, there was something in-

tensely appealing about her. So young. So soft. So virginal. And so alone!

Fascinated, you stared and stared at this vision of loveliness. No longer did you strain to escape, for now your every effort was to break the Master's hypnotic spell, not so as to leap *away*, but rather so as to *go forward*.

As you ran your eyes appraisingly over every line and curve of her perfect figure, the girl mechanically seated herself on the couch, lifted up one shapely leg, crossed her knees, unlatched the slipper, and let it plop to the floor.

Its sudden sound seemed to shock the girl almost into consciousness. Her wide, unseeing eyes narrowed, and her expression became momentarily human—the one touch needed for complete perfection.

But only for a brief instant. Then the Master waved one taloned hand in her direction. "Sleep!" he crooned. "Sleep, my little dear. Sleep."

Her vacant stare returned. She unfastened and took off the other slipper.

The hunchback, grinning fatuously, held up one hand, and said, "My little dear, that will be enough for the present." Then, turning to you, "All right, my boy. She is yours."

Released from your paralysis, although still under his spell, you stole slowly, eagerly forward. Your feet seemed planted in shifting sands. Interminable ages elapsed. Would you ever reach her?

Behind you the cracked voice of the Master squeaked. "Welcome him, my little dear."

In response to this command, the girl held out her arms to you. A dumb eagerness suffused her piquant oval face. You in turn held out your arms to her, with an intense yearning to clasp them tightly around her.

At last, after countless ages it seemed, you almost reached her, your fingertips met hers, just barely brushing them, and a tingling thrill swept through you. With one supreme effort, you leaped forward.

But an invisible hand seemed to clamp itself upon one of

your shoulders, pulling you backward. And behind you sounded the croak of the Master, saying: "Bah! You are mere automatons! There is no vicarious pleasure to be had by me from such puppet amours as this!"

Then his invisible hand spun you around to face his toad-like leering features.

"Master!" you implored. "Master!"

His slant eyes narrowed, and his slit mouth broadened into a grin.

"I am going to be kind to you," he announced, in his high-pitched, cracked voice. "To the two of you—and to myself. I shall remove my hypnotic spell, and then see if you two cannot react to each other like normal human beings."

He waved one taloned hand imperiously.

"Awake!" he croaked. "It is my command that you both awake."

The invisible hands upon your shoulders relaxed their hold. A shudder passed through you. You lifted up one hand and brushed the cobwebs from your eyes. You drew a deep breath. The sluggish shackles slipped off of your mind and soul. You were free. Free!

Wheeling eagerly, you confronted the beautiful, olive-skinned girl.

But now she drew away from you—her eyes, no longer dumb, now pools of horror. Her two little hands fluttered up in front of her, as if to ward you off. A dull, red flush, commencing at the rounded hollow of her slim young throat, crept slowly up until it suffused her entire face, as she cringed back against the couch.

And you—your eagerness to clasp her in your arms now changed to eagerness to protect her. You halted abruptly.

From behind you there came a cackling laugh and the words, "She does not seem to relish you, my friend. Well, I shall leave the two of you alone together for a while, until you and she become better acquainted. *Adios!*"

A door slammed, and there was the sound of the turning of a key in the lock.

The girl was now seated on the edge of the couch, with one hand raised to her eyes to blot out the unwelcome sight of you.

But by now you were in complete command of yourself, once more a gentleman. "My dear young lady," you breathed, moving forward, "there's nothing to be afraid of. I want to help you; I want to be your friend. Trust me, and I'll try to get you of here. That dwarf is a dangerous madman, and we've got to forget everything except how to outwit him."

She smiled, and nodded. "I *do* trust you!" she exclaimed, rising and gripping your arm.

Hurriedly you made a circuit of all four walls of the room, carefully inspecting them. It was a room without a single window. There was only one door, and that was of solid oak, and locked.

"It is no use, Galahad," said the girl, in a rich liquid voice, but with a touch of mocking sadness. "The Master has us safely imprisoned, and there's nothing we can do about it. Of course, when he is through with *you*, he will probably let *you* go. But I am to be kept here for good."

"I will come back with the police, and raid the place, and rescue you," you asserted.

She smiled sadly. "I wonder," she said.

"Why do you wonder?" you asked, surprised. "If that crazy dwarf is fool enough to let me loose, it ought to be a simple matter to come back here and break in."

"I wonder."

"Why do you keep saying, 'I wonder'?"

"Because other men have been brought here to me by the Master, and they have promised, just as you are now promising. And yet none of them has ever come back."

"But *I* will."

"I wonder."

"Stop it!" you stormed. "Stop parroting those words! I'm a gentleman, and I keep my word. Besides I—er—I admire you very much," you continued lamely. "I've never seen a girl quite like you. *Of course* I'll come back!"

"The Master is a skilful hypnotist. Before he lets you go, he will hypnotize you into forgetting everything."

"He couldn't make a man forget *you!*"

"Yes, even me. Yet perhaps——"

"Perhaps what?"

"Perhaps—if you were to hold me in your arms——"

Eagerly you clasped her to you, and covered her upturned flower-face with kisses, until finally your lips met and she returned your passion in one soul-searing embrace.

As you released her, you exultantly exclaimed, "Now let the Master do his worst! I shall never forget that kiss!"

A cackling laugh echoed through the vacant reaches of the room.

Startled, you sprang to your feet; but there was no one in the room. No one except you yourself and the dark-haired, olive-skinned girl.

Again the cackling laugh. It seemed to come from everywhere—from nowhere.

"Where are you, Master?" you cried.

"Aha!" spoke his cracked voice out of the air. "I see that you have learned respect, and that you address me by my proper title. And I thank you for a very pleasant evening; I enjoyed that kiss! You too ought to thank *me!*"

"I don't!" you stormed. "Let us out of here, or I'll call the police! Where are you, anyway?"

"I am behind one of the mirrors in the wall," he croaked. "It is what is known in the glass trade as an 'X-ray mirror,' that is to say, a transparent one. From *your* side you can see nothing but reflections, whereas from *my* side it is merely a slightly grayed window-pane. And so I have been able to enjoy vicariously your little moment of bliss."

"But your voice?" you asked, incredulous.

"I am talking into a microphone," croaked the invisible dwarf. "There are loud-speakers behind several of the pictures.—And now I am coming in to join my two little play-mates."



"If you enter this room, I shall wring your neck!" you raged.

"I rather think not," rasped his high-pitched voice, trailing off into nothingness.

You turned, and placed one arm comfortingly around the shaken girl.

The key grated in the lock. The door opened. The repulsively leering hunchback came hopping in.

Now was your chance. With cool determination, you charged across the room!

But, grinning unconcernedly, he held out one arm in your direction, with the flat of his hand toward you. A mighty invisible blow smote you squarely in the chest, flinging you back upon the couch, and upon the pathetic little figure there.

Making passes with his hands, the obscene frog-like Master approached you.

"Sleep! Sleep!" he murmured. "Sleep, my friend."

Your veins filled with water, and you slumped helplessly.

"Get up!" he commanded, not unkindly.

You arose.

"Follow me!"

Like a sleep-walker, you followed.

Behind you, there sounded the pleading voice of your sweetheart, imploring, "Oh, my lover, be sure and make a note of the number of this house when you leave it, and come back and rescue me!"

Love is strong! In spite of the invisible hands which sought to restrain you, you turned and cried, "I will! I promise you!"

Her sweet eyes filled with gladness; then shot a glance toward the Master, a glance filled with scorn for his thwarted powers, then back to you again, welling with perfect confidence.

"I believe you," she cried happily. "I shall be waiting."

Then you turned and followed the hunchback out of the room. Dazedly you were led to the street door.

On the threshold the Master transfixed you with his penetrating gaze, and commanded incisively, "You will now forget all that has happened in this house of ecstasy this evening! Do you hear me? You will forget *all* that has happened! Go down the steps, turn to the right, and walk away. When you reach the corner, you will awake. But you will remember nothing. Good-night, my friend, and I thank you for a very pleasant evening."

The door closed behind you.

Ringling in your ears was the insistent command of the wistful girl who had given you her love. "You must not forget! You must not forget."

Already you felt stronger and more free. The spell was beginning to lift. The vision of a piquant oval pleading face was before your eyes.

"I will not forget!" you stalwartly promised, as you went down the steps. Then, before you turned to the right as commanded, you took careful note of the house-number.

You returned from your walk that evening with a vague idea that something was wrong, a vague realization that you had been out of your house an hour or so longer than you could account for.

You consider yourself to be a man of your word, don't you? And yet you have never returned to the house of ecstasy to rescue that girl, although you solemnly promised her that you would.

I have now told you all that I myself know of the episode. But unfortunately I do not know the address of the house of ecstasy. You need that address. You have to have that address, if you are ever to rescue the girl who loved and trusted you.

Try hard, my friend, try hard.

*Can't* you remember? You *must* remember!

## ESCAPE

By PAUL ERNST

*A brief weird tale about the escape of a madman*

HE HAD the craziest form of craziness I've ever seen.

Of course, I hasten to add, I hadn't seen much. I'd been through an asylum once before, as now, to get a story for my paper on treatment and conditions of State inmates, and that was all. On that former trip I'd witnessed nothing like this; nor had I, till now, on this trip.

The man didn't look crazy. So often they don't. He was a medium-sized chap with gray in his hair and a look of sadness on his thin, mild face. A look of sadness—and determination. Neatly dressed, precise of movement, he was very busy in his cell. He paid no attention for a while as the guard and I stood at the barred door and watched him.

He was building something. He would pick up a tool, adjust it carefully, work with all the delicacy of a watchmaker for a moment. Then he would lay the tool down and pick up a gage and check his work. All very accurate and careful.

The only thing was that you couldn't see what he was building. And you couldn't see any tools, nor gages nor workbench. There was nothing in the cell but the man, and a bolted-down cot and chair.

Nevertheless, the fellow was extraordinarily industrious. He would seize a nonexistent tool, examine it with a frown, and then use it on thin air, after which would come the inevitable measuring movements.

"It certainly looks," I said in a low tone to the attendant, "as though there should be something there."

The attendant grinned and nodded. And I continued to watch, fascinated.

You could follow the man through his whole box of tools,

from his rational movements. Now he was boring a hole, obviously a very small hole, with a tiny metal-drill equipped with an egg-beater handle. Now he was just touching a surface with a file. Now he was sawing something else, after which he took the sawed part from an imaginary work-bench and tried it in its place—whatever and wherever that was.

I got still another glimpse of unity of effort as I watched him. Each little period of accurate workmanship ended with a trip four steps to his left, to a corner of his cell which was bright with sunlight. There, his motions said, was the thing he was working on. There was the object, slowly growing bit by accurate bit, which he was making and assembling.

It was uncanny. There simply ought to have been something there—a cabinet, chair, whatnot—and there wasn't.

The man slowly screwed an imaginary part to an imaginary whole, then laid down his imaginary screw-driver and walked to the door, for the first time acknowledging our presence there.

"Hello, Nick," he said to the attendant. His voice was as mild and as sad and as oddly determined as the rest of him.

"Hello," said the attendant affably. His good-natured, broad face turned from the man in the cell toward me.

"Meet Mr. Freer, Mr. Gannet. Mr. Freer's with a newspaper."

"Oh?" said Gannet, politely. He put out his hand so that I could shake it if I reached through the bars of his door a little. I hesitated, then grasped it. He didn't look dangerous.

"How're you doing with your what-is-it, Gannet?" the attendant said, nodding solemnly toward the bright corner where lay the object of the man's attentions.

"Pretty well," said Gannet. "This damned floor isn't quite level. It's three thirty-seconds of an inch to the foot off. I have to allow for that in every line and angle, and it makes it needlessly difficult."

"*What* is it you're building?" asked Nick wheedlingly. "You won't tell any of us, but won't you tell Mr. Freer, for his newspaper story?"

"There it is," shrugged Gannet, pointing to the corner. "See for yourself."

I stared involuntarily at the corner, then, feeling like a fool, back at his mild, sad face. Was there a ghost of a twinkle in his gray eyes? Or was it my imagination? I couldn't tell. I was beginning to feel a little crazy myself.

We walked away. The big library and lounging-room where the almost-cured could sit and read was left for me to see. But I looked around without much interest as we passed through. I kept thinking of Gannet.

"Has he been going through that set of motions very long?" I asked the attendant.

"He started right after he got here," said Nick. "That was a year ago. He came here raving, trying to fight free and get back to the house where he'd lived with his son and daughter-in-law. There was something in his room he had to get, he said. Then he calmed down, and next day began going through the routine you saw. Some days he 'works' only a few hours, sometimes all day long and up until lights-out at night."

"The way he pattered around that corner made me think I was off myself, for not seeing something there," I said. "It was amazingly realistic. As though you could surely *feel* what he was working on, even if you couldn't see it. Has anybody ever felt around that corner where he spends his time?"

"Hey, boy," said Nick, "easy, now. Pretty soon we'll be sending a wagon for you."

"But has anybody?" I persisted, smiling.

"No. That's the one thing that brings out Gannet's kink: If anyone gets too close to that corner he gets quite violent. So we don't even clean there. We're trying to cure these folks, not upset 'em needlessly."

We went out the massive door of the main building, where a stalwart attendant eyed us sharply. There were nicely kept grounds, and then a high fence with inward-slanting barbs on its top.

"You don't want anybody to escape from here, do you?" I said, nodding toward the heavy door and the high fence.

Nick grinned. "Nope. And nobody ever has. Or ever will, I reckon. See you in church."

But he saw me sooner than that.

I kept thinking of the spare, mild-mannered man with the sad, determined eyes all evening, after I'd handed my story in to the paper. I kept thinking about him next morning. And next afternoon saw me at the asylum again, standing in front of Gannet's barred door.

He was as busy as he had been yesterday. But his activity seemed more mental than physical today. He would stand in the center of his cell, hand rubbing jaw, while he stared at the sunny corner. Then he would walk to the corner and touch a spot in midair with an inquisitive forefinger. Then he would step back and survey the atmosphere again, eyes running slowly up and down as though over the lines of a quite tangible thing.

Finally he took something out of his pocket and walked with a more decisive air to the corner. I saw his hands move close together, for all the world as though he were adjusting a micrometer or other delicate measuring-device. He applied his hands to the questionable point in nothingness.

As he had done yesterday, he paid no attention to observers at his door, at first. But finally he spoke, without looking up from his task.

"Hello, Freer."

"Hello," I said. Gannet had an unimpaired memory, at any rate.

"Come for another story?"

"In a way," I evaded.

He shook his head, meanwhile stepping a foot to the right and staring critically at nothing.

"I don't see how you stand it."

"Stand what?"

"Your work. The madness and despair of humanity—that's your stock in trade. You deal in war and famine and flood, in social injustice and political and civil brutalities. They're the

intimate facts of your life. I don't see how you can live among such things. I can't even read about them."

I stared at him. I'd never met a man who seemed less crazy.

"Whether you face the facts intimately or detachedly," I said, "they are still facts and they're still there. You can't avoid them."

"But you can. At least *I* can. And I'm going to. I'm getting out of all this."

He squatted on his haunches, and began running his hands slowly over space, up and down, then horizontally. He straightened and repeated the process. I'll swear I could make out what he had in his mind. It was a sort of chair, with a very high back and unusually high arms.

Just as I had decided this—he sat in it.

You've seen stage tricksters sit in chairs with arms folded, when there are no chairs to sit in? Well, this was the same. I gaped at Gannet, sitting in thin air. Not an impossible stunt, but always an arresting one.

He got up and came to the door.

"I can't take life as it's lived today, Freer. A weakness, no doubt, but there you are."

"So you're getting out of it," I nodded.

"So I'm getting out of it. It's not for nothing that I am a mathematician and an inventor."

What a shame! I almost said it aloud, but didn't. I'd conceived a positive fancy for the sad-faced Mr. Gannet.

He stared at me quizzically.

"You needn't hunt up Nick," he said. "I'm not hinting at suicide. It's a more literal escape, I mean."

"Escape? With these barred doors, the high wall outside?"

"Oh, walls! Bars!" He waved his hand, dismissing them.

He walked back to his sunny corner and resumed his critical ocular and manual examination of—nothing.

"You may have another story tomorrow, Freer," he said mildly. And then he turned his back, thereby dismissing me as he had the walls and bolts of his confinement.

I hunted up Nick on the way out. I felt like a traitor, but I knew it was for my new friend's own good.

"Gannet's talking of an escape," I said.

Nick's customary grin appeared on his broad face.

"Forget it. He's handed out that line before. Nobody could get out of here."

He walked to the high gate in the fence with me, and waved as I got into my car.

I wasn't coming back any more. I didn't want to see Gannet again. He was such a nice little guy. But next noon saw me knocking for admittance a third time, summoned by a call from Nick.

"Got an exclusive for you, if you want it," he said. "An escape. I don't know that it's very important to you, but we've never had one before. That might make it worth a couple of inches."

"Escape?" I said.

"Yeah. Your man, Gannet."

"So he did it! But how?"

Nick grunted. "Suppose you tell me."

"In the night?" I asked.

He shook his head. "A little while ago, in broad daylight. He was seen in his cell at ten. An hour later the room was empty. He was gone."

"But he couldn't have simply walked out of the place in broad daylight."

"No," said Nick, "he couldn't."

"Was his door unlocked?"

"It was not. It was locked, from the outside, when we came to investigate the report that he was gone. His window bars are all right, too."

"You've searched the grounds?"

"Of course. He isn't in them. He isn't in any of the buildings. Nobody saw him after eleven o'clock. He's just gone, with his cell still locked so even a monkey couldn't slip out."

"You must have some idea how he got away."

"No idea. Because it can't be done. Only, it was."



"How am I going to get a story out of that?" I asked.

"How in thunder would I know? That's *your* worry."

I put a cigarette between my lips unlit because smoking wasn't permitted here.

"What in the world do you suppose he . . . thought he was building?" I mused.

Nick snorted. "I don't suppose anything about it. If I did, I'd be as crazy as he was. Well, there's your exclusive, if you know what to do with it."

I didn't know what to do with it, so I finally handed it in as it stands now. This very story, in fact. And the little man with the big vizor at the editor's desk promptly handed it back. Not that I blame him.

Nobody ever saw Gannet again. Nobody ever thought of him again, I guess. Except me. I had a rush of curiosity to the head a few days later, and went to his cell armed with a level and a steel rule.

The floor of the barred cubicle Gannet once occupied *is* three thirty-seconds of an inch off level. Now how do you suppose he could have determined that without tools of any kind to aid the naked eye?



## THE ADAPTIVE ULTIMATE

By JOHN JESSEL

DR. DANIEL SCOTT, his dark and brilliant eyes alight with the fire of enthusiasm, paused at last and stared out over the city, or that portion of it visible from the office windows of Herman Bach—the Dr. Herman Bach of Grand Mercy Hospital. There was a moment of silence; the old man smiled a little indulgently, a little wistfully, at the face of the youthful biochemist.

“Go on, Dan,” he said. “So it occurred to you that getting well of a disease or injury is merely a form of adaptation—then what?”

“Then,” flashed the other, “I began to look for the most adaptive of living organisms. And what are they? Insects! Insects, of course. Cut off a wing, and it grows back. Cut off a head, stick it to the headless body of another of the same species, and that grows back on. And what’s the secret of their great adaptability?”

Dr. Bach shrugged. “What is?”

Scott was suddenly gloomy. “I’m not sure,” he muttered. “It’s glandular, of course—a matter of hormones.” He brightened again. “But I’m off the track. So then I looked around for the most adaptive insect. And which is that?”

“Ants?” suggested Dr. Bach. “Bees? Termites?”

“Bah! They’re the most highly evolved, not the most adaptable. No; there’s one insect that is known to produce a higher percentage of mutants than any other, more freaks, more biological sports. The one Morgan used in his experiments on the effect of hard X-rays on heredity—the fruit fly, the ordinary fruit fly. Remember? They have reddish eyes, but under X-rays they produced white-eyed offspring—and that was a true mutation, because the white eyes bred true! Acquired characteristics can’t be inherited, but these were. Therefore——”

"I know," interrupted Dr. Bach.

Scott caught his breath. "So I used fruit flies," he resumed. "I putrefied their bodies, injected a cow, and got a serum at last, after weeks of clarifying with albumen, evaporating *in vacuo*, rectifying with— But you're not interested in the technique. I got a serum. I tried it on tubercular guinea pigs, and"—he paused dramatically—"it cured! They adapted themselves to the tubercule bacillus. I tried it on a rabid dog. He adapted. I tried it on a cat with a broken spine. That knit. And now, I'm asking you for the chance to try it on a human being!"

Dr. Bach frowned. "You're not ready," he grunted. "You're not ready by two years. Try it on an anthropoid. Then try it on yourself. I can't risk a human life in an experiment that's as raw as this."

"Yes, but I haven't got anything that needs curing, and as for an anthropoid you get the board to allow funds to buy an ape—if you can. I've tried."

"Take it up with the Stoneman Foundation, then."

"And have Grand Mercy lose the credit? Listen, Dr. Bach, I'm asking for just one chance—a charity case—anything."

"Charity cases are human beings." The old man scowled down at his hands. "See here, Dan. I shouldn't even offer this much, because it's against all medical ethics, but if I find a hopeless case—utterly hopeless, you understand—where the patient himself consents, I'll do it. And that's the final word."

Scott groaned. "And try to find a case like that. If the patient's conscious, you think there's hope, and if he isn't, how can he consent? That settles it!"

But it didn't. Less than a week later Scott looked suddenly up at the annunciator in the corner of his tiny laboratory. "Dr. Scott," it rasped. "Dr. Scott. Dr. Scott. To Dr. Bach's office."

He finished his titration, noted the figures, and hurried out. The old man was pacing the floor nervously as Scott entered.

"I've got your case, Dan," he muttered. "It's against all ethics—yet I'll be damned if I can see how you can do this one any harm. But you'd better hurry. Come on—isolation ward."

They hurried. In the tiny cubical room Scott stared appalled. "A girl!" he muttered.

She could never have been other than drab and plain, but lying there with the pallor of death already on her cheeks, she had an appearance of somber sweetness. Yet that was all the charm she could ever have possessed; her dark, cropped, oily hair was unkempt and stringy, her features flat and unattractive. She breathed with an almost inaudible rasp, and her eyes were closed.

"Do you," asked Scott, "consider this a test? She's all but dead now."

Dr. Bach nodded. "Tuberculosis," he said, "final stage. Her lungs are hemorrhaging—a matter of hours."

The girl coughed; flecks of blood appeared on her pallid lips. She opened dull, watery blue eyes.

"So!" said Bach, "conscious, eh? This is Dr. Scott. Dan, this is—uh"—he peered at the card at the foot of the bed—"Miss—uh—Kyra Zelas. Dr. Scott has an injection, Miss Zelas. As I warned you, it probably won't help, but I can't see how it can hurt. Are you willing?"

She spoke in faint, gurgling tones. "Sure, I'm through anyway. What's the odds?"

"All right. Got the hypo, Dan?" Bach took the tube of water-clear serum. "Any particular point of injection? No? Give me the cubital, then."

He thrust the needle into the girl's arm. Dan noted that she did not even wince at the bite of the steel point, but lay stoical and passive as thirty c.c. of liquid flowed into her veins. She coughed again, then closed her eyes.

"Come out of here," ordered Bach gruffly, and as they moved into the hall, "I'm damned if I like this. I feel like a dirty dog."

He seemed to feel less canine, however, the following day. "That Zelas case is still alive," he reported to Scott. "If I dared trust my eyes, I'd say she's improved a little. A very little. I'd still call it hopeless."

But the following day Scott found him seated in his office

with a puzzled expression in his old gray eyes. "Zelas is better," he muttered. "No question of it. But you keep your head, Dan. Such miracles have happened before, and without serums. You wait until we've had her under long observation."

By the end of the week it became evident that the observation was not to be long. Kyra Zelas flourished under their gaze like some swift-blooming tropical weed. Queerly, she lost none of her pallor, but flesh softened the angular features, and a trace of light grew in her eyes.

"The spots on her lungs are going," muttered Bach. "She's stopped coughing, and there's no sign of bugs in her culture. But the queerest thing, Dan—and I can't figure it out, either—is the way she reacts to abrasions and skin punctures. Yesterday I took a blood specimen for a Wassermann, and—this sounds utterly mad—the puncture closed almost before I had a c.c.! Closed and healed!"

And in another week, "Dan, I can't see any reason for keeping Kyra here. She's well. Yet I want her where we can keep her under observation. There's a queer mystery about this serum of yours. And besides, I hate to turn her out to the sort of life that brought her here."

"What did she do?"

"Sewed. Piece work in some sweatshop, when she could work at all. Drab, ugly, uneducated girl, but there's something appealing about her. She adapts herself quickly."

Scott gave him a strange look. "Yes," he said. "She adapts quickly."

"So," resumed Bach, "it occurred to me that she could stay at my place. We could keep her under observation, you see, and she could help the housekeeper. I'm interested—damn interested. I think I'll offer her the chance."

Scott was present when Dr. Bach made his suggestion. The girl Kyra smiled. "Sure," she said. Her pallid, plain face lighted up. "Thanks."

Bach gave her the address. "Mrs. Getz will let you in. Don't

do anything this afternoon. In fact, it might not hurt you to simply walk in the park for a few hours."

Scott watched the girl as she walked down the hall toward the elevator. She had filled out, but she was still spare to the point of emaciation, and her worn black suit hung on her as if it were on a frame of sticks. As she disappeared, he moved thoughtfully about his duties, and a quarter hour later descended to his laboratory.

On the first floor, turmoil met him. Two officers were carrying in the body of a nondescript old man, whose head was a bloody ruin. There was a babble of excited voices, and he saw a crowd on the steps outside.

"What's up?" he called. "Accident?"

"Accident!" snapped an officer. "Murder, you mean. Woman steps up to this old guy, picks a hefty stone from the park border, slugs him, and takes his wallet. Just like that!"

Scott peered out of the window. The Black Maria was backing toward a crowd on the park side of the street. A pair of hulking policemen flanked a thin figure in black, thrusting it toward the doors of the vehicle.

Scott gasped. It was Kyra Zelas!

## II

A week later Dr. Bach stared into the dark fireplace of his living room. "It's not our business," he repeated.

"My God!" blazed Scott. "Not our business! How do we know we're not responsible? How do we know that our injection didn't unsettle her mind? Glands can do that; look at Mongoloid idiots and cretins. Our stuff was glandular. Maybe we drove her crazy!"

"All right," said Bach. "Listen. We'll attend the trial tomorrow, and if it looks bad for her, we'll get hold of her lawyer and let him put us on the stand. We'll testify that she's just been released after a long and dangerous illness, and may not be fully responsible. That's entirely true."

Mid-morning of the next day found them hunched tensely

on benches in the crowded courtroom. The prosecution was opening; three witnesses testified to the event.

"This old guy buys peanuts for the pigeons. Yeah, I sell 'em to him every day—or did. So this time he hasn't change, and he pulls out his wallet, and I see it's stuffed with bills. And one minute later I see the dame pick up the rock and conk him. Then she grabs the dough——"

"Describe her, please."

"She's skinny, and dressed in black. She ain't no beauty, neither. Brownish hair, dark eyes, I don't know whether dark-blue or brown."

"Your witness!" snapped the prosecutor.

A young and nervous individual—appointed by the court, the paper said—rose. "You say," he squeaked, "that the assailant had brown hair and dark eyes?"

"Yeah."

"Will the defendant please rise?"

Her back was toward Scott and Bach as Kyra Zelas arose, but Scott stiffened. Something was strangely different about her appearance; surely her worn black suit no longer hung so loosely about her. What he could see of her figure seemed—well, magnificent.

"Take off your hat, Miss Zelas," squeaked the attorney.

Scott gasped. Radiant as aluminum glowed the mass of hair she revealed!

"I submit, your honor, that this defendant does not possess dark hair, nor, if you will observe, dark eyes. It is, I suppose, conceivable that she could somehow have bleached her hair while in custody, and I therefore"—he brandished a pair of scissors—"submit a lock to be tested by any chemist the court appoints. The pigmentation is entirely natural. And as for her eyes—does my esteemed opponent suggest that they, too, are bleached?"

He swung on the gaping witness. "Is this lady the one you claim to have seen committing the crime?"

The man goggled. "Uh—I can't—say."

"Is she?"



"N-o!"

The speaker smiled. "That's all. Will you take the stand, Miss Zelas?"

The girl moved lithe as a panther. Slowly she turned, facing the court. Scott's brain whirled, and his fingers dug into Bach's arm. Silver-eyed, aluminum-haired, alabaster pale, the girl on the stand was beyond doubt the most beautiful woman he had ever seen!

The attorney was speaking again. "Tell the court in your own words what happened, Miss Zelas."

Quite casually the girl crossed her trim ankles and began to speak. Her voice was low, resonant, and thrilling; Scott had to fight to keep his attention on the sense of her words rather than the sound.

"I had just left Grand Mercy Hospital," she said, "where I had been ill for some months. I had crossed to the park when suddenly a woman in black rushed at me, thrust an empty wallet into my hands, and vanished. A moment later I was surrounded by a screaming crowd, and—well, that's all."

"An empty wallet, you say?" asked the defense lawyer. "What of the money found in your own bag, which my eminent colleague believes stolen?"

"It was mine," said the girl, "about seven hundred dollars."

Bach hissed, "That's a lie! She had two dollars and thirty-three cents on her when we took her in."

"Do you mean you think she's the same Kyra Zelas we had at the hospital?" gasped Scott.

"I don't know. I don't know anything, but if I ever touch that damned serum of yours— Look! Look, Dan!" This last was a tense whisper.

"What?"

"Her hair! When the sun strikes it!"

Scott peered more closely. A vagrant ray of noon sunlight filtered through a high window, and now and again the swaying of a shade permitted it to touch the metallic radiance of the girl's hair. Scott stared and saw; slightly but unmistakably,

whenever the light touched that glowing aureole, her hair darkened from bright aluminum to golden blond!

Something clicked in his brain. There was a clue somewhere—if he could but find it. The pieces of the puzzle were there, but they were woefully hard to fit together. The girl in the hospital and her reaction to incisions; this girl and her reaction to light.

"I've got to see her," he whispered. "There's something I have to find— Listen!"

The speaker was orating. "And we ask the dismissal of the whole case, your honor, on the grounds that the prosecution has utterly failed even to identify the defendant."

The judge's gavel crashed. For a moment his aging eyes rested on the girl with the silver eyes and incredible hair, then: "Case dismissed!" he snapped. "Jury discharged!"

There was a tumult of voices. Flashlights shot instantaneous sheets of lighting. The girl on the witness stand rose with perfect poise, smiled with lovely, innocent lips, and moved away. Scott waited until she passed close at hand, then:

"Miss Zelas!" he called.

She paused. Her strange silver eyes lighted with unmistakable recognition. "Dr. Scott!" said the voice of tinkling metal. "And Dr. Bach!"

She was, then. She was the same girl. This was the drab sloven of the isolation ward, this weirdly beautiful creature of exotic coloring. Staring, Scott could trace now the very identity of her features, but changed as by a miracle.

He pushed through the mob of photographers, press men, and curiosity seekers. "Have you a place to stay?" he asked. "Dr. Bach's offer still stands."

She smiled. "I am very grateful," she murmured, and then, to the crowd of reporters, "The doctor is an old friend of mine." She was completely at ease, unruffled, poised.

Something caught Scott's eye, and he purchased a paper, glancing quickly at the photograph, the one taken at the moment the girl had removed her hat. He started; her hair showed raven black! There was a comment below the pic-

ture, too, to the effect that "her striking hair photographs much darker than it appears to the eye."

He frowned. "This way," he said to the girl, then goggled in surprise again. For in the broad light of noon her complexion was no longer the white of alabaster; it was creamy tan, the skin of one exposed to long hours of sunlight; her eyes were deep violet, and her hair—that tiny wisp unconcealed by her hat—was as black as the basalt columns of hell!

Kyra had insisted on stopping to purchase a substitute for the worn black suit, and had ended by acquiring an entire outfit. She sat now curled in the deep davenport before the fireplace in Dr. Bach's library, sheathed in silken black from her white throat to the tiny black pumps on her feet. She was almost unearthly in her weird beauty, with her aluminum hair, silver eyes, and marble-pale skin against the jet silk covering.

She gazed innocently at Scott. "But why shouldn't I?" she asked. "The court returned my money; I can buy what I please with it."

"Your money?" he muttered. "You had less than three dollars when you left the hospital."

"But this is mine now."

"Kyra," he said abruptly, "where did you get that money?"

Her face was saintlike in its purity. "From the old man."

"You—you did murder him!"

"Why, of course I did."

He choked. "My Lord!" he gasped. "Don't you realize we'll have to tell?"

She shook her head, smiling, gently from one to the other of them. "No, Dan. You won't tell, for it wouldn't do any good. I can't be tried twice for the same crime. Not in America."

"But why, Kyra? Why did you——"

"Would you have me resume the life that sent me into your hands? I needed money; money was there; I took it."

"But murder!"

"It was the most direct way."

"Not if you had happened to be punished for it," he returned grimly.

"But I wasn't," she reminded him gently.

He groaned. "Kyra," he said, shifting the subject suddenly, "why do your eyes and skin and hair darken in sunlight or when exposed to flashlight?"

She smiled. "Do they?" she asked. "I hadn't noticed." She yawned, stretched her arms above her head and her slim legs before her. "I think I shall sleep now," she announced. She swept her magnificent eyes over them, rose, and disappeared into the room Dr. Bach had given her—his own.

Scott faced the older man, his features working in emotion. "Do you see?" he hissed. "Good Lord, do you see?"

"Do you, Dan?"

"Part of it. Part of it, anyway."

"Well," said Scott, "here it is as I see it. That serum—that accursed serum of mine—has somehow accentuated this girl's adaptability to an impossible degree. What is it that differentiates life from non-living matter? Two things, irritation and adaptation. Life adapts itself to its environment, and the greater the adaptability, the more successful the organism.

"Now," he proceeded, "all human beings show a very considerable adaptivity. When we expose ourselves to sunlight, our skin shows pigmentation—we tan. That's adaptation to an environment containing sunlight. When a man loses his right hand, he learns to use his left. That's another adaptation. When a person's skin is punctured, it heals and rebuilds, and that's another angle of the same thing. Sunny regions produce dark-skinned, dark-haired people; northern lands produce blonds—and that's adaptation again.

"So what's happened to Kyra Zelas, by some mad twist I don't understand, is that her adaptive powers have been increased to an extreme. She adapts instantly to her environment; when sun strikes her, she tans at once, and in shade she fades immediately. In sunlight her hair and eyes are those of a tropical race; in shadow, those of a Northerner. And—good Lord, I see it now—when she was faced with danger

there in the courtroom, faced by a jury and judge who were men, she adapted to that! She met that danger, not only by changed appearance, but by a beauty so great that she couldn't have been convicted!" He paused. "But how? How?"

"Perhaps medicine can tell how," said Bach. "Undoubtedly man is the creature of his glands. The differences between races—white, red, black, yellow—is doubtless glandular. And perhaps the most effective agent of adaptation is the human brain and neural system, which in itself is controlled partly by a little greasy mass on the floor of the brain's third ventricle, before the cerebellum, and supposed by the ancients to be the seat of the soul.

"I mean, of course, the pineal gland. I suspect that what your serum contains is the long-sought hormone *pinealin*, and that it has caused hypertrophy of Kyra's pineal gland. And Dan, do you realize that if her adaptability is perfect, she's not only invincible, but invulnerable?"

"That's true!" gulped Scott. "Why, she couldn't be electrocuted, because she'd adapt instantly to an environment containing an electric current, and she couldn't be killed by a shot, because she'd adapt to that as quickly as to your needle pricks. And poison—but there must be limit somewhere!"

"There doubtless is," observed Bach. "I hardly believe she could adapt herself to an environment containing a fifty-ton locomotive passing over her body. And yet there's an important point we haven't considered. Adaptation itself is of two kinds."

"Two kinds?"

"Yes. One kind is biological; the other, human. Naturally a biochemist like you would deal only with the first, and equally naturally a brain surgeon like me has to consider the second as well. Biological adaptation is what all life—plants, animals, and humans—possess, and it is merely conforming to one's environment. A chameleon, for instance, shows much the same ability as Kyra herself, and so, in lesser degree, does the arctic fox, white in winter, brown in summer; or the snowshoe rabbit, for that matter, or the weasel. All life conforms

to its environment to a great extent, because if it doesn't, it dies. But human life does more."

"More?"

"Much more. Human adaptation is not only conformity to environment, but also the actual changing of environment to fit human needs! The first cave man who left his cave to build a grass hut changed his environment, and so, in exactly the same sense, did Steinmetz, Edison, and as far as that goes, Julius Cæsar and Napoleon. In fact, Dan, all human invention, genius, and military leadership boils down to that one fact—changing the environment instead of conforming to it."

He paused, then continued, "Now we know that Kyra possesses the biological adaptivity. Her hair and eyes prove that. But what if she possesses the other to the same degree? If she does, God knows what the result will be. We can only watch to see what direction she takes—watch and hope."

"But I don't see," muttered Scott, "how that could be glandular."

"Anything can be glandular. In a mutant—and Kyra's as much a mutant as your white-eyed fruit flies—anything is possible." He frowned reflectively. "If I dared phrase a philosophical interpretation, I'd say that Kyra—perhaps—represents a stage in human evolution. A mutation. If one ventured to believe that, then de Vries and Weissman are justified."

"The mutation theory of evolution, you mean?"

"Exactly. You see, Dan, while it is very obvious from fossil remains that evolution occurred, yet it is very easy to prove it couldn't possibly have occurred!"

"How?"

"Well, it couldn't have occurred slowly, as Darwin believed, for many reasons. Take the eye, for instance. He thought that very gradually, over thousands of generations, some sea creature developed a spot on its skin that was sensitive to light, and that this gave it an advantage over its blind fellows. Therefore its kind survived and the others perished. But see here. If this eye developed slowly, why did the very first ones, the ones that couldn't yet see, have any better chance than the

others? And take a wing. What good is a wing until you can fly with it? Just because a jumping lizard had a tiny fold of skin between foreleg and breast wouldn't mean that that lizard could survive where others died. What kept the wing developing to a point where it could actually have value?"

"What did?"

"De Vries and Weissman say nothing did. They answer that evolution must have progressed in jumps, so that when the eye appeared, it was already efficient enough to have survival value, and likewise the wing. Those jumps they named mutations. And in that sense, Dan, Kyra's a mutation, a jump from the human to—something else. Perhaps the super-human."

Scott shook his head in perplexity. He was thoroughly puzzled, completely baffled, and more than a little unnerved. In a few moments more he bade Bach good night, wandered home, and lay for hours in sleepless thought.

The next day Bach managed a leave of absence for both of them from Grand Mercy, and Scott moved in. This was in part simply out of his fascinated interest in the case of Kyra Zelas, but in part it was altruistic. She had confessedly murdered one man; it occurred to Scott that she might with no more compunction murder Dr. Bach, and he meant to be at hand to prevent it.

He had been in her company no more than a few hours before Bach's words on evolution and mutations took on new meaning. It was not only Kyra's chameleonlike coloring, nor her strangely pure and saintlike features, nor even her incredible beauty. There was something more; he could not at once identify it, but decidedly the girl Kyra was not quite human.

The event that impressed this on him occurred in the late afternoon. Bach was away somewhere on personal business, and Scott had been questioning the girl about her own impressions of her experience.

"But don't you know you've changed?" he asked. "Can't you see the difference in yourself?"

"Not I. It is the world that has changed."

"But your hair was black. Now it's light as ashes."

"Was it?" she asked. "Is it?"

He groaned in exasperation. "Kyra," he said, "you must know something about yourself."

Her exquisite eyes turned their silver on him. "I do," she said. "I know that what I want is mine, and"—her pure lips smiled—"I think I want you, Dan."

It seemed to him that she changed at that moment. Her beauty was not quite as it had been, but somehow more wildly intoxicating than before. He realized what it meant; her environment now contained a man she loved, or thought she loved, and she was adapting to that, too. She was becoming—he shivered slightly—irresistible!

### III

Bach must have realized the situation, but he said nothing. As for Scott, it was sheer torture, for he realized only too well that the girl he loved was a freak, a biological sport, and worse than that, a cold murderess and a creature not exactly human. Yet for the next several days things went smoothly. Kyra slipped easily into the routine; she was ever a willing subject for their inquiries and investigations.

Then Scott had an idea. He produced one of the guinea pigs that he had injected, and they found that the creature evinced the same reaction as Kyra to cuts. They killed the thing by literally cutting it in half with an ax, and Bach examined its brain.

"Right!" he said at last. "It's hypertrophy of the pineal." He stared intently at Scott. "Suppose," he said, "that we could reach Kyra's pineal and correct the hypertrophy. Do you suppose that might return her to normal?"

Scott suppressed a pang of fear. "But why? She can't do any harm as long as we guard her here. Why do we have to gamble with her life like that?"

Bach laughed shortly. "For the first time in my life I'm glad I'm an old man," he said. "Don't you see we have to do



something? She's a menace. She's dangerous. Heaven only knows how dangerous. We'll have to try."

Scott groaned and assented. An hour later, under the pretext of experiment, he watched the old man inject five grains of morphia into the girl's arm, watched her frown and blink—and adjust. The drug was powerless.

It was at night that Bach got his next idea. "Ethyl chloride!" he whispered. "The instantaneous anæsthetic. Perhaps she can't adjust to lack of oxygen. We'll try."

Kyra was asleep. Silently, carefully, the two crept in, and Scott stared down in utter fascination at the weird beauty of her features, paler than ever in the faint light of midnight. Carefully, so carefully, Bach held the cone above her sleeping face, drop by drop he poured the volatile, sweet-scented liquid into it. Minutes passed.

"That should anæsthetize an elephant," he whispered at last, and jammed the cone full upon her face.

She awoke. Fingers like slim steel rods closed on his wrist, forcing his hand away. Scott seized the cone, and her hand clutched his wrist as well, and he felt the strength of her grasp.

"Stupid," she said quietly, sitting erect. "This is quite useless— Look!"

She snatched a paper knife from the table beside the bed. She bared her pale throat to the moonlight, and then, suddenly, drove the knife to its hilt into her bosom!

Scott gulped in horror as she withdrew it. A single spot of blood showed on her flesh; she wiped it away, and displayed her skin, pale, unscarred, beautiful.

"Go away," she said softly, and they departed.

The next day she made no reference to the incident. Scott and Bach spent a worried morning in the laboratory, doing no work, but simply talking. It was a mistake, for when they returned to the library, she was gone, having, according to Mrs. Getz, simply strolled out of the door and away. A hectic and hasty search of the adjacent blocks brought no sign of her.

At dusk she was back, pausing hatless in the doorway to permit Scott, who was there alone, to watch the miraculous

change as she passed from sunset to chamber, and her hair faded from mahogany to aluminum.

"Hello," she said smiling. "I killed a child."

"What? My Lord, Kyra!"

"It was an accident. Surely you don't feel that I should be punished for an accident, Dan, do you?"

He was staring in utter horror. "How——"

"Oh, I decided to walk a bit. After a block or two, it occurred to me that I should like to ride. There was a car parked there with the keys in it, and the driver was talking on the sidewalk, so I slipped in, started it, and drove away. Naturally I drove rather fast, since he was shouting, and at the second corner I hit a little boy."

"And—you didn't stop?"

"Of course not. I drove around the corner, turned another corner or two, and then parked the car and walked back. The boy was gone, but the crowd was still there. Not one of them noticed me." She smiled her saintlike smile. "We're quite safe. They can't possibly trace me."

Scott dropped his head on his hands and groaned. "I don't know what to do!" he muttered. "Kyra, you're going to have to report this to the police."

"But it was an accident," she said gently, her luminous silver eyes pityingly on Scott.

"No matter. You'll have to."

She placed her white hand on his head. "Perhaps to-morrow," she said. "Dan, I have learned something. What one needs in this world is power. As long as there are people in the world with more power than I, I run afoul of them. They keep trying to punish me with their laws—and why? Their laws are not for me. They cannot punish me."

He did not answer.

"Therefore," she said softly, "to-morrow I go out of here to seek power. I will be more powerful than any laws."

That shocked him to action. "Kyra!" he cried. "You're not to try to leave here again." He gripped her shoulders.

"Promise me! Swear that you'll not step beyond that door without me!"

"Why, if you wish," she said quietly.

"But swear it! Swear it by everything sacred!"

Her silver eyes looked steadily into his from a face like that of a marble angel. "I swear it," she murmured. "By anything you name, I swear it, Dan."

And in the morning she was gone, taking what cash and bills had been in Scott's wallet, and in Bach's as well. And, they discovered later, in Mrs. Getz's also.

"But if you could have seen her!" muttered Scott. "She looked straight into my eyes and promised, and her face was pure as a madonna's. I can't believe she was lying."

"The lie as an adaptive mechanism," said Bach, "deserves more attention than it has received. Probably the original liars are those plants and animals that use protective mimicry—harmless snakes imitating poisonous ones, stingless flies that look like bees. Those are living lies."

"But she couldn't——"

"She has, however. What you've told me about her desire for power is proof enough. She's entered the second adaptive phase—that of adapting her environment to herself instead of herself to her environment. How far will her madness—or her genius—carry her? There is very little difference between the two, Dan. And what is left now for us to do but watch?"

"Watch? How? Where is she?"

"Unless I'm badly mistaken, watching her will be easy once she begins to achieve. Wherever she is, I think we—and the rest of the world—will know of it soon enough."

But weeks dropped away without sign of Kyra Zelas. Scott and Bach returned to their duties at Grand Mercy, and down in his laboratory the biochemist disposed grimly of the remains of three guinea pigs, a cat, and a dog, whose killing had been an exhausting and sickening task. Into the crematory as well went a tube of water-clear serum.

Then one day the annunciator summoned him to Bach's

office, where he found the old man hunched over a copy of the *Post Record*.

"Look there!" he said, indicating a political gossip column called "Whirls of Washington."

Scott read, "And the surprise of the evening was the *soi-disant* confirmed bachelor of the cabinet, upright John Callan, who fluttered none other than the gorgeous Kyra Zelas, the lady who affects a dark wig by day and a white by night. Some of us remember her as the acquittée of a murder trail."

Scott looked up. "Callan, eh? Secretary of the treasury, no less! When she said power she meant power, apparently."

"But will she stop there?" mused Bach gloomily. "I have a premonition that she's just beginning."

"Well, actually, how far can a woman go?"

The old man looked at him. "A woman? This is Kyra Zelas, Dan. Don't set your limits yet. There will be more of her."

Bach was right. Her name began to appear with increasing frequency, first in social connections, then with veiled references to secret intrigues and influences.

Thus: "Whom do the press boys mean by the tenth cabineteer?" Or later: "Why not a secretary of personal relations? She has the powers; give her the name." And still later: "One has to go back to Egypt for another instance of a country whose exchequer was run by a woman. And Cleopatra busted that one."

Scott grinned a little ruefully to himself as he realized that the thrusts were becoming more indirect, as if the press itself were beginning to grow cautious. It was a sign of increasing power, for nowhere are people as sensitive to such trends as among the Washington correspondents. Kyra's appearances in the public prints began to be more largely restrained to purely social affairs, and usually in connection with John Callan, the forty-five-year-old bachelor secretary of the treasury.

Waking or sleeping, Scott never for a moment quite forgot her, for there was something mystical about her, whether she were mad or a woman of genius, whether freak or super-

woman. The only thing he did forget was a thin girl with drab features and greasy black hair who had lain on a pallet in the isolation ward and coughed up flecks of blood.

## IV

It was no surprise to either Scott or Dr. Bach to return one evening to Bach's residence for a few hours' conversation, and find there, seated as comfortably as if she had never left it, Kyra Zelas. Outwardly she had changed but little; Scott gazed once more in fascination on her incredible hair and wide, innocent silver eyes. She was smoking a cigarette, and she exhaled a long, blue plume of smoke and smiled up at him.

He hardened himself. "Nice of you to honor us," he said coldly. "What's the reason for this visit? Did you run out of money?"

"Money? Of course not. How could I run out of money?"

"You couldn't, not as long as you replenish your funds the way you did when you left."

"Oh, that!" she said contemptuously. She opened her hand bag, indicating a green mass of bills. "I'll give that back, Dan. How much was it?"

"To hell with the money!" he blazed. "What hurts me is the way you lied. Staring into my eyes as innocent as a baby, and lying all the time!"

"Was I? she asked. "I won't lie to you again, Dan. I promise."

"I don't believe you," he said bitterly. "Tell us what you're doing here, then."

"I wanted to see you. I haven't forgotten what I said to you, Dan." With the words she seemed again to grow more beautiful than ever, and this time poignantly wistful as well.

"And have you," asked Bach suddenly, "abandoned your idea of power?"

"Why should I want power?" she rejoined innocently, flashing her magnificent eyes to him.

"But you said," began Scott impatiently, "that you——"

"Did I?" There was the ghost of a smile on her perfect lips. "I won't lie to you, Dan," she went on, laughing a little. "If I want power, it is mine for the taking—more power than you dream."

"Through John Callan?" he rasped.

"He offers a simple way," she said impassively. "Suppose, for instance, that in a day or so he were to issue a statement—a supremely insulting statement—about the war debts. The administration couldn't afford to reprimand him openly, because most of the voters feel that a supremely insulting statement is called for. And if it were insulting enough—and I assure you it would be—you would see the animosity of Europe directed westward.

"Now, if the statement were one that no national government could ignore and yet keep its dignity in the eyes of its people, it would provoke counter-insults. And there are three nations—you know their names as well as I—who await only such a diversion of interest. Don't you see?" She frowned.

"How stupid you both are!" she murmured, and then, stretching her glorious figure and yawning, "I wonder what sort of empress I would make. A good one, doubtless."

But Scott was aghast. "Kyra, do you mean you'd urge Callan into such a colossal blunder as that?"

"Urge him!" she echoed contemptuously. "I'd force him."

"Do you mean you'd do it?"

"I haven't said so," she smiled. She yawned again, and snapped her cigarette into the dark fireplace. "I'll stay here a day or two," she added pleasantly, rising. "Good night."

Scott faced Dr. Bach as she vanished into the old man's chamber. "Damn her!" he grated, his lips white. "If I believed she meant all of that——"

"You'd better believe it," said Bach.

"Empress, eh! Empress of what?"

"Of the world, perhaps. You can't set limits to madness or genius."

"We've got to stop her!"

"How? We can't keep her locked up here. In the first place, she'd doubtless develop strength enough in her wrists to break the locks on the doors, and if she didn't, all she'd need to do is shout for help from a window."

"We can have her adjudged insanel!" flared Scott. "We can have her locked up where she can't break out or call for help."

"Yes, we could. We could if we could get her committed by the Sanity Commission. And if we got her before them, what chance do you think we'd have?"

"All right, then," said Scott grimly, "we're going to have to find her weakness. Her adaptability can't be infinite. She's immune to drugs and immune to wounds, but she can't be above the fundamental laws of biology. What we have to do is to find the law we need."

"You find it, then," said Bach gloomily.

"But we've got to do something. At least we can warn people——" He broke off, realizing the utter absurdity of the idea.

"Warn people!" scoffed Bach. "Against what? We'd be the ones to go before the Sanity Commission then. Callan would ignore us with dignity, and Kyra would laugh her pretty little laugh of contempt, and that would be that."

Scott shrugged helplessly. "I'm staying here to-night," he said abruptly. "At least we can talk to her again to-morrow."

"If she's still here," remarked Bach ironically.

But she was. She came out as Scott was reading the morning papers alone in the library, and sat silently opposite him, garbed in black silk lounging pajamas against which her alabaster skin and incredible hair glowed in startling contrast. He watched skin and hair turn faintly golden as the morning sun lightened the chamber. Somehow it angered him that she should be so beautiful and at the same time deadly with an inhuman deadliness.

He spoke first. "You haven't committed any murders since our last meeting, I hope." He said it spitefully, viciously.

She was quite indifferent. "Why should I? It has not been necessary."

"You know, Kyra," he said evenly, "that you ought to be killed."

"But not by you, Dan. You love me."

He said nothing. The fact was too obvious to deny.

"Dan," she said softly, "if you only had my courage, there is no height we might not reach together. No height—if you had the courage to try. That is why I came back here, but——" She shrugged. "I go back to Washington tomorrow."

Later in the day Scott got Bach alone. "She's going tomorrow!" he said tensely. "Whatever we can do has to be done to-night."

The old man gestured helplessly. "What can we do? Can you think of any law that limits adaptability?"

"No, but——" He paused suddenly. "By Heaven!" he cried. "I can! I've got it!"

"What?"

"The law! A fundamental biological law that must be Kyra's weakness!"

"But what?"

"This! No organism can live in its own waste products! Its own waste is poison to any living thing!"

"But——"

"Listen. Carbon dioxide is a human waste product. Kyra can't adapt to an atmosphere of carbon dioxide!"

Bach stared. "By Heaven!" he cried. "But even if you're right, how——"

"Wait a minute. You can get a couple of cylinders of carbonic acid gas from Grand Mercy. Can you think of any way of getting the gas into her room?"

"Why—this is an old house. There's a hole from her room to the one I'm using, where the radiator connection goes through. It's not tight; we could get a rubber tube past the pipe."

"Good!"



"But the windows! She'll have the windows open."

"Never mind that," said Scott. "See that they're soaped so they'll close easily, that's all."

"But even if it works, what good—Dan! You don't mean to kill her!"

He shook his head. "I—couldn't," he whispered. "But once she's helpless, once she's overcome—if she is—you'll operate. That operation on the pineal you suggested before. And may Heaven forgive me!"

Scott suffered the tortures of the damned that evening. Kyra was, if possible, lovelier than ever, and for the first time she seemed to exert herself to be charming. Her conversation was literally brilliant; she sparkled, and over and over Scott found himself so fascinated that the thought of the treachery he planned was an excruciating pain. It seemed almost a blasphemy to attempt violence against one whose outward appearance was so pure, so innocent, so saintlike.

"But she isn't quite—human!" he told himself. "She's not an angel but a female demon, a—what were they called?—an incubus!"

Despite himself, when at last Kyra yawned luxuriously and dropped her dainty feet to the floor to depart, he pleaded for a few moments more.

"But it's early," he said, "and to-morrow you leave."

"I will return, Dan. This is not the end for us."

"I hope not," he muttered miserably, watching the door of her room as it clicked shut.

He gazed at Bach. The older man, after a moment's silence, whispered, "It is likely that she sleeps almost at once. That's also a matter of adaptability."

In tense silence they watched the thin line of light below the closed door. Scott started violently when, after a brief interval, her shadow crossed it and it disappeared with a faint click.

"Now, then," he said grimly. "Let's get it over."

He followed Bach into the adjacent room. There, cold and metallic, stood the gray cylinders of compressed gas. He

watched as the old man attached a length of tubing, ran it to the opening around the steam pipe, and began to pack the remaining space with wet cotton.

Scott turned to his own task. He moved quietly into the library. With utmost stealth he tried the door of Kyra's room; it was unlocked as he had known it would be, for the girl was supremely confident of her own invulnerability.

For a long moment he gazed across at the mass of radiant silver hair on her pillow, then, very cautiously, he placed a tiny candle on the chair by the door, so that it should be at about the level of the bed, lighted it with a snap of his cigarette lighter, withdrew the door key, and departed.

He locked the door on the outside, and set about stuffing the crack below it with cotton. It was far from air-tight, but that mattered little, he mused, since one had to allow for the escape of the replaced atmosphere.

He returned to Bach's room. "Give me a minute," he whispered. "Then turn it on."

He stepped to a window. Outside was a two-foot ledge of stone, and he crept to this precarious perch. He was visible from the street below, but not markedly noticeable, for he was directly above an areaway between Bach's house and its neighbor. He prayed fervently to escape attention.

He crept along the ledge. The two windows of Kyra's chamber were wide, but Bach had done his work. They slid downward without a creak, and he pressed close against the glass to peer in.

Across the room glowed the faint and steady flame of his little taper. Close beside him, within a short arm's length had no pane intervened, lay Kyra, quite visible in the dusk. She lay on her back, with one arm thrown above her unbelievable hair, and she had drawn only a single sheet over her. He could watch her breathing, quiet, calm, peaceful.

It seemed as if a long time passed. He fancied at last that he could hear the gentle hiss of gas from Bach's window, but he knew that that must be only fancy. In the chamber he watched there was no sign of anything unusual; the glorious

Kyra slept as she did everything else—easily, quietly, and confidently.

Then there was a sign. The little candle flame, burning steadily in the draughtless air, flickered suddenly. He watched it, certain now that its color was changing. Again it flickered, flared for a moment, then died. A red spark glowed on the wick for a bare instant, then that was gone.

The candle flame was smothered. That meant a concentration of eight or ten per cent of carbon dioxide in the room's atmosphere—far too high to support ordinary life. Yet Kyra was living. Except that her quiet breathing seemed to have deepened, she gave not even a sign of inconvenience. She had adapted to the decreased oxygen supply.

But there must be limits to her powers. He blinked into the darkness. Surely—surely her breathing was quickening. He was positive now; her breast rose and fell in convulsive gasps, and somewhere in his turbulent mind the scientist in him recorded the fact.

"Cheyne-Stokes breathing," he muttered. In a moment the violence of it would waken her.

It did. Suddenly the silver eyes started open. She brushed her hand across her mouth, then clutched at her throat. Aware instantly of danger, she thrust herself erect, and her bare legs flashed as she pushed herself from the bed. But she must have been dazed, for she turned first to the door.

He saw the unsteadiness in her movements. She twisted the doorknob, tugged frantically, then whirled toward the window. He could see her swaying as she staggered through the vitiated air, but she reached it. Her face was close to his, but he doubted if she saw him, for her eyes were wide and frightened, and her mouth and throat were straining violently for breath. She raised her hand to smash the pane; the blow landed, but weakly, and the window shook but did not shatter.

Again her arm rose, but that blow was never delivered. For a moment she stood poised, swaying slowly, then her mag-

nificent eyes misted and fluttered closed, she dropped to her knees, and at last collapsed limply on the floor.

Scott waited a long, torturing moment, then thrust up the window. The rush of lifeless air set him whirling dizzily on his dangerous perch, and he clutched the casement. Then a slow breeze moved between the buildings, and his head cleared.

He stepped gingerly into the chamber. It was stifling, but near the open window he could breathe. He kicked thrice against Bach's wall.

The hiss of gas ceased. He gathered Kyra's form in his arms, waited until he heard the key turn, then dashed across the room and into the library.

Bach stared as if fascinated at the pure features of the girl. "A goddess overcome," he said. "There is something sinful about our part in this."

"Be quick!" snapped Scott. "She's unconscious, not anæsthetized. God knows how quickly she'll readjust."

But she had not yet recovered when Scott laid her on the operating table in Bach's office, and drew the straps about her arms and body and slim bare legs. He looked down on her still, white face and bright hair, and he felt his heart contract with pain to see them darken ever so faintly and beautifully under the brilliant operating light, rich in actinic rays.

"You were right," he whispered to the unhearing girl. "Had I your courage there is nothing we might not have attained together."

Bach spoke brusquely. "Nasal?" he asked. "Or shall I trephine her?"

"Nasal."

"But I should like a chance to observe the pineal gland. This case is unique, and——"

"Nasal!" blazed Scott. "I won't have her scarred!"

Bach sighed and began. Scott, despite his long hospital experience, found himself quite unable to watch this operation: he passed the old man his instruments as needed, but kept his eyes averted from the girl's passive and lovely face.

“So!” said Bach at last. “It is done.” For the first time he himself had a moment’s leisure to survey Kyra’s features.

Bach started violently. Gone was the exquisite aluminum hair, replaced by the stringy, dark, and oily locks of the girl in the hospital! He pried open her eye, silver no longer, but pallid blue. Of all her loveliness, there remained—what? A trace, perhaps; a trace in the saintlike purity of her pale face, and in the molding of her features. But a flame had died; she was a goddess no longer, but a mortal—a human being. The superwoman had become no more than a suffering girl.

An ejaculation had almost burst from his lips when Scott’s voice stopped him.

“How beautiful she is!” he whispered.

Bach stared. He realized suddenly that Scott was not seeing her as she was, but as she once had been. To his eyes, colored by love, she was still Kyra the magnificent.



## THE WOMAN IN GRAY

By WALKER G. EVERETT

*A strange story of too many cocktails, and a weird  
nemesis in gray*

BILL was at a dinner party at the Carters when the subject first came up—a dinner to which he would never have gone if he could have thought of a single plausible excuse. Sarah Carter had a girl visiting her from the East; her school roommate or something, Bill thought vaguely. Bill was her dinner partner. They were talking about some people she didn't like.

"And they told it all over town," she said, "that I was the girl that was caught in the roadhouse, and that I had a red wig on so nobody would know me. Oh, how I wish I could get even with them—the most hateful people! Haven't you any suggestions?"

Bill looked pensive. Many Martinis had set up a pleasant buzzing in his brain, and everything in life seemed very easy.

"You might tell everybody they have a crazy locked-up daughter nobody ever sees, and that's why they don't like young girls."

"Too easy. They have *three* daughters, all crazy, only not locked up. That is, yet."

"In that case, I don't know," said Bill. "Why don't you just leave it to me?"

She looked at him. "What do you mean? Do you make little wax images and stick pins in them?"

Ah! there she had stolen a march on him—because that was just what he had been going to say. So he took a piece of celery, applied his mental spurs to himself and came out in an inspiration.

"Haven't I ever told you about the lady in gray?"

"No! Who is she?"

"Just a lady in gray."

"Well, where is she?"

"She's right here beside me now!"

"Where?"—startled.

"Oh," said Bill, confidentially, getting into his stride, "you can't see her. I'm the only one that can see her, but she's right here by me all the time. I've known her for years."

"Goodness gracious!" exclaimed his partner. "Aren't you scared? Doesn't she haunt you?"

"Oh, no. She *likes* me. That's why she stays here.—Isn't it, Lady?" He turned and nodded to the imaginary figure beside him. "Of course, she's very modest, and goes out of the room when I'm undressed, but all the rest of the time she's here. Even her face is gray."

"Well," said the girl, making a violent effort to keep the conversation going, "doesn't she do anything at all?"

"Certainly. She gets after people I don't like."

"How terrible! Well, sic her on the Quarrys in Hartford, then. Tell her to do her worst."

"I will, right now.—Did you hear that, Lady? Hartford, Connecticut; Quarry's the name."

"The third house from the corner on the left," said the girl. "I don't want any mistake."

"She never makes a mistake," said Bill; "and now, I think dinner's over and we can get down to the serious part of the evening."

And that was the last Bill thought about it for two weeks, until Sarah Carter plowed across the room at a cocktail party, and said, "What's this about some Lady in Gray?"

"I don't know," said Bill. "What do you mean?"

"I had a letter from Elsa. She said to tell you your Lady in Gray did the work a little too well, and that you'd better be careful."

Bill looked thoughtful. "What else did she say?"

"Something about a family named Quarry. That had an automobile accident, and all died—five, I think."



"What a coincidence!" said Bill. "And what a story!"

He lost no time in telling it around, of course. It was a good story, with enough of pleasant actual horror in it, but not too much, the Quarrys remaining mythical; so that it was worth a chill and a laugh any place.

Two weeks later he was at a dinner at Corinne Gorman's house—a fine, old-fashioned dinner with old-fashioned cocktails before, new-fashioned highballs after, and good old-fashioned screaming all the way through. Bill sat by Corinne; her short boyish hair was circled with a gold band, and she had on a red velvet dress. She turned to him and pointed to two empty seats.

"I could kill those people," said Corinne. "They're always hours late anyway, and finally they phone from Winnetka that they've broken down." She tamped out a nice long two and one-half inch cigarette butt until it was twisted and grub-like. "Why don't you sic your Lady in Gray on them for me?"

"I would, but I don't hate them. *I* don't want them to turn over like the Quarrys," Bill answered.

"How well do you know them?" asked Corinne.

"Not very well."

"Well, I can tell you some things. They've named their children 'Peggy Jean' and 'Michael Peter'; they have some name for their car; they go to the circus every year, and laugh and laugh and eat crackerjack and peanuts—that's the kind of people they are."

"Oh, well," said Bill, "I'd just as soon hate them myself. Sure, I'll send the Gray Lady after them—only they'd better look out."

That was the last they thought about it until dinner was nearly over, and Corinne was called to the telephone. She came back white.

"It was they," she whispered. "Terrible accident; a taxi hit them. Don't tell anybody for a minute."

"Were they badly hurt?" Bill asked.

"Yes."

He wondered suddenly if he ought to say anything about the absurd conversation regarding the Gray Lady. He decided not. Two coincidences were just a little too much. He knew there was nothing in it—hadn't he made her up out of a clear sky, just to amuse a guest of Sarah Carter? But, just the same, he felt it would be a little smart-alecky to allude to it. However, Corinne soon saved him the trouble.

"Never mention that Gray Woman again," she said. "Never, never, never, never."

"Oh, that didn't have anything at all to do with it," said Bill. "You know that."

"Well, I do. But it's a little too strange, that's all—as if Santa Claus should suddenly come down the chimney."

"Or you'd find a baby in a cabbage."

"I think that would be a great improvement," said Corinne. "But this isn't any time to be funny. I'll tell them now, and start the shrieks."

So Bill's Lady in Gray story became even more famous. "It's the funniest thing," people said; "somebody ought to send it in to the *New Yorker*. And you know, Bill is such a scream about it—he's afraid to hate anybody, he says, for fear she'll get after them—and he's going to rent her to the Government in the next war."

But Bill didn't think he was funny. He thought this, while not exactly playing with fire, was at least in bad taste. He didn't think he was in very good taste, anyway, for about this time he had a bad week; seven nights of drinking and running around town, cashing checks, all the time with a low wormish feeling of approaching reckoning under the talking, talking, talking of nightly parties to get over yesterday's hangover. And every day down at the office getting blearier, going to the water-cooler with the aspirin bottle in his hand and standing blindly in the window when the terrible eleven-thirty nausea swept over him in waves. But he didn't know what to do, because life didn't have much meaning, anyway, and he was having a better time than most people.

One warm night—it was the next Monday—he sat in his room, alone. The window was open, on blackness, soft and flecked with gold. The curtains were limp; his electric fan turned its flat face wearily from side to side, stirring up an ineffectual commotion in the air. A bell rang; he answered.

“Mr. Jacobson to see you.”

“Tell him to come up.”

What could he want, Jacobson from the office, whom he hardly knew, unctuous and self-righteous?

The door-bell buzzed.

“Come in. Good evening, good evening.”

Jacobson came in and sat down. “Warm, isn’t it?”

“Terribly.”

“You probably wonder why I am here.” Jacobson’s mouse-like eyes took in the empty highball glass; the bowl of melted ice.

“Well,” said Bill, “I do. Want a drink?”

“Thanks, no. Never touch it.”

“Oh. O. K.”

“What I wanted to see you about is this—Mr. Selfridge asked me to have a little talk with you—a friendly chat, merely, between friends,” he purred.

Bill looked at him. “What a smack!” he thought. “Yes?”

“It’s about your work—a word to the wise, as it were.”

“Oh. Have I been lying down on the job? Am I going to get the gate?”

“Oh, no, not that. But the first, perhaps, a trifle. A little too many parties—eh? And Mr. Selfridge thought that just a quiet tip from a friend—”

Bill was reminded of the smile of a snake. “I see,” he said. “Thank you.”

“Oh, not at all—not at all. It’s a pleasure.”

“I don’t doubt it.”

“Oh, I didn’t mean that! Well, I’ll be running along.” Jacobson got up. “Nice little place you’ve got here.”

“Yes,” said Bill. “I like it.” (How he hated the man! Why didn’t he go?)

"Well, I'd better go. I've got a new Chevy downstairs, and I have to go so slow it'll take me a while. I live in the suburbs, you know."

"Oh, you do? You have? How do you like it?"

"It's a fine little bus. You can see it from the window."

"I'll look out. Good-night. See you tomorrow."

"Good-night." And Jacobson was gone.

"That ass and his Chevy," thought Bill. "I wish——"

He went to the window, looked out. Presently Jacobson came out, climbed into a little yellow car with a black patch on the top, started out, and drove straight into the side of a big truck that had swung around the corner, with a horrible ripping and glassy noise.

"Good God!" said Bill.

He waited until he saw people, like sudden ants, flocking; then he came back, mixed himself a highball, and sat down on the couch. It had happened again. And just after being told all that about his job. Everything he did seemed to be wrong. And it was all his own fault. He gulped down his drink and made another, stronger. The lights seemed so bright, and made the room look so empty, with only those two black holes of windows, that he turned them out, and sat in the single ray that came from the bathroom.

When the lights were out, the room changed; the black windows became, gradually, a soft warm blue, like a promise of day to come. It was the room that was dark. But Bill just sat there, tapping his foot to some radio music that drifted in. Then he spoke out loud, "God! I hate myself!"

Then the door opened, and in came the Lady in Gray. Now, it wasn't anyone dressed up to frighten him, or his sister come to call. It was the Lady in Gray, and Bill knew it. He looked at her steadily as she came nearer, quietly, delicately. He felt his brains run down the inside of his skull like melting drug-store ice; the room started to rock, and then to swirl faster and faster. Finally she was halfway across the floor. He threw his glass at her. It smashed against the opposite wall.

Bill stood up and whirled around—the whole room was swinging in a grayish haze. He turned to the window.

They found him next morning, on the second-floor fire escape—one of those horizontal ones, with a weight on the end. He had landed almost in the middle, and was doing a ghastly little teeter-totter.



## THE PIPES OF PAN

By LESTER DEL REY

*If a god is a god only so long as he has worshippers, and Pan was forced to seek employment—*

BEYOND the woods on either side were kept fields and fertile farm land, but here the undergrowth ran down to the dirt road and hid the small plot of tilled ground, already overrun with weeds. Behind that, concealed by thicker scrub timber lay a rude log house. Only the trees around, that had sheltered it from the heavy winds, had kept it from crumbling long before.

Pan recognized the lazy retreat to nature that had replaced his strong worship of old. He moved carefully through the tangled growth that made way for him, his cloven hoofs clicking sharply on the stones. It was a thin and saddened god that approached the house and gazed in through a hole that served as a window.

Inside, Frank Emmet lay on a rude pallet on the floor, a bag of his possessions beside him. Across from him was a stone fireplace, and between the two, nothing. A weak hand moved listlessly, brushing aside the vermin that knew his sickness; perhaps they sensed that the man was dying, and their time was short. He gave up and reached for a broken crock that contained water, but the effort was too great.

"Pan!" The man's voice reached out, and the god stepped away from the window and through the warped doorway. He moved to the pallet and leaned over his follower. The man looked up.

"Pan!" Emmet's words were startled, but there was a reverent note in his labored voice, though another might have mistaken the god for a devil. The tangled locks of Pan's head were separated by two goat horns and the thin sharp

face ended in a ragged beard that seemed the worse for the weather. Then the neck led down to a bronzed torso that might have graced Hercules, only to end in the hips and legs of a goat, covered with shaggy hair. Horror and comedy mingled grotesquely, except for the eyes, which were deep and old, filled now with pity.

Pan nodded. "You've been calling me, Frank Emmet, and it's a poor god that wouldn't answer the appeal of his last worshiper. All the others of your kind have deserted me for newer gods, and only you are left, now."

It was true enough. Over the years, Pan had seen his followers fall off and dwindle until his great body grew lean and his lordly capering among the hills became a slow march toward extinction. Now even this man was dying. He lifted the tired head and held the crock of water to Emmet's mouth.

"Thanks!" The man mulled it over slowly. "So when I'm gone, there's no others. If I'd 'a' known, Pan, I might have raised up kids to honor your name, but I thought there were others. Am I——"

"Dying," the god answered. The blunt truth was easier than half-believed lies.

"Then take me outside, where the sun can shine on me."

Pan nodded and lifted him easily, bearing him out as gently as a mother might her child, but a spasm of pain shot over the man's face as Pan laid him down. The time was almost up, the god knew. From a pocket in his tattered loincloth he drew out a small syrinx, or pipe of seven reeds, and blew softly across it. A bird heard the low murmuring melody and improvised a harmony, while a cricket marked time in slow chirps.

Emmet's face relaxed slowly and one of his hands came out to lie on the hairy thigh. "Thanks, Pan. You've always been a good god to me, and I'm hoping you'll have good l——" The voice trailed away and disappeared into the melody of the syrinx. Pan rose slowly, drawing a last lingering note from it, dropped the arm over the still chest and



closed the eyes. Nearby was a rusty spade, and the earth was soft and moist.

Pan's great shoulders drooped as he wiped the last of the earth from his hands. Experimentally, he chirped at the cricket, but there was no response, and he knew that the law governing all gods still applied. When the last of their worshipers were gone, they either died or were forced to eke out their living in the world of men by some human activity. Now there would be hunger to satisfy, and in satisfying it, other needs of a life among men would present themselves.

Apollo was gone, long since, choosing in his pride to die, and the other gods had followed slowly, some choosing work, some death. But they had at least the advantage of human forms, while he knew himself for a monster his own mother had fled from. But then, the modern clothes were more concealing than the ancient ones.

Inside the house he found Emmet's other clothes, more or less presentable, and a hunting knife and soap. Men were partial to their own appearance, and horns were a stigma among them. Reluctantly, he brought the knife up against the base of one, cutting through it. Pain lanced through him at first, but enough of his god-head remained to make the stumps heal over almost instantly. Then the other one, followed by the long locks of his hair. He combed it out and hacked it into such form as he could.

As the beard came away he muttered ungodly phrases at the knife that took off skin with the hair. But even to his own eyes, the smooth-shaven face was less forbidding. The lips, as revealed, were firm and straight, and the chin was good, though a mark of different color showed where the beard had been.

He fingered his tail thoughtfully, touching it with the blade of the knife, then let it go; clothes could hide it, and Pan had no love for the barren spine that men regarded as a mark of superiority. The tail must stay. Shoes were another problem, but he solved it by carving wooden feet to

fit them, and making holes for his hoofs. By lacing them on firmly, he found half an hour's practice enough to teach him to walk. The underclothes, that scratched against the hair on his thighs and itched savagely, were another factor he had no love for, but time might improve that.

Hobbling about in the rough walk his strange legs necessitated, he came on a few pieces of silver in another broken crock and pocketed them. From the scraps of conversation he had heard, work was hard enough for men to find, and he might need this small sum before he found occupation. Already hunger was creeping over him, or he guessed it was hunger. At least the vacuum in his stomach was as abhorrent to him as to nature. Heretofore, he had supped lightly on milk and honey as the moon suited him, but this was a man-sized craving.

Well, if work he must, work he would. The others had come to it, such as still lived. Ishtar, or Aphrodite, was working somewhere in the East as a nursemaid, though her old taste for men still cost her jobs as fast as she gained them. Pan's father, Hermes, had been working as a Postal Telegraph boy the last he'd seen of him. Even Zeus, proudest of all, was doing an electrician's work somewhere, leaving only Ares still thriving in full god-head. What his own talents might be, time alone would tell, but the rippling muscles of his body must be put to some good usage.

Satisfied that there was no more he could do, he trotted out and plowed his way through the underbrush that failed to make way for him as it should have. He jingled the money in one pocket thoughtfully as he hit the road, then drew out the syrinx and began a reedy tune of defiance on it. Work there must be, and he'd find it.

It was less than half an hour later, but the god's feet were already aching in the tight boxes he had made for them, and his legs threatened to buckle under the effort it took to ape man's walk. He moved past the ugly square house and toward the barn where the farmer was unhitching his team.

"Handout or work?" The man's voice was anything but enthusiastic.

"I'm looking for work."

"Uh-huh. Well, you do look strong enough. Living near the city the way I do, I get a lot of fellows in here, figuring they can always work in the country. But their arms wouldn't make toothpicks for a jaybird. Know anything about farming?"

"Something." It was more in Demeter's line, but he knew something about everything that grew. "I'm not asking more than room and board and a little on the side."

The farmer's eyes were appraising. "You do look as if you'd seen fresh air, at that. And you're homely enough to be honest. Grab a-holt here, and we'll talk it over. I don't rightly need a man, but— Hey! Whoa, there!"

Pan cursed silently. His god-head was still clinging to him, and the horses sensed the urge to wildness that was so intimately a part of him. As his hands fell on the tugs, they reared and bucked, lunging against their collars. He caught at the lines to steady them, but they flattened back their ears and whinnied wildly. That was enough; Pan moved back and let the farmer quiet them.

"Afraid I can't use you." The words were slow and decisive. "I use a right smart amount of horseflesh here, and some people just don't have the knack with them; animals are funny that way—temperamental, you might call it. Easy, there, Nelly. Tried any other places?"

"All the other farms along the road; they're not hiring hands."

"Hm-m-m. Wouldn't be, of course. Bunch of city men. Think they can come out and live in the country and do a little farming on the side. If I had the money, I'd sell out and move somewhere where people knew what the earth was made for. You won't find any work around here." He slapped a horse on the withers and watched as it stretched out and rolled in the short grass. "Stay for lunch?"

"No." He wasn't hungry enough to need food yet, and

the delay might cost him a job elsewhere. "Any shepherding done around here?" As the god of the shepherds, it should come natural to him, and it was work that would be more pleasant than the tight closeness of the city.

"Not around here. Out West they have, but the Mexicans do all that. If you're a sheep man, though, that's why the horses didn't take to you; they hate the smell of sheep."

Again the limitations of a human life imposed themselves; instead of transporting himself to the shepherding country in a night, he'd have to walk there slowly, or ride. "How much would it cost to go out West?"

"Blamed if I know. Seventy dollars, maybe more."

So that was out. It would have to be the city, after all, where the fetid stench of close-packed humans tainted the air, and their meaningless yammering beat incessantly in one's ears. "I guess I'll have to go on into town," he said ruefully.

"Might be best. Nowadays, the country ain't what it used to be. Every fool that fails in town thinks he can fall back on the country, and every boy we have that amounts to anything goes to the city. Machinery's cutting down the number of men we need, and prices are shot haywire, even when a mortgage doesn't eat up all we make. You traveling on Shank's Mare?"

Pan nodded, and the other studied him again. "Uh-huh. Well, down the road a piece you'll see a brick house set away back from the road. Go in there and tell Hank Sherman I said you was a friend of mine. He's going into the city, and you might as well ride. Better hurry, though."

Pan made his thanks hastily, and left. If memory served him right, the friendliness of the farmer was the last he'd see. In the cities, even in the old days, men were too busy with their own importance and superiority to bother with others. But beggars made ill choosers.

The god clumped down the hot sidewalk, avoiding the press of the one o'clock rush, and surveyed the signs thought-

fully. Food should come first, he guessed, but the prices were discouraging. One read:

### BUSINESS MAN'S LUNCH

Blue plate special, 75c

He cut away from the large street into an older part of the city, and found that the prices dropped steadily. Finally a sign that suited his pocketbook came into view, and he turned in, picking the only vacant booth. Now he was thankful for the time he'd believed wasted in studying men's ways.

The menu meant little to him. He studied it carefully, and decided that the safest course was to order one of their combinations. Fish—no, that was food for Poseidon. But the lamb plate looked better, and the price fell within his means. "Lamb," he ordered.

The waitress shifted her eyes from the man behind the counter and wrote it down in the manner of all waitresses who expect no tip from the customer. "Coffeetearmilk?" she asked. "Rollerwhiterrye?"

"Eh? Oh, milk and roll." Pan had a word for her type in several languages, and was tempted to use it. As a god—but he wasn't a god now, and men no longer respected their gods, anyway. The cashier eyed his clothes thoughtfully until he moved in irritation, jingling the few coins in his pocket. Then she went back to her tickets, flipping gum from one tooth to another in an abstract manner.

The food, when it came, was a soggy-looking mess, to him, but that was true of all human food, and he supposed it was good enough. At least the plate was better filled than those he had seen through the windows of the more expensive places, and Pan's appetite was immense. He stuffed half a roll in his mouth and chewed on it quickly.

Not bad; in fact, he might grow to like this business of eating. His stomach quieted down and made itself at home, while another half bun followed the first. As he started to

pick up the cut of meat and swallow it, he caught the eyes of another diner, and rumbled unhappily. Should he know the sissies nipped off shavings with their knives and minced the food down? But he put the meat back on the plate and fell to as they did. It was best to ape them.

"Mind if I sit here, old-timer?" Pan looked up at a clean-cut young man. "The other booths are filled, you know."

Where the man sat was no business of his. The seat opposite him was vacant, and he motioned to it. "I didn't buy it, and your face isn't misshapen. Sit down."

The other grinned good-naturedly and inspected the menu. "Lamb any good?"

"Seems all right." He was no judge of food, naturally, but it wasn't burned, and he had seen no dirt on it. At least his stomach was satisfied. He cleaned the last of the gravy from his plate with a bun and transferred it to his mouth. "At least, it partly fills a man."

"O. K., lamb it is." This time the waitress showed more interest, and even brought water, a thing she'd neglected before. "Make it lamb, sugar. And a beer. How about you, stranger?"

"Eh?" Unless he was mistaken, that was an invitation, and a welcome one. It was long years since he'd had a chance to sample even the anemic brew of the modern world, but that had been none of his choosing.

"Have a beer?"

"Why not?" As an after-thought, he added an ungodlike thanks. The man was likable, he decided, though friendship among city men was not what he had expected. "You wouldn't know about work in this city, would you—uh?"

"Bob Bailey."

"Men call me Pan—or Faunus, sometimes."

"Pan Faunus, eh? Tried the want ads yet, or the employment agencies?" Bailey pulled a folded paper from his pocket and handed it over. "There might be a job in the back there. What kind of work?"

"Whatever I can do." He began at the bottom and skimmed

up the list from xylophone players to bartenders. "But nothing they have here. I'm supposed to be good at herding and playing the syrinx, but that's about all."

"Syrinx?" He inspected the instrument Pan held out, and amusement danced in his eyes. "Oh, that. Afraid it wouldn't do, Mr. Faunus. You don't happen to play the clarinet?"

"Never tried it."

"Then you don't. I'm looking for someone who does, right now, for my band—Bob Bailey's Barnstormers. Ever heard of it? Well, you're not the only one. Since we lost the best darndest clarinetist in the business, we've slipped plenty. Playing the third-rate spots now with the substitute we had to hire. Corny? *Wheoo!* He used to be on the Lady Lee Lullaby hour, and never got over it."

"Why not get a good one then?" The talk made little sense to the god, but the solution seemed obvious.

"Where? We get plenty of applicants—there's an ad in there now. But they'd either soothe the jitterbugs to sleep or rattle the strings off the dog house. Not a good clear tone in the bunch. All the good guys are signed up, or starting their own outfits."

They finished the beers and Pan counted out the amount marked on his ticket, estimating the length of time what was left would last; two days maybe, by going half hungry. He grunted. "Where are these employment agencies you mentioned?"

"One just down the street. It's a United States' employment center, and won't try to rob you. Good luck, Faunus."

"And to you. My thanks for the beer." Then they separated, and Pan headed down the street toward the mecca of the jobless. The ads had all called for training of some sort, but there must be other work in this town that needed no previous experience. Perhaps meeting two friendly men in one day was a good omen. He hoped so.

The girl at the desk, when he finally found the right division, looked as bored as had the waitress. Looking over the collection of people waiting, Pan felt she had more reason.

There were the coarsened red faces of professional sots, the lack-luster stares of men whose intelligence ranked slightly below the apes, and the dreary faces of people who struggle futilely for a life that brings nothing but death to break its monotony.

But there were others there who looked efficient and purposeful, and these were the ones Pan feared. They had at least some training, some experience, and their appearance was better than his. Surely the preference would go to them, and even as a minority, there were still many of that type there.

He studied the applicants and strained his ears to familiarize himself with the questions asked, holding down his impatience as best he could. But the machine ground slowly on, and his time finally came, just as the hot fetid air was becoming unbearable. "Your name," said the girl studying him impersonally.

"Pan—Pan Faunus."

Many strange names had passed over the desk to her, and her expression remained the same. "Middle name?"

"Uh . . . Sylvanus." The Romans had done him a good turn in doubling up on their names for him though he preferred the Greek.

"Address?"

For a moment, that stumped him. Then he gave the address of the restaurant, figuring that he might be able to arrange with the cashier to accept any mail that came there; he'd heard another man talking of that scheme while he waited, and it was as good as any.

"Age?"

"Seven thou— *Ulp!* Forty-five." Since a pack of lies were needed of him, they might as well be good ones. "Born June 5, 1894."

There were more questions, and at some of his answers the girl looked up sharply, but his wits had always been good, and he passed the test with some fair success. Then came what he had been dreading.

"Experience and type of work?"



"General work in the country," he decided. "No trade, and I can't give references, since my former foll—employer is dead."

"Social Security Number?"

"Eh?" He had been hearing that asked of the applicants, but it still meant nothing to him. "I don't have one."

"Sorry." She nodded. "Naturally you wouldn't, as a farm-hand. You'll have to have a card, though. Get that as soon as you find work."

Finally it was done, and he was sent into a cubbyhole where a man asked more questions and made marks on a piece of paper. Some of his answers were true; Hermes was his father, at least. Even that questioning came to a final end that left him sweating and cursing the underclothes that itched again in the hot room. The man leaned back and surveyed him.

"We haven't much of a job for you, Mr. Faunus. As a matter of fact, you'd probably do much better in the country where you came from. But"—he searched through his records—"this call just came in for an office boy, and they want someone of your age, for some reason. It pays only \$12.50 a week, but they didn't mention experience. Want to try it?"

Pan nodded emphatically and blessed the luck that had opened the job at precisely the right moment; he'd seen enough others turned away to know how small his chances were. He wasted no time in taking the little address slip and tracking the job to its lair.

Late afternoon found him less enthusiastic about the work. The air in the office was thick and stuffy, and there was an incessant thudding from the typewriters, jarring of the comptometer, and the general buzz that men think necessary to business. He leaned over on the table, taking some of the ache from his tired feet and cursing the endless piles of envelopes that needed sealing and stamping.

This was work for a fool or one of the machines men were so proud of. Pick up an envelope, draw one finger under the flap to lift it, roll the flap over the wet roller, and

close it with the other hand as it came off. Lift, roll, seal, lift, roll, seal. No wonder men shut themselves in tight houses, away from the good, clean winds and light of the sun; they were ashamed of what served for life among them, and with good reason.

But if it had to be done, he was willing to try. At first, the exultation of getting the work had served to keep his mind from it. Lying and deceit were not his specialty, and only a driving urge to adapt himself had made him use them to the extent that had been necessary. Now the men had put him on work that shriveled the mind, and did the muscles no good.

The old office boy came up to inspect his work, and Pan understood, looking at him, why the manager no longer wanted boys. The kid didn't know as yet that his job was being taken over, but thought he was in line for promotion, and was cocky enough for two. He seized the envelope rudely and ran it over the roller with a flourish.

"Awful dumb help they're sending out these days," he told the air. "Now I told you these had to go out tonight, and I find you loafing. Keep moving. You don't catch me laying down on the job. Ain't you never had work before?"

Pan looked at him, a side-long glance that choked off the kid's words, and fell to on the envelopes again. The air was getting the best of him. His head felt numb and thick, and his whole body was logy and dull. With what was supposed to be a chummy air, the boy sat his overgrown body on the desk and opened up his reservoir of personal anecdotes.

"Boy, you should 'a' been with me last night. Good-looking babes—Hm-m-m! Maybe they didn't like me, too. One little baby'd seen me work on the football team last year, and that didn't do me any harm. Best high school team in the State we had. You like football, guy?"

Pan's lips twitched. "No!" He redid an envelope that hadn't been properly wetted and reviewed the reasons for not committing mayhem on the boy. They were good reasons, but their value was depreciating with the passage of time in

the stinking office, and with each new visit from the boy. The direct bluntness he longed to use came out a little in his voice, and the kid bounced off the table, scowling.

"O. K., don't let it get you. Hey, whatda you think stamps are? Don't tear them that way. Some of you hicks are ignorant enough to eat them."

The god caught himself on the table again, throbbing pains running through his head. There was a conference around the manager's desk and cigar smoke was being added to the thickness of the room. He groped out behind him for a stool, and eased himself down on it. Something sharp cut into him, and brought him up with a wild bellow!

The boy giggled. "Dawgonne, I didn't think you'd fall for it. Oldest trick there is, and you still sat right down on that tack. Boy, you should 'a' seen yourself."

Pan wasn't seeing himself, but he was seeing red. Homeric Greek is probably the most expressive of all languages, and his command of it included a good deal Homer had forgotten to mention. With a sharp leap, his head came down and his body jerked forward. He missed the horns, now, but his hard skull on the boy's midsection served well enough.

Sudden confusion ran through the office, and the manager rose quickly from his chair and headed toward the scene. Pan's senses were returning and he knew it was time to leave. The back door opened on an alley and he didn't wait to ask for directions.

The outer air removed the last traces of his temper and sobered him down, but there was no regret in his mind. What was done was done, and there was no room in his philosophy for regrets. Of course, word of it would get back to the employment agency, and he'd have no more jobs from them, but he wanted no more of such jobs. Maybe Apollo had the right idea in dying.

He made a slow meal in the restaurant, noting that Bailey was not there. He'd liked that young man. With a rush of extravagance, he bought a beer for himself and hung around,

half waiting in hopes of Bailey's appearance and half planning for tomorrow; but nothing came of his plans.

Finally he got up and moved out into a little park across from the restaurant, just as darkness began to replace the twilight. Sleeping accommodations were the least of his worries. He found a large bush which concealed his body, and lay down on the ground under it. Sleep came quickly.

When he awoke, he found himself better for the sleep, though the same wasn't true of his clothes. He located his shoes and clamped his hoofs into them again, muttering dark thoughts about cobblers in general. If this kept up, he'd get bog spavins yet.

He made his way across to the restaurant again, where the waitress who was on at that hour regarded him with less approval than the other had. Out of the great pity of her heart, her actions said, she'd condescend to serve him, but she'd be the last to object to his disappearance. The sweet bun he got must have been well chosen for dryness.

"Hello there, old-timer." Bob Bailey's easy voice broke in on his gloom as the young man sat down opposite him. His eyes studied the god's clothes, and he nodded faintly to himself, but made no comment. "Have any luck yesterday?"

"Some, if you'd call it that." Pan related his fortunes shortly. Bailey grinned faintly.

"The trouble with you," Bailey said around a mouthful of eggs, "is that you're a man; employers don't want that. They want machines with self-starters and a high regard for so-called business ideals. Takes several years to inculcate a man with the proper reverence for all forms of knuckling under. You're supposed to lie down and take it, no matter how little you like it."

"Even empty fools who hold themselves better than gods?"

"That or worse; I know something about it myself. Stood all I could of a two-bit, white-collar job before I organized the Barnstormers."

Pan considered the prospect, and wondered how long it

would take him to starve. "Slavery isn't what I'm looking for. Find your musician?"

"Not a chance. When they've got rhythm, they don't bother learning to play; and most of them don't have it. Smoke?"

Pan took the cigarette doubtfully, and mimicked the other's actions. He'd seen men smoking for centuries now, but the urge to try it had never come to him. He coughed over the first puff, letting out a bleat that startled the couple in the next booth, then set about mastering this smoke-sucking. Once the harsh sting of the tobacco was gone, there was something oddly soothing about it, and his vigorous good health threw off any toxic effect it might have had.

Bob finished his breakfast, and picked up the checks. "On me, Faunus," he said. "The shows should open in a few minutes. Want to take one in?"

Pan shook his head vigorously. The close-packed throng of humans in a dark theater was not his idea of a soothing atmosphere. "I'm going over to the park again. Maybe in the outdoor air, I can find some idea."

"O. K., we'll make it a twosome, if it's all right with you. Time to kill is about the only thing I have now." As he paid the checks, Pan noticed that the man's pocketbook was anything but overflowing, and guessed that one of Bailey's difficulties was inability to pay for a first-class musician.

They found a bench in the shade and sat down together, each thinking of his own troubles and mulling over the other's. It was the best way in the world of feeling miserable. Above them in a tree, a bird settled down to a high, bubbling little song and a squirrel came over to them with the faint hopes of peanuts clearly in its mind.

Pan clucked at it, making clicking sounds that brought its beady little eyes up at him quickly. It was a fat well-fed squirrel that had domesticated man nicely for its purposes, and there was no fear about it. When even the animals had learned to live with man and like it, surely a god could do as well.

He tapped his thighs slowly and felt the syrx under his hand. The squirrel regarded him carefully as he drew it out, saw there was no bag of peanuts there, and started to withdraw. The first low notes blown from the reeds called it back, and it sat down on its tail, paws to its mouth in a rapt attitude that aped a critic listening to Bach.

Pan took courage, and the old bluff laughter fell from his lips. He lifted the syrx again and began a wild quick air on the spur of the moment, letting the music roam through the notes as it would. There was no set tempo, but his feet tapped lightly on the graveled path, and the bird fell in step.

Bailey looked up quickly, his fingers twitching at the irregular rhythm. There was a wildness to it, a primitiveness that barely escaped savagery, and groped out toward man's first awareness of the fierce wild joy of living. Now the notes formed into a regular cadence that could be followed, and Bailey whistled an impromptu harmony. The squirrel swayed lightly from side to side, twitching his tail.

"Jitterbug, isn't he?" Bob asked, as Pan paused. "I've never seen music hit an animal that way before. Where'd you learn the piece?"

"Learn it?" Pan shook his head. "Music isn't learned—it's something that comes from inside."

"You mean you made that up as you went along? *Whew!* But you can play a regular tune, can't you?"

"I never tried."

"Uh. Well, here's one." He pursed his lips and began whistling one of the swiny popular things his orchestra played at, but never hit. Pan listened to it carefully, only half sure he liked it, then put the syrx to his lips, beat his foot for time, and repeated it. But there were minor variations that somehow lifted it and set the rhythm bouncing along, reaching out to the squirrel and making its tail twitch frenziedly.

Bailey slapped him on the back, grinning. "Old-timer," he chuckled, "you've got the corniest instrument there is, but

you can roll it down the groove. I'd like to have the boys hear what a real hepeat can do to a piece."

Pan's face was blank, though the voice seemed approving. "Can't you speak English?"

"Sure. I'm telling you you're hot. Give the jitterbugs an earful of that and top-billing would follow after. Come on!"

Pan followed him, uncertain. "Where?"

"Over to the boys. If you can wrap your lips around a clarinet the way you do that thing, our worries are over. And I'm betting you can."

It was their last night's engagement at the Grotto a month later, and Pan stood up, roaring out the doggerel words in a deep rich basso that caught and lifted the song. Strictly speaking, his voice was a little too true for swing, but the boisterous paganism in it was like a beat note from a tuba, something that refused to permit feet to be still. Then it ended, and the usual clamor followed. His singing was a recent experiment, but it went over.

Bob shook hands with himself and grinned. "Great, Pan! You're hot tonight." Then he stepped to the microphone. "And now, for our last number, folks, I'd like to present a new tune for the first time ever played. It's called 'The Gods Got Rhythm,' and we think you'll like it. Words and music by Tin Pan Faunus, the Idol of the Jitterbugs. O. K., Tin Pan, take it!"

Pan cuddled the clarinet in his mouth and watched the crowd stampede out onto the floor. Bob winked at him, and he opened up, watching the dancers. This was like the rest, a wild ecstasy that refused to let them stay still. Primitive, vital, every nerve alive to the music. Even the nymphs of old had danced less savagely to his piping.

One of the boys passed a note over to his knee, and he glanced at it as he played. "Boys, we're set. Peterson just gave Bob the signal, and that means three months at the Crystal Palace. Good-by blues."

Pan opened up, letting the other instruments idle in the

background, and went in for a private jam session of his own. Out on the floor were his worshipers, every step an act of homage to him. Homage that paid dividends, and was as real in its way as the sacrifices of old; but that was a minor detail. Right now he was hot.

He lifted the instrument higher, drawing out the last wild ecstasy from it. Under his clothes, his tail twitched sharply, but the dancers couldn't see that, and wouldn't have cared if they had. Tin Pan Faunus, Idol of the Jitterbugs, was playing, and that was enough.



## AUNT CASSIE

By VIRGINIA SWAIN

It was odd, Edward Alden thought, as he struggled with his dress tie, how one little old lady, really very kind and well-intentioned, could so rub a whole family the wrong way that, after years of civilized communal life, it could let its nerves snap out into snarls like barb-wire released from a coil, and stage a scene that included loud vituperations, slamming of doors, hiccuping sobs from his daughter Eileen, and some exceedingly surprising language from his wife Mary, whose most intimate conversation could normally be repeated from the platform of the Darien Women's Club without causing a cheek to pale in the audience. All this, too, in front of a guest.

That the guest was only that nincompoop boy, Johnny Nesbit, whom Eileen thought she was in love with, made it worse, not better. Johnny's family hadn't much "background," and Edward and Mary had maintained a gently patronizing manner towards him, in the hope that, since they could not make Eileen give him up, they could frighten him into abandoning her. And then in front of him, Mary had called Aunt Cassie an "old idiot" and Eileen an "hysterical little fool," and he, Edward, had shouted at them both to keep quiet, and when they wouldn't, had rushed out of the room and slammed the door.

Only Aunt Cassie had behaved like a perfect lady. She had come teetering on her dainty feet into the room where Eileen was entertaining Johnny and said in the careful diction acquired in 1865 at the Oxford, Mississippi, Female Seminary, "Eileen, dear, your Great-uncle Horace is standing behind you there. He wants to tell you that in our family young ladies never sit up after ten o'clock with young gentlemen to whom they are not engaged."

Eileen had given her one blank look and then begun to

cry, and her parents, sitting in the back parlor, had come running through the open double doors. Mary, with a horrified look at Eileen, sobbing and crumpled on the sofa, had made a lot of unintelligible clucking sounds, shot a glance of pure hatred at Johnny Nesbit, and turned to Edward in a way that showed she meant him to deal with this, Aunt Cassie being his aunt, not hers.

Aunt Cassie caught her look and turned to Edward too. "You understand, Neddy, it's not my opinion—only Uncle Horace's. He's been trying for days to tell Eileen. But I met him in the linen closet yesterday and he said that since you were all too stubborn to see or hear him, I'd better tell her. He said, 'Tell the girl that's not the way to catch a husband.'" Her voice was sweet and low and she smiled with innocent affection upon them all.

It was then that Mary had called her an idiot and Eileen had stopped whimpering and begun bawling, and he had yelled at them all and gone out and slammed the door. He could recall how Johnny had sat, like an ugly gingerbread man in his brown suit, bolt upright at his end of the couch.

He was still annoyed with Eileen. It was embarrassing for the kid, of course; but she had been trained for twelve years in the proper way to deal with this crotchet of Aunt Cassie's, and she should have risen to the emergency last night. When Aunt Cassie came to live with them, Eileen was six, and they had explained everything to her. If Aunt Cassie spoke to someone who wasn't there, she was only dreaming, and you ignored it. If Aunt Cassie pointed out to you something that you couldn't see yourself, you said "Yes," politely, and remembered that old ladies live a great deal in the past and sometimes it makes them happier to pretend that persons who are gone are still around them.

Eileen had accepted it all like a good little sport, and together the three of them had weathered twelve years of Aunt Cassie. She was a decent old girl in every other way. She mended all their clothes and made spiced pickles and jellies, and kept herself attractive with nice old lace and rather

coquettish dresses of gray and lavender. She had her own money—not much, but enough to pay her way.

He had to admit, pushing his starched shirt flat and watching it buckle out again, that she paid a little more than her own way. If she weren't helping with the household bills, he could not have afforded to buy that second-hand roadster for Eileen's graduation present last June. Also, her doing the sewing gave Mary more time for her club work. But he acquitted himself of any mercenary motive for having Aunt Cassie in his house. He was fond of her, and she had done a good deal for him when he was young. But, by God, if she was going to upset Mary and Eileen— Suddenly his anger veered around. Eileen needed a good talking-to. She was a nice girl, but Mary had spoiled her rotten. She had no sense of responsibility and no gratitude. She'd been downright unpleasant about his taking her car tonight. He was going to take it regardless. With his own car in the shop and this insurance banquet twenty miles away, there was nothing else for him to do.

When he had given up trying to keep his shirt front flat and had brushed his hair for the fifth time over his bald spot, he walked across to the chest of drawers, pulled out a whiskey bottle from under a pile of shirts, and took a good long pull at it. Then he filled a flat silver flask and put it in his hip pocket, and put the bottle back in the drawer.

When he went down to the dining-room, the three women were standing there waiting for him. Mary, rather quiet and shamefaced, came across and hunched his dinner jacket up in the back over his collar, and patted him. Eileen looked sulky. She cast a young, disdainful eye over his gala costume and said, "You be careful of those brakes, Dad. That car shouldn't be driven that far until they're fixed." She snapped a blossom off the potted begonia on the stand beside her. "There's ice all the way to New Canaan, and they haven't sanded it yet."

"I'll be careful," he said, looking at the decanters on the sideboard. It was going to be a cold drive, and if he took a little shot from one of those, he'd have his flask intact for

the evening. No use paying sixty cents a drink at the hotel. He let Mary help him on with his coat and hand him his gloves. He even put his hat on, absently, in the house, in the presence of his three women.

He stiffened his knees and somehow that made his shirt front pop. But he walked masterfully to the sideboard and poured himself a drink. Mary usually nagged about his drinking when he had to drive, but tonight she evidently wasn't going to say anything. And Eileen was engrossed in snapping off more begonia flowers. Sulky and frowning as she was, he saw from the tail of his eye what a pretty girl she had grown into. His heart warmed towards Mary too because she hadn't said a word about the whiskey.

Aunt Cassie said, "My goodness, there's Betsy."

There was silence for a moment, except for the noise Edward made in swallowing his whiskey suddenly.

"It must seem funny to you, Neddy," said Aunt Cassie, "to hear your mother called Betsy. I know that dam-yank preacher she married always called her Elizabeth. But down home she was Betsy." She turned slightly away from him towards the doorway. "Yes, Betsy. What is it?"

Again there was silence, but in the silence the three of them, Mary and Eileen and Edward, turned, against their wills, to face the door. After twelve years, you'd think they'd stop doing that.

Aunt Cassie was nodding her head, then shaking it. "Yes, Betsy, I know. He's drinking too much spirits. It's bad for his blood pressure. And he ought to let the stuff alone when he's going to drive a car." She paused. "Yes, I know, you died before automobiles became common. Nowadays the police will arrest you if they catch you driving one when you've been drinking.—Betsy, have you seen much of mother lately?"

Edward set the glass down on the edge of the chest, so that it tottered and fell off, spilling a few drops of whiskey on Mary's prized oriental rug.

He glanced at her and saw that she looked angry, but

whether with him or with Aunt Cassie he could not judge. He seized his gloves again and went out in a hurry. He had to check his pace on the front steps because they were slippery. He flung himself into the roadster, noting the litter of cigarette stubs on the floor. "That Nesbit puppy's been driving it," he thought. "I'm going to tell Eileen." But then his temper softened. He remembered how graceful she had looked in her red house-gown, and how white her fingers were, snapping the heads off the begonias. "Youth," he thought in a surge of mellowness, "youth!" As he stepped on the accelerator at the end of the main street, he smiled to himself. "I understand Eileen better than Mary does. And she understands me. We're pals, all right." If Aunt Cassie kept on annoying Eileen, she'd just have to go and live with Cousin Robert, though she wouldn't like that, for Robert's house was ramshackle and he had a lot of young children. Still, he thought, youth must be served, and old age must learn to take a back seat.

The road wasn't so terribly slick. Once out of town he stepped harder on the gas and said to himself that there was no danger so long as he didn't have to use his brakes suddenly—and he wouldn't have to, for there was nobody else on the road. He had just time to make his appointment if he got up speed. He began to hum to himself.

He took a back road north of Darien which cut four miles off the trip. People avoided it because it was narrow and at one point crawled for some distance along the edge of a ravine. That made him laugh. He knew that road like a book, and he felt good and warm inside, and competent.

His headlights cut a brave swath in front of him. This going was wonderful—smooth as glass, where the ice covered the ruts he had met there the last time. He was going to get to his banquet on time.

The blinding lights that cut across him from the curve ahead could have come from no automobile in this world. Of that he was convinced as the roadster jerked, waltzed, skittered, and dropped into space. As it turned over once and then

again, he was framing a bill to be presented to the legislature at Hartford, to make the use of million-candle-power headlights on the highway a felony.

When, later, he pulled himself out from under Eileen's wrecked flivver, his first thought was to notify the state police that somewhere on the south Connecticut roads an engine of death was rampant, with lights out of solar space harnessed to its fenders. There ought to be a law against it. The guy hadn't even stopped.

He made his way back home. He was dry enough. At least he felt dry—perhaps because his clothes were frozen. Even his shirt had stopped popping and stood out like a balloon in front of him. During the last mile, when he was really beginning to feel somewhat light and giddy, he steadied himself by thinking, "Eileen will have a fit, seeing me come in looking like this."

But he was so glad when he turned into his street and saw his home that he forgot the ruined roadster in the gorge, the criminal carelessness of the fellow who had pinned those suns on his fender, even the lurking suspicion that if he had not taken those two big slugs of whiskey on an empty stomach, he could have checked the crazy dancing of the flivver.

He climbed the steps and went into the house. The hall and front parlor were dark. The women used the back parlor after dinner, Mary busy at her needlepoint, Eileen poking tunes out of the piano, Aunt Cassie darning socks or reading beside the gas-fire.

He tried to shrug off his outer coat, but it would not leave him, and when he reached up to take his hat off, he remembered that his hat was icebound somewhere in a hollow between Darien and New Canaan. He struck numb, stiff hands against his shirt front and saw that they made no impression on it. All right then, he'd go into the back parlor as is. Wait till they heard what had happened to him. He'd have to buy Eileen another car—only fair, when he had ruined hers.

As he went through the front parlor he thought of last night and Johnny Nesbit, and wondered why he had let it

perturb him. There was nothing to worry about. Mary loved him, Eileen loved him, two delightful women, who made up his life.

From behind the double doors he heard conversation. "It was mean of him to take my car tonight. He knows Johnny and I always go to the movies on Saturday night."

Then Mary said, rather feebly, he thought, "Well, he did have to go to that dinner."

Edward took a step forward and stood in the wide doorway. The women were at the other end of the long room. For a moment he thought that Eileen had seen him, but she couldn't have, because she dropped her eyes calmly again to her hands lying listless in her lap. There was only one lamp burning in the room, beside Mary's chair.

He felt deflated because nobody had looked up and cried out with horror at his battered appearance. He crept into the shadowy end of the room and sat down close to the dull glow of the grate. But still they did not notice him. Mary spoke again. "You mustn't blame me, darling, for what happened last night. It's your father—he *will* have her here, and I haven't a word to say about it."

His daughter jumped up from her chair and began to pace the rug. "Yes, I know. It's only what *he* wants that counts in this house." She was coming towards him now and Edward put out a hand to her in supplication. She didn't see him. She was absorbed in her own discontent. She turned back to face her mother and said, "Why couldn't you have picked me a better father, mother? You must have been darned attractive when you were a girl."

He turned in an agony to look at Mary. But she wasn't looking shocked or angry, only puzzled and a little sad. "Well, Eileen, it may surprise you, but he was considered very attractive too, when he was young. And—" with a little smile "—I couldn't foresee Aunt Cassie, you know."

He could bear no more of this. He sprang from his chair and strode towards them into the circle of the lamp light.

"Mary," he cried, "Mary! I'm here. I had a wreck, but I wasn't killed. I got home all right!"

Nothing happened. Eileen went on pacing up and down, and his wife did not raise her eyes from her embroidery.

There was a light tapping of feet on the hardwood floor outside the parlor door. Oh God, he thought, how like her to come barging in at a moment like this! He had to talk to Mary. "Aunt Cassie," he called out loudly, "Aunt Cassie, would you mind——"

She was just inside the door now and she looked up at him and smiled. "Well, Neddy," she said in her bright social manner, "how is it over there? When you see Uncle Horace, tell him——"



PART II  
FRESH VARIANTS



## NOTE ON PART II

IT SEEMS to be definitely established, for no good reason that is presently or even remotely obvious, that all comparisons are invidious. Why invidious, I do not know, when they might as easily be called insulting, malicious, sneaky, ill-natured or any one of a dozen other things more frequently represented in the English language than "invidious" and perhaps it is the very use of the uncommon word that has established the libel on comparisons.

No such somber facts need be raised about these authors of strikingly original manners in "Strange Ideas," and people who have created original developments for mildly orthodox situations in "Fresh Variations." The invention is as respectable in one case as the other. In the first story, "A God In A Garden," we have the very old situation of a power which grants wishes, but neither the Grimms nor Galland wrote of wishes as *a priori* facts. In the fairy and genii stories one wished and the thing was done; in Mr. Sturgeon's story one wishes and sometimes does not wish, and the thing always *has been* done. Wells, the Grimms, and Jacobs (in "The Monkey's Paw") have touched this idea of throwing conceits into the terms of eternity, the past, present and future, but this story seems to explore the notion somewhat more thoroughly.

There is something similar in "The Man Who Knew All the Answers." There are plenty of stories of people with prevision, but this is beautifully built to its structural catastrophe on the detail that its character knew a wrong correct answer.

The good-humor and unexcused melodrama of Mindret Lord's "Problem" is its *raison d'etre* as far as this volume is concerned. Mr. Lord is a producer of motion picture revues and a popular composer. Mrs. Lord is the daughter of one of Iowa's early authors, Hamlin Garland.

## II

The other "variants" derive from the most ordinary notions of imaginative fiction but do not use them enough to be tiresome. It takes as much skill to write a new story from an old notion—as Shakespeare's works prove—as it does to start from scratch. Mr. O'Brien has given a vivacious picture of a world in which every one has to tell the truth. Mark Twain went into this matter in an essay one time without dramatizing the horrible possibilities.

"Alas, All Thinking," goes to the last ends of human evolution and discusses the eventual thought monster. The reader may be comforted by the recent report of one scientist or another that the human race entered another era of intellectual recession about ten years ago, after its dangerous advances in intellectual power during the early part of the century.

"The Comedy of Eras" uses the old-time machine trick but it is rather fetching, after all the words, to find that Shakespeare wrote Bacon's works by Shakespeare as inspired by an ordinary Twentieth Century bum who stole from Shakespeare. Glancing at "Titus Andronicus" and "Pericles" and some other details among the magnificent writings of the Bard, it is immediately evident that this is the most credible explanation of Shakespeare's works that has yet been advanced.

Mr. Kuttner, incidentally, does a Shakespeare-Bacon trick of his own. He is represented in the third section of this book by a story which is as pleasantly gruesome as one could wish; but when he is doing japes like this "Comedy" he becomes "Kelvin Kent" in the magazines.

"The Fourth Dimensional Demonstrator" is a rowdy little affair which never uses the possible fourth dimension as an intrinsic element of the plot. It imagines that the dies or molds of creation might be set to include personalities and suggests some consequences. Several of these stories have been written but this one seems to be the gustiest of the lot. Perhaps an improvement could be made by devising a story in which Roosevelts, Hitlers, Bernard Shaws and so on could be multi-

plied in the same moment of history—Chaplin has done something a little like this in “The Great Dictator”—but the mere notion is sufficiently terrible for the average person, without any details.

These are not offered as “literary” stories, though there is nothing disgraceful about the forthright prose of even the humblest of them. They are simply the products of some of the most ingenious of our Free Thinkers.

The most casual critic will notice that these are nearly all dramatizations of the paradox. In some of the plodding stories that discuss time and the extra dimensions, the paradox is covered by laborious and offensively arbitrary definitions and explanations. This crop is not marred by any appeals to reason. If you dig up a god in your garden who assures you that your worst lies are not only true but always have been—don't bother Einstein, see Mr. Sturgeon or me.



## A GOD IN A GARDEN

*He was most excessively ugly, and had queer ideas as to how to deal with truth—but he had power!*

By THEODORE STURGEON

KENNETH COURTNEY, anyone could see, was plenty sore. No man works so hard and viciously digging his own lily pond on his own time unless he has a man-size gripe against someone. In Kenneth's case it was a wife who allowed herself to be annoyed by trifles. The fact that in her arguments she presented a good case made Kenneth all the angrier because it made him sore at himself too. Suppose he *had* come in at four a.m.? And suppose he *had* told Marjorie that he was working late? A lie like that was nothing—much. The only trouble with lies was that people—especially wives and bosses—can make such a damn fool out of a man when they catch him in one. All right; so it was a poker game, and he had lost a few bucks.

Marjorie, as usual, got all the details out of him; but she didn't stop there. She cited instance after instance when he had done the same thing. Her kick, it developed, was not so much the poker, but the fact that he had lied to her about it. Well, and why should a man brag to his wife about losing twenty-four bucks? If only she'd take his simple little explanations without all those fireworks, life would be more worth living. At least he wouldn't have to retreat into the garden and take out his fury on a pick and shovel.

He had reached about this stage in his mental monologue when his shovel rang dully against old Rakna.

Of course, he didn't know then that it was Rakna. He might well have stopped digging altogether if he had known. And then again, he might not. It didn't work out so badly in the end.

At any rate, all he knew was that there was an unyielding mass, and a large one, in his way, and he couldn't finish digging the little lily pool until he moved it. That *would* have to happen now, he thought bitterly. Everything's going wrong today.

He threw down his shovel and stamped up the garden path toward the house. Sore as he was, he still found room in his sulking mind to admire that garden. It began at the house, almost as if it were part of it, and led downward into a little gully. Kenneth had, by ranking trees and shrubs carefully, built a small lot up to look like something twenty times as big.

The sunken rockery, well out of sight, was the hidden theme of the whole; you stumbled on it, that rock garden; and yet because of the subtle placing of the trees and plants around it, you knew that it had been there all the time. There was a miniature bridge, and a huge pottery teapot—all the fixings. And once you were in the rock garden, you and your eye were led to the shrinelike niche by the lily pool.

For months Kenneth had been searching for an idol ugly enough for that niche; he wanted it there so that it would frighten people. Something nice and hideous, to be a perfect and jarring foil for the quiet and beautiful effect of all that surrounded it. Kenneth determined to leave that niche empty until he found a stone face ugly enough to turn an average stomach—not wrench it, exactly; Kenneth was not altogether fiendish in his humorous moments!—but plumb ugly.

He went into the back kitchen—it served as a tool shed as well—and took down a crowbar. His wife came to the door when she heard him.

“How's it going?” she asked in the dutifully interested tone of a wife whose most recent words to her husband were violent ones.

“Swell,” he said, his casualness equally forced.

“See?” she cried in feminine triumph. “You even lie to me about a little thing like that. If everything was swell down there, you wouldn't need a crowbar to dig with. This



ground isn't rocky. Why can't you tell the truth just *once*?" Then she fled into her own territory, to be alone with her indignation.

Kenneth shrugged. Fight all morning with your wife, and you're up against things like that. He hesitated. She was probably crying, after that blowup. That's a woman for you. Fire and water all at once. Oh, well. He shrugged again and started back with his crowbar. The tears would wait, he reflected callously. There were more where they came from.

His conscience bothered him a little, though. Maybe she had something there. It did seem as if he couldn't tell her—or anyone—the absolute truth. It was just a conversational habit, that lying; but it did make trouble. But what could a man do? Maybe he'd be a little more careful in future—but, damn it, why did she have to be so picky?

As usual, he took it out in work, picking and prying and heaving. Well, this lump of brownstone or whatever it was, was something worth while working on. Not like digging in the soft earth around it. He began to forget about Marge and her annoyances in the task on hand.

Slipping the bar well under the brown mass, he heaved strongly and lifted it a few inches at the corner. Kicking a rock under it, he stepped back for a look at the thing, and was confronted by quite the most hideous imaginable face. He stared, shook his head, stared again.

"Well, I'll be . . . here's my idol, right where I need it. Now where the devil did that thing come from?" he asked no one in particular.

Yes, it was an idol, that brown mass in the half-finished lily pool. And what a face! Hideous—and yet, was it? There was a certain tongue-in-cheek quality about it, a grim and likable humor. The planes of that face were craggy and aristocratic, and there was that about the curve of the nostril and the heavily lidded eyes that told Kenneth that he was looking at a realistic conception of a superiority complex. And yet—again; was it? Those heavy eyelids—each, it seemed, had been closed in the middle of a sly wink at some huge and subtle

joke. And the deep lines around the mouth were the lines of authority, but also the lines of laughter. It was the face of a very old little boy caught stealing jam, and it was also the face of a being who might have the power to stop the sun.

"Or a clock," thought Kenneth. He shook himself from his apathy—the thing nearly hypnotized by its ugliness—and walked around it, knocking off clods of dirt with his hands.

The face was lying on its side. Yes, he discovered, it was more than a face. A body, about half the size of the head, was curled up behind it. Kenneth shuddered. The body looked like unborn fetus he had seen at the Fair, floating in alcohol. The limbs were shriveled, and the trunk was big-bellied with an atrophied chest, jammed up against the back of that enormous head. The whole thing was, maybe, five feet high and three wide, and weighed a good ton.

Kenneth went back to the house shrugging off an emotional hangover, and called up Joe Mancinelli. Joe had a two-ton hoist at his "Auto Fixery" that would do the trick.

"Joe," he said when he got his connection, "I want you to come right over with your truck and the two-ton lift. And listen. What I've got to lift will knock your eye out. Don't let it scare you."

"Hokay, Kan," said Mancinelli. "I feex. I no scare. You know me, boy!"

Kenneth had his doubts.

"Who are you calling, dear?" Marjorie called.

"Joe Mancinelli. I've got to have help. I ran across a . . . a big rock in the lily pool." There it was again. Now, why did he have to say that?

Marjorie came across the room and put her hands on his shoulders. "That's so much better, sweetheart. It isn't terribly hard to tell the truth, now, is it?"

Her eyes were a little red, and she looked very sweet. He kissed her. "I . . . I'll try, kiddo. You're right, I guess." He turned and went out to the shed, muttering to himself.

"Can you beat that? Tell her a lie and she raises hell. Tell her another and everything's all right. You can't win."

He rigged a set of shear poles so that the chain hoist would have some kind of a purchase, and dragged them down to the rock garden. The sight of the half-buried idol gave him another fascinated shock. He looked at it more closely. It seemed old as time itself and carved—was it carved? Its execution made him think that if nature had carved rock into idols, then this was a natural work. And yet, it was so flawless! What human artist could do such macabre sculpture? Kenneth had seen the *striges* on the carved galleries on Notre Dame cathedral in Paris, and had thought that they were tops in *outré* art. But this— He shrugged and went back to the shed for a wire strap to slip under the thing, meeting Joe halfway to the house. Joe was staggering under the coils of chain over his shoulders.

“Hi, keed! Ware you got heem, thees beeg theeng?”

“Down at the bottom of the garden, Joe. What made you come over here so fast?”

“I like to see thees theeng make scare Joe Mancinelli,” wheezed Joe.

“Well, look it over for yourself. It’s half buried. I’ve got shear poles rigged. Be with you in a jiffy.”

As he reached the shed, Kenneth smiled at the roar of polylingual profanity which issued from the rock garden. Joe was evidently impressed. Coming to the door with the wire strap in his hand, Kenneth called: “Scared, Joe?”

The answer came back hollowly: “I no scare. I sorry I come. But I no scare!”

Kenneth laughed and started down. He had taken about five steps when he heard a sound like a giant champagne cork, and Joe Mancinelli came hurtling up the path as if he were being chased by one of the devil’s altar boys.

“Hey! Whoa there!” Kenneth called, laughing. “What happened? Hey!”

He surged forward and tackled the Italian low. They slid to a stop in a cloud of dust. “Easy, now, boy. Easy.”

“The ’oist is down dere. You do you work, calla me, I come back, get heem. I don’t *never* touch that theeng.”

"All right, all right. But what happened?"

"You don' tell nobody?"

"No, Joe. Course not."

"So I see thees face. Thees not so gooda face. Maybe I scare, maybe no. I tell this face, 'I no lika you. So. I speet on you. So. *Ptui.*'" Joe turned white at the recollection, and swallowed hard. "Thees theeng shake all over like wan piece jally, is make the mouth like dees"—Joe pursed his lips—"an' . . . *ptow!* Is speet on me. So. Now, I go."

"You dreamed it," Kenneth said unconvincingly.

"So, I dream. But I tella you, boy, I go now to church. I take wan bat' in holy water. I light wan dozen candles. An' I bring you tomorra plenty dynamite for feex that theeng."

Kenneth laughed. "Forget it, Joe," he said. "I'll take care of old funnyface down there. Without dynamite."

Joe snorted and went back to his truck, starting it with a violence that set its gears' teeth on edge. Kenneth grinned and picked up the wire strap. "I no scare," he said, and laughed again.

He was not, evidently, the only one who was amused by the episode. Old funnyface, as Ken had called the idol, really seemed to have deepened the humorous lines around his tight-lipped, aristocratic mouth. A trick of the light, of course. "You know," said Kenneth conversationally, "if you *were* alive you'd be a rather likable dog."

He burrowed under the idol and pushed the end of the strap as far under as he could reach. He was flat on his stomach, reaching out and down, with his shoulder against the mass of the thing, when he felt it settle slightly. He pulled his arm out and rolled clear, to see old funnyface settling steadily back into the hole.

"You old devil!" he said. "You almost had me that time. Bet you did that on purpose."

The idol's face seemed to have taken on a definite smirk.

"—is speet on me," Joe had said. Well, he was no better than Joe. He picked up a clod of earth, held it poised, and expectorated explosively, following up by ramming the clod

into the sardonic lips of the idol. There was a small but powerful explosion and Kenneth found himself flat on his back six feet away.

Now Kenneth Courtney was no story-book hero. He was just an ordinary driver for an ordinary trucking firm. But in his unbrilliant but satisfying past, he had found that the best thing to do when he had this cold, crawling feeling at the pit of his stomach was to smile at his antagonist. Nine times out of ten, said antagonist was floored by it. So he reared up on his elbow and smiled engagingly at the idol.

The smile faded quickly; one glance at the idol's mouth took care of that. The lower lip was quivering, like an angry child's, or like a railroad bull about to take a poke at a tramp. Suddenly it snapped shut. The jaws bulged and contracted, and little bits of earth fell into the hole around its cheeks.

More than a little shaken, Kenneth got his feet under him and walked over to the idol. "I'd bury you where you are, tough guy, but you're in my lily pool. Come up out of there!"

He went furiously to work, rigging the hoist over the idol. In a remarkably short time he had the ends of the strap hooked into the chain-fall, and was heaving merrily. To his surprise, he found that the idol came up easily—there could not have been more than three or four hundred pounds' load on the hoist. He stopped hauling and stood off a bit.

"Why, you son of a gun!" he exclaimed. "So you've decided to co-operate, hey?"

It was true. The idol's emaciated legs and arms straddled the pit, and were lifting the massive head steadily. Even as he watched, the chain-fall began to slacken as the weight came off it. By this time Kenneth was almost beyond surprise at anything.

"O. K., buddy," he cried, and heaved away. Higher and higher rose the idol, until the shear poles creaked and their bases began to sink deeper into the soft earth. Finally it swung clear. Gauging the distance nicely, Kenneth toppled the shear poles and the idol swung face inward into the niche, landing with a rubbery thump. Kenneth grinned.

"Stay that way, old boy," he told the idol. "You're no uglier behind than you are face-outward." He threw the strap over his shoulder, lifted the shear poles at the lashing and dragged them back up to the shed.

When he came back with a spouting garden hose, the idol was facing outward.

"On second thought," said Kenneth conversationally, as he busily sluiced down that hideous, humorous face, "I don't blame you. You are a little more presentable stern-foremost; but then you're a damsite more likable this way." Kenneth was scared stiff, but he wouldn't show it, not even to an old graven image.

"That's much better," said the idol, blinking the mud out of its eyes. Kenneth sat down weakly on the nozzle of the hose. This was the payoff.

"Don't sit there looking so stupid!" said the idol irritably. "Besides, you'll catch cold, holding down that hose."

Kenneth's breath came out in a rush. "This is too much," he gasped. He was more than a little hysterical. "I . . . I . . . in just a minute I'll wake up and smell coffee and bacon. I don't believe there *is* a crusty old idol, or that it talked, or that——"

"Get off that hose," said the idol, and added meaningly. "And dry up."

Kenneth rose and absently began wringing his clothes. "What sort of a critter are you?"

"I'm a god," said the idol. "Name's Rakna. What's yours?"

"K-Kenneth Courtney."

"Stop stammering, man! I'm not going to hurt you. What's the matter; didn't you ever see a god before?"

"No," said Kenneth, a little relieved. "You don't seem like . . . I mean—" Suddenly something about the god, something in his incredibly deep eyes, made it very easy to talk. "I thought gods lived up in the clouds, sort of. And anything I ever read about it said that gods come to earth in fire, or lightning, or in the shape of some kind of animal, or——"

"Nuts," said the god.

Kenneth was startled. "Well, gods don't talk like that . . . uh . . . do they?"

"You heard me, didn't you?" asked Rakna. "Think I'm a liar?" The piercing gaze made Kenneth wince. "Like you? No, you dope; I was created by common people, who thought common thoughts and spoke in a common way. Not in this language, of course, or in this time. But people are pretty much the same, by and large. Think the same way, y'know."

"Well, what people were you the god of?"

"Oh, you wouldn't know if I told you. They disappeared quite a while back. Used to be one of them buried near me. Had his thigh bone poking into my . . . well, never mind. Anyhow, he faded out. There's not a trace of those people left anywhere. This earth has been here quite a while, you know. They come and they go."

"How come you can speak English, then?"

"Because I know everything you know, which isn't much, by the way, and considerable besides. Every time a thought passes in that gab factory of yours I know what it is. You drive a truck. Your wife's named Marjorie. She's very capable; knows all about budgets and calories and such. She thinks you're a liar."

"If you're a god," Kenneth said quickly, to change the subject, "why couldn't you dig yourself out?"

"Listen, lamebrain, who said I wanted to dig myself out? Can't a god grab forty winks once in a while?"

"Forty winks? How long were you asleep?"

"I don't know. Couple of hundred million years, maybe. I'll tell you when I get a chance to look at the stars."

"But there wasn't any earth that long ago!"

Rakna leered at him. "Vas you dere?"

Kenneth sat down again, this time on dry ground. Standing was too much of a strain.

"Hm-m-m . . . I see steam's back again. Electricity? Yes. You're getting along, you people. Atomic power? Oh, well, it won't be long now. Levitation? Trans——"

Kenneth had the uncomfortable feeling that he was being read like a newspaper—a back number at that. He was a little annoyed, and besides, those waves of beneficence still flowed from Rakna's eyes. Kenneth's fear departed completely, and he rose to his feet and said:

"Listen. All this is a little too strong for me. As far as I'm concerned, your somebody's half-ton Charlie McCarthy. Or maybe you're wired for sound."

Rakna chuckled deep in his jowls. "Aha!" he rumbled. "A skeptic, no less! Know what happens to little mortals who get cocky? They suffer for it. In lots of ways. For instance, I can increase the density of your bones so that your own skeleton will crush you to death. Like *this!*"

The deep eyes turned on Kenneth, and he fell to the ground, crushed there by an insupportable and increasing weight.

"Or I can put your eyes on your fingertips so that you have to see with your hands."

Kenneth found himself on his feet again. He was staring at the ground, although his head was up. He saw the world reel about him as he clapped his seeing hands to his face. He cried out in an ecstasy of terror.

"Or," continued the god conversationally, "I can finish your lily pool for you and drown you in it."

Kenneth was hurled forward into shallow water, where no water had been before. He bumped his head stunningly on a solid concrete surface and lay there, immersed and strangling. Suddenly he found himself before the idol again. His clothes were dry; his eyes were in place; everything was quite, quite normal. Except that damned idol, and the brand-new lily pool. It had all taken possibly eight seconds.

"Or—" said the idol

"O. K., O. K.," said Kenneth weakly. "You win."

"That's better," smirked Rakna. "Now listen to me. I don't want you to think I intend any harm! I don't. But unfortunately for my character I was created in more or less a man's image. The only faults I have are human ones, and even though I have improved considerably, I still possess those



faults. One of them is vanity. I don't like to be called a weakling any more than you do. You'll take a poke at someone who calls you a pansy; all right, so will I. Savvy?"

Kenneth nodded.

"Right. All I want from you is a little consideration. Keep your mouth shut about me; I don't mind being admired, but I don't want to be a museum piece." Amused pity suddenly manifested itself on those craggy features. "Look, Kenneth, I've been a little hard on you. After all, you did give me a comfortable place to sit. Anything I could do for you?" Again those fear-erasing waves of friendliness. Kenneth stopped trembling.

"Why . . . I don't know. I've got a good job, and about everything I want."

"How about your wife? Are you altogether happy?"

"Why, sure I am. Well . . . that is——"

"Never mind the details. I know all about it. She calls you a liar and she's right, and you wish something could be done about it. Want me to make you incapable of telling a lie? I can do it."

"You mean——"

"I mean that every time anyone asks you a question you'll be able to tell them only the truth. How much money you have, what you did that night in Denver"—Kenneth quailed at that—"what you honestly think of your boss——"

"Oh, no!" said Kenneth. "That doesn't sound so hot."

Rakna grinned. "All right. Let's do it this way. Everything you say will be the truth. If you say black is white, it will be white. If you tell your wife you were working late instead of playing poker, then it will be true. See what I mean?"

Kenneth couldn't see anything wrong in that. "By golly, Rakna, you've got something there. Can you do it?"

"I've done it," said Rakna. "Look. See that chain hoist you hauled me up with?"

Kenneth glanced at it. "Yeah."

"Now tell me it's not lying here, but it's in the shed."

"It's in the shed," said Kenneth obediently.

The hoist vanished. A clinking of chain drifted down the garden path. Rakna grinned.

"Hot cha!" exclaimed Kenneth. "Nothing but the truth. Thanks a million, Rakna. You're an ace!"

"Skip it," said the god. "Now beat it. I want to think."

Kenneth started up the path, his surliness quite gone and a new spring in his step. Rakna gazed after him and chuckled deeply.

"Cocky little devil," he said. "This ought to be good." He relaxed and let his mind dwell casually on profound matters.

As he came to the turn in the path and out of the range of old Rakna's quizzical gaze, Kenneth's steps suddenly slowed and he began to wonder a little at all this. Surely a thing like this couldn't be true! He found himself in a very precarious mental state. He could go back again and see if there really was a god in his garden, or he could blindly believe everything that had happened, or he could go on as usual and try to forget the whole thing. The worst part of it all was that if it all was a dream, he was probably nuts. If it wasn't a dream, who was nuts? He shrugged. Once you got used to the idea of having a god in your back yard you could get a kick out of it. But how did the old sourpuss think he could prove his power by making Kenneth speak the absolute truth? Not, of course, that there was anything in it.

Marjorie heard him coming into the house.

"Hurry and wash up, darling," she called briskly. "Supper's on!"

"Be right with you, kid!" He scrubbed up, put on a clean shirt and came down to the dining room. In one of the steaming dishes on the table was turnips. He frowned. His wife noticed, and said forlornly:

"Oh, dear, I forgot. You don't like turnips!"

"Don't be silly," he lied gallantly. "I love 'em."

No sooner had he said the words than the lowly turnips seemed to take on a glamour, a gustatory perfection. His mouth watered for them, his being cried out for them--turnips

were the most delicious, the most nourishing and delightful food ever to be set on a man's table. He loved 'em.

A little startled, he sat down and began to eat—turnips more than anything else. "Most delicious meal I ever had," he told a gratified Marjorie. No sooner said than done. It *was*. And as a matter of fact, it was strictly a budget meal—one of those meals that good little managers like Marjorie Courtney throw together to make up for yesterday's spring chicken. She was vastly flattered.

"You must have worked terribly hard to fix up a meal like this," Kenneth said with his mouth full. "You must be tired."

She was, suddenly, a little. Kenneth laid down his fork. "You *look* tired, dear." Lines appeared on her fresh little face. "Darling!" he said anxiously. "You're terribly tired!"

"I don't know what's the matter," she said haggardly.

"Marjorie, sweet, you're sick! What is it?"

"I don't know," she said faintly. "All of a sudden I feel—" Her head dropped on the table. He caught her in his arms.

"Buck up, kid. I'll carry you upstairs. Hang on, now. I'll get you settled and call a doctor." He crossed the room and started up the stairs.

"I'm too heavy—" she murmured.

"Nonsense!" he scoffed. "You're as light as a feather!"

Her body seemed to lift out of his arms. He was halfway up the stairs by this time, poised on one leg, about to take another step. The sudden lightening of her body had the effect, on him, of a kick on the chin. Down he went, head over heels, to the bottom of the stairs.

It was a nasty jolt, and for the moment he couldn't see anything but stars. "Marge!" he muttered. "You all right? Say you're all right!"

A whimpering cry cleared his head. Marjorie was settling gently down toward him, bumping each step lightly—lightly, like a floating feather.

He reached out dazedly and took her hand. She came drifting down toward him as he sprawled there, until their bodies rested together.

"Oh, God," moaned Kenneth. "What am I going to do?"

He rose and tried to help her up. His gentle pull on her arm sent her flying up over his head. She was crying weakly, hysterically. He walked into the living room, his wife literally streaming out behind him, and held her poised over the day bed until she rested on it. Then he ran for the telephone.

But as the singsong "Operator!" came over the wire he laid down the receiver, struck with a thought. Bit by insane bit he pieced the thing together; Rakna's promise; the power that he now had over the truth—the whole crazy affair. In the last few hectic minutes he had all but forgotten. Well, if he could do it, he could undo it.

He went back to his wife, drew a deep breath, and said:

"You're not sick. You weigh one hundred and fourteen."

Marjorie bounced up out of the day bed, shook her head dizzily, and advanced toward him. Kenneth sensed thunder in the air.

"What sort of a joke was that?" she demanded, her voice trembling. Kenneth thought a little faster this time. "Why, darling! Nothing has happened to you!"

Marjorie's face cleared. She stopped, then went on into the dining room, saying: "What on earth made us wander out here when we should be eating?"

"Nothing," said Kenneth; and that seemed to tie up all the threads. He felt a little weak; this power of his was a little too big to be comfortable. He noticed another thing, too: he could make his wife forget anything that happened, but he still knew about it. Lord! He'd have to be careful. He had a splitting headache, as always when he was excited, and that didn't help any. Marjorie noticed it.

"Is something the matter, Kenny?" she asked. "Have you a headache?"

"No," he said automatically; and as he said it, it was true! For the first time he grinned at the idea of his power. Not bad! No more toothache, stomachache, business worries—business—Holy smoke! He was rich! Watch.

"Marge," he said as she put two lumps in his coffee, "we have twenty thousand dollars in the bank."

"Yes. I know. Isn't it nice? Cream?"

"You know? How did you know?"

"Silly! I've always known. You told me, didn't you? Anyway, I've known about it quite a while, it seems to me. Why?"

"Why?" Kenneth was floored. Then he shrugged. The truth was like that, he guessed. If a thing was true, it required no explanation; it just *was*. He finished his coffee and pushed back his chair. "Let's go to a show, kiddo."

"That would be nice," she said. "Just as soon as I get the dishes done."

"Oh," he said airily. "They're done."

She turned astonished eyes to him. It occurred to him then that if he persisted in this sort of thing he might make her doubt her sanity. A bank account was one thing; but the dishes—

"I mean," he explained. "We did them."

"Oh . . . of course. I . . . well, let's go."

He made up his mind to go a little easy thereafter.

That was the beginning of a hectic three weeks for Kenneth Courtney. Hectic, but fun, by golly. Everything came his way; everything he said was true, and if everything he did wasn't quite right, it could be fixed. Like the time he was driving his big twelve-speed Diesel tractor-trailer job through the mountains one night, and a light sedan whipped around a hairpin turn and steered straight between his headlights.

"Look out!" he called to Johnny Green, his helper, who was in the bunk over the seat. "We're going to smash!"

And as the car approached, as their bumpers practically kissed, Kenneth remembered his powers. "We missed him!" he bellowed.

Miss him they did. The car vanished, and a second later its careening tail light appeared in the rear-view mirror. It just wasn't possible—but it was true.

He did learn to be careful, though. There was the time

when he casually remarked that it was raining cats and dogs. That mistake cost him half an hour of running madly around telling people that it really wasn't raining cats and dogs, you know, just raining hard. The thing would have made quite a sensation if he had not thought of declaring that it had not rained at all that day.

His influence was far-reaching. One night he happened to tune into a radio soprano who was mutilating Italian opera to such an extent that Kenneth inadvertently remarked: "She's lousy!" Thirty seconds later the loud-speaker gave vent to a series of squeaks and squalls which had no conceivable connection with Italian opera.

He had to watch his language. No author or orator was ever so careful about avoiding clichés and catch phrases as was Kenneth Courtney in the weeks in which he enjoyed his powers. A friend once remarked that he had been working all day; "I'm dead!" he said. Kenneth turned pale and solemnly swore that he would never use *that* expression again. He began to notice things about the way we speak: "I'm starved." "You're crazy." "You look like a ghost." "I hate you." "You're a half-wit," or "idiot" or "imbecile." "You never grew up."

At first Kenneth was a good man to have around the house. From his easychair he did the housework, made the beds, cooked a delicious series of meals, redecorated the living room, and renewed every article of clothing and linen in the house. Pretty soft. But he found that the wear and tear of the thing was too much for his wife.

Though Marjorie had every evidence that the work was done, still she had no memory of doing it—unless, of course, she remarked on it to Kenneth. In that case she would be told, and truthfully, that she had done the work herself. But she began to worry a little about her memory; at times she thought she was losing it altogether. You don't cook a six-course dinner without remembering anything about it except

the fact that you cooked it; and Marjorie even had to be told about that. So Kenneth, after a while, left the house to its appointed boss, and amused himself elsewhere.

And Kenneth never told her—or anyone—about Rakna and what he had done. Why? Because the conviction that matter-of-fact, efficient little Marjorie Courtney wouldn't believe such a far-fetched tale was so deep-rooted that it never occurred to him to use his power on her. She had, in the past, called him a liar so many times with justice that he felt subconsciously that she would do it again. That, incidentally, *might* have been Rakna's doing.

Well, for three weeks this went on. Kenneth had money to burn, all the leisure time he wanted—he worked now for the fun of it—and life was a song—in swingtime, of course, but still a song. He had been so busy experimenting and amusing himself that he hadn't thought of really celebrating. And on one memorable Saturday night he went downtown and threw a whingding that made history.

Only an old sailor or an ex-soldier or a man with Kenneth's powers can throw that sort of a binge. He was not a heavy drinker; but every time that sickly, cloying feeling came over him he'd say, like every other swiller: "*I'm* not drunk. I may be tight, but I'm not drunk." And then he could start over. Never mind the details; but let this suffice: the next morning, stocks on liquor jumped two points, and on the various hang-over remedies, six to ten points. Not a sober man went out of a barroom anywhere in town that night. Kenneth painted the town bright, bright red; and he and all the tipplers he could possibly find—and everything was possible to Kenneth!—literally drank the town dry.

He reeled home about six in the morning. He had poured some two hundred gallons of the best down his throat, and his breath would fell a strong man at thirty yards. Yet he was only delightfully high; he even remembered to eradicate the breath as he came in the door, by remarking that it was sweet as a baby's.

Marjorie was up when he entered rockily, flinging his hat to the right, his coat to the left, and himself on the carpet. She said nothing, which was bad; just walked daintily around him and upstairs. He called her, but she kept on going.

"Oh, oh!" he said. He started after her, found the stairs a little too much for him, and so declared himself on the second floor. Once there, he stumbled in on Marjorie. She was packing.

"What goes on?" he wanted to know.

"I'm going to stay with mother for a while," she said tiredly. "Till you sober up."

"Sober up?" he repeated. "Why, I'm perfectly sober!" It was true, of course; but that made no difference. Just because a thing is basically, unalterably true doesn't mean that a woman and a wife is going to believe it. She kept packing.

"Now wait a minute, darling. Haven't I been good to you? What do you want me to do? Marjorie!" This was the first time she had pulled anything like this. He was flabbergasted.

She turned toward him. "Kenneth, I'm sorry, but I've got to go away from you for a while. Maybe forever," she added forlornly. "You see, something's happened to me . . . to us . . . in the last few weeks. I don't know what it is, but I think sometimes that I'm losing my mind. I forget things . . . and you, Kenneth! I can't understand what you're up to, with all your running around at all hours of the night, and the strange things that are happening. The other day I was in the living room and just happened to be looking at Aunt Myrtle's vase when it disappeared . . . vanished, just like that." She snapped her fingers.

Kenneth swore under his breath. That was a slip. He had hated that eyesore, and happened to think of it one day when he was on the road. He had stated that it no longer existed, forgetting that his wife might be in the room at the time.

"So you see I need a rest, Kenneth." She began to cry, but turned to her packing all the same. Kenneth tried to put his arms around her, but she pushed him away.

Now Kenneth had learned during his year or so of marriage



that the only way to stop one of these bickerings was to tell the truth, take his medicine like a man, and then be forgiven. Well, he reasoned, the truth wouldn't be so hard to tell this time. Again, it never occurred to him to tell her that nothing was the matter, that she wasn't angry and frightened. No, the only thing he could think of that would fill the bill was to share his secret about the god in the garden. That was the cause of it all, so it might be the cure.

"Marjorie . . . I can explain everything."

"Oh, yes," she said bitterly. "You always can."

He swallowed that and tried again. "Listen, darling, please. I was digging our lily pool, and——"

As the story unfolded she stopped her packing and sank down on the edge of the bed. His words carried a peculiar conviction, and he thrilled to the dawning belief in her face.

"—and so last night I thought of celebrating it. It would do no harm that couldn't be set right. See? So don't go, sweetheart. There's no need——"

The remark brought her engrossed mind back to the fact that she had been in the midst of leaving his bed and board when he had interrupted with this story, this—yes—preposterous story. She remembered that she was angry at him, and that fact was quite sufficient. He was so horribly smug, so terribly in the right about everything. Marjorie Courtney was by no means the first woman who, incensed, refused to believe the absolute truth simply because that truth put her in the wrong.

"I don't believe any of it!" she said firmly. Suddenly she drew back a little. "Kenneth . . . I do believe that it's *you* who are losing your mind, not I . . . Ohhh——"

Kenneth realized then that if she kept that up any longer she'd have herself convinced. That wouldn't do. He took her by the arm, hurried her out and down the stairs. "Come on," he said grimly. "You're about to be introduced to a god. That'll show you who's crazy."

She struggled a little, but allowed herself to be forced out

into the yard and down the garden path. She wouldn't believe it! She wouldn't!

As they reached the pool she looked up at Kenneth's face. It was grimly determined; she was frightened. She did not see old Rakna grin and raise his carven eyebrows.

"Rakna!" called Kenneth. "My wife won't believe in you. What can I do to convince her?"

Marjorie said brokenly: "It's just an old statue . . . I know . . . I saw the hideous thing last week . . . it can't talk . . . It's stone——"

Rakna said: "I *am* stone, to her. I told you I didn't want anybody but you knowing anything about me."

"But . . . she's my wife!" cried Kenneth.

Marjorie said: "What?"

"You see," said Rakna, "she can't hear me. She thinks you're talking to a piece of stone." The god laughed richly. "I don't blame her for thinking you're nuts!"

"Skip that," Kenneth said angrily. "She's going to leave me if I can't convince her I'm sane. She just won't believe me. I thought you said I would always speak the absolute truth? Why won't she believe me?"

"Kenneth!" gasped Marjorie hysterically. "Stop it! Stop talking to that awful statue! Please, Kenneth!"

Rakna laughed again. "Look, dope, don't you know that truth, as such, does not exist to an angry woman, unless she happens to agree with it? As for my doing anything about this, that's up to you. You got yourself into this. I found it most amusing, too. Now get yourself out. That ought to be funnier."

"Why you old . . . Listen, Rakna, give me a break, will you?" said Kenneth desperately.

Rakna just chuckled.

Suddenly Marjorie fell on her knees beside Kenneth. She looked up at him with tear-filled, imploring eyes. She was incredibly lovely, lovely and pitiful as she knelt there.

"Kenneth," she moaned. "Oh, darling, I love you . . . I always will, no matter what happens to you, no matter——"

She drew a great shuddering sigh, and Kenneth's heart and soul went out to her. "Tell me you're all right, Kenneth. Tell me this is all a dream. Oh, God . . . Kenneth! I'm your wife, and I'm crying for you! You're out of your mind! This idol . . . its power over you——"

Kenneth dropped beside her and held her close. Rakna chuckled again—his last chuckle.

Kenneth whispered in Marjorie's ear: "Darling, it's all right! I'm quite sane, truly I am. Just forget everything. There is no Rakna . . . you're right. Just a brownstone idol. Rakna has no power over me. I have no powers that he gave me——" Anything to comfort her. He murmured on and on.

They crouched there, those two young people, at the foot of an incredibly old brownstone idol, who was once Rakna, a god with the power of a god. The stone idol had no power over Kenneth Courtney, for Kenneth had spoken the truth when he said those words.

They lived, of course, happily ever after. And if you visit them, Kenneth may take you into the rock garden and show you his ugly old idol. It has a craggy, aristocratic face, with an expression on it of rueful humor. He was a good sport, that Rakna. Kenneth, by the way, still lies to his wife.



## THE MAN WHO KNEW ALL THE ANSWERS

By DONALD BERN

*Nobody liked Mr. Scuttlebottom, but he didn't know it until he bought the book and found out how to read minds. Then he got the real truth. But when he decided to use his power, truth vanished*

THE faded gilt sign read:

### YE VILLAGE BOOK-STALL

"Fiddlesticks!" Scuttlebottom grunted. "Central City hasn't been a village for thirty years."

In such a mood, he tripped down the decaying stone steps and half fell through the rickety screen door, which he opened just in time.

"What the hell . . ." Scuttlebottom did a half somersault and lit on his pudgy feet, glaring.

A little man came walking slowly up the dusty aisle. He wore a pince-nez. He looked exactly like a person who wears a pince-nez. Only in this case, a little more so. His forehead was high, and locks of gray hair streamed down over his thin, gently inquiring face. He had a soft, straggly collar and a flowing bow tie; black sack suit, spats, and cracked patent leather shoes. He had eyes, too; quiet brown eyes that might have known a lot, but never said much.

"Yes?" said the proprietor of Ye Village Book-stall.

"Those stone steps," Scuttlebottom spluttered, "they're falling apart! I almost broke my neck coming in."

"Indeed?" said the proprietor. "Those steps have been here many years, you know. General Grant visited here one day many years ago to buy his wife a present. He stumbled over them, too."

"What the hell do I care!" Scuttlebottom roared. "I came here to buy a book, not to be killed."

"Ah, yes," said the proprietor. "Yes, indeed. I was sure of that the moment I saw you coming. Well, sir, is there any particular book you would be interested in?"

Scuttlebottom glared at him. "You probably wouldn't have it," he sneered.

"I have not everything here," the little man said, "but I have much. Oh, yes, indeed."

"Well," barked Scuttlebottom, "I want something different."

"Something—different?"

"That's what I said. Too many adventure books lately. Have to change off for a while. Understand?"

"I," said the little man, "understand perfectly. And I believe I have just what you need."

He led the way along the dusty aisle to a particular dusty table covered with a helter-skelter assortment of dusty books on very dusty themes. He rummaged about in the dim light, finally found what he wanted.

"This," said the little man, "ought to do quite nicely."

He padded back up the aisle again, with Scuttlebottom coughing and sneezing as dust rose up and smote his sourpuss features.

The proprietor dusted off the little book on his pants, held the title up to the light. Scuttlebottom, squinting angrily, read:

### THE DORMANT MIND

The title was printed in block gold letters, and the binding was of fine leather.

Scuttlebottom, anxious to get out of the place, barked,

"How much? And what is this thing about, anyway?"

"It is of the mind," said the proprietor. "With it you may read the inner thoughts of other people. It will give you a power such as you never dreamed possible."

"Rubbish!" roared Scuttlebottom. "How come you've been saving it, if it's so wonderful a book?"

"The right man," the proprietor said softly, "had to come along."

Scuttlebottom growled, tucked the book under his arm and strode toward the door.

"One dollar, please," said the pince-nezed little man.

Scuttlebottom drew out a fat wallet, hastily peeled out a bill and flung it down on a book-covered table.

"Twice what it's worth," he grunted, pushing open the screen door.

"Not," said the little proprietor very softly, "to me."

Scuttlebottom got home a half hour later. He walked into his house, flung his hat on the rack, washed his hands and came down to dinner.

Mrs. Scuttlebottom, a prim, scared little woman, had veal cutlets tonight, Scuttlebottom's favorite. Scuttlebottom, Junior, eighteen years old, seated himself apologetically and waited patiently for his father to be served. Junior had slicked back his hair tonight and put on a clean shirt.

"How is the meat, dear?" Mrs. Scuttlebottom asked in her nervous voice.

"Tough," Scuttlebottom grunted. "Rotten butcher. Buy your meat some place else!"

Mrs. Scuttlebottom flushed. Junior looked unhappy, too. He waited until his father was eating a particularly delicious piece of blueberry pie.

"Father——"

"No!" Scuttlebottom barked. "Business is bad. I can't go laying out money for silly gadgets and things. Why don't you go to work?"

Junior looked sick. "But father, the Senior Prom is coming off in two weeks. All the other boys are buying tuxedos, and I know where I can get a real nice one for only \$22.50, and——"

"No!" Scuttlebottom roared. "What the hell do you think

I am, the mint?" He wiped his mouth angrily on a spotless white napkin, rose from the table.

"Pie too sour, Martha," he grunted at his wife. "Work hard all day and can't even get a decent meal."

He slammed out of the dining room and clumped upstairs to his bedroom. He put on his dressing robe, settled comfortably in a big Morris chair and picked up the book he had bought, "The Dormant Mind."

Downstairs, Mrs. Scuttlebottom was crying, and Junior was trying hard not to show his own bitter disappointment.

\* \* \*

The evening grew heavy with darkening shadows. Scuttlebottom switched on the lamp over his head irritably and kept on reading.

Never, never had he ever in his life read a book that absorbed him as much as this one did. Even as the bookshop proprietor had said, he had never dreamed that such things were possible with the human mind.

In every brain, Scuttlebottom knew, there is the subconscious, which is at work even during sleep. But Scuttlebottom had never realized the amazing power stored deep within this portion of the mind. He had always thought that mind-reading was a fake, a phony, a counterfeit art practiced on sleazy vaudeville stages by crackpot entertainers.

Now as he read, a whole new vista of the human intellect was revealed to him. His eyes remained glued to the printed pages; his whole attention was utterly concentrated on the fascinating message there. And when he finished the little book, closely printed, it was with a start.

Dawn was streaking the eastern heavens.

"Gosh!" Scuttlebottom muttered. "I've been reading this all night."

He sat for a while, pondering the things he had read. Then he got up, rubbed his eyes, undressed mechanically and flopped into bed . . .

Scuttlebottom groaned when the alarm clock went off. But



habit was too old to break. He pulled on his trousers, washed, finished dressing and went down to breakfast, late for the first time in years.

Junior was already sitting at the table. He glanced covertly at his father and noticed that his parent seemed to be thinking about something. Mrs. Scuttlebottom, seeing the same thing, said, "Thank God!" under her breath. Maybe her husband would not complain about his carefully broiled ham this morning.

"No!" Scuttlebottom shouted suddenly, glaring up from his plate at Junior.

Junior, who had been thinking about whether to broach the subject of the tuxedo suit again, almost collapsed.

"I didn't say anything!" he bleated.

Scuttlebottom stared, realized that his son indeed hadn't said a word. Glowering, he returned to his eating.

Junior's mother and Junior exchanged unhappy glances.

"He's in a terrible humor again," they seemed to be telling each other.

"How dare you say such a thing!" Scuttlebottom roared, pushing back his chair and getting up in a terrific huff.

"We didn't say a word!" mother and son cried, white-faced.

Scuttlebottom almost jumped. His heavy jowls got red.

"No, I guess you didn't," he grunted. "Anyway, you spoiled my appetite!"

He grabbed up his hat and stormed out of the house. Just as suddenly he stormed back in, stamped into the dining room and grabbed Junior's arm.

"What did you say about me?" he yelled.

Junior cringed. "But I didn't say a thing!"

Scuttlebottom shook in restrained rage. "Well, I don't like what you've been *thinking!*" he blurted.

Junior's blue eyes grew blank and round. He stared. He stared so hard that his father dropped his hold and stared, in turn, at the long-suffering Mrs. Scuttlebottom. Mrs. Scuttlebottom put a hand to her throat and stared even harder.

"Oh, my God!" Scuttlebottom groaned. "You both think I'm crazy!"

Mother and son chorused, "We never said anything like that!"

Scuttlebottom flushed brick red, glared, shook, and then went stamping out of the house.

Waiting for the street car, Scuttlebottom, still hopping mad, was confronted by Nick Marshetta, the "newsboy" on that corner for the past fifteen years.

Nick had a sick wife to look after. Many of his customers never asked for the two cents' change from their nickels. Scuttlebottom always did.

"Da cheapskate!" Nick thought as he handed Scuttlebottom the paper and his change.

"What the hell did you say!" Scuttlebottom shouted.

Half a dozen people turned around and stared at him. Nick looked frightened.

"Never said nothin'," he muttered. "Always keep my mouth shut."

"That's the best thing you do!" Scuttlebottom rasped, and stepped out to the approaching trolley.

At his office building, in which he had an interest, Scuttlebottom was greeted by the plump, good-natured elevator man who usually took him up.

"Good morning, Mr. Scuttlebottom. Nice day out."

"I hadn't noticed it," Scuttlebottom snapped.

The elevator man didn't answer. But Scuttlebottom thought he had.

"You said I was a 'sourpussed old skinflint'!" Scuttlebottom shouted.

"I never said anything!" the man protested, knowing his job was at stake.

The other passengers in the car glared at Scuttlebottom. Among them were a couple of good tenants who had been threatening to move. Scuttlebottom choked.

"Must have been my imagination!" he muttered. "I guess I didn't *hear* you say anything . . ."

Scuttlebottom strode into his busy real estate office, looking right through all his scared employees as he barged down the aisle and entered his own sanctum.

He was sourly scanning some overdue tax bills from the city when his secretary for twenty years, Alfred Higgins, padded nervously into the room and stood quaking before the great man.

"Mr. Scuttlebottom," Higgins began, taking a deep breath and clenching his small hands determinedly.

Scuttlebottom looked up, glaring. "No!" he barked. "Absolutely not. You haven't had a vacation in five years, huh, so you think you're going to get one now? Well, *I* haven't had one in ten years, what do you think of that! What's good enough for me is good enough for you. Anything else?"

Higgins drew himself up to his full five feet two.

"Yes," he said quietly, respectfully, "I was offered a position yesterday with Harburton, Smythe and Scraggs. I am accepting it. And if you'll pardon my impertinence, sir, you may go to hell."

Scuttlebottom gasped. His mean blue eyes widened. Involuntarily he found himself looking through his open office door as Higgins walked softly to the rack behind the filing cabinets, took his hat off the stand, looked for the last time at the desk which had been his for twenty years, and padded unobtrusively out the door.

All the rest of the morning, Scuttlebottom sat staring out the window. Frightened employees came in with papers to sign. Scuttlebottom let them lay. There were several telephone calls. Scuttlebottom mumbled his replies, got one call so badly bolixed up that it cost him a \$5,000 realty commission. Scuttlebottom never turned a hair.

At lunchtime he went downstairs for a malted milk and a ham sandwich.

The counter boy looked at him politely. "Wish that fat slob would eat some place else. Never tips, makes the other customers uneasy," he thought.

Scuttlebottom choked. He grew very red in the face. He

slammed down thirty cents, got up abruptly and stomped out into the street.

Across the street was the bank. Scuttlebottom remembered he had a big deal on at nine the next morning. He entered the place, drew a check for a thousand dollars and presented it at the teller's window.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Scuttlebottom," the teller said. But he thought: "The damned fat chiseler! They say he's even lousy to his family. Hope they get his dough when he kicks off. They certainly deserve it!"

Scuttlebottom got apoplectic. "How dare you!" he screamed hysterically. "I'll take my account away from this. I'll——"

The cashier had been standing near the teller, going over some accounts.

"But Mr. Scuttlebottom," the cashier protested, as the white-faced teller looked about to faint, "Mr. Watkins here only said 'Good afternoon.' Mr. Watkins has been in our employ for many years, and——"

Scuttlebottom gasped. And for the first time in his adult life, his dogmatic, matter-of-fact mind slipped a cog.

*Watkins had never said any such thing*, he realized in a panic. Watkins must have—why, he must have *thought* it!

Scuttlebottom got absolutely green about the gills. Nobody, it came to him with a terrific shock, nobody had openly insulted him all day. Nobody but his ex-secretary, and Higgins had *said* quite respectfully what he felt.

White as a sheet, Scuttlebottom snatched the thousand dollars the teller had been counting out, stuffed the bills absent-mindedly into his trousers pocket and lurched out of the bank.

Back to his office he went. The frightened look on his face scared the wits out of his already frightened employees.

All afternoon he sat in his office, refusing to see anyone.

"That damnable book!" he groaned. "'The Dormant Mind.' Oh, God, now I can read other people's minds! Now I know what everybody is thinking about me! And I can't *do* anything about it, I can't get anybody fired—because nobody *says* a single word!"

The afternoon sun went down. Evening shadows fell. Scuttlebottom, slumped in his swivel-chair, fell asleep finally, emotionally exhausted . . .

A fire engine clanging down the street woke him up.

Scuttlebottom started, rubbed his eyes, saw it was night. He switched on his desk lamp, looked at his watch.

"Nine-thirty! Must have been asleep a couple hours."

Haggard, worn, he took the elevator downstairs and walked over to the building register to sign himself out.

"Why, good evening!" the night man said. "Had a busy day, eh, Mr. Scuttlebottom?"

But he was thinking: "Busy day my hat! That fat pig works his people to death, pays 'em nothing and keeps all the dough to himself. Hope he falls down a manhole and breaks his neck!"

Scuttlebottom jerked as though prodded with a red-hot poker.

"Shut up!" he screamed. "SHUT UP! You're driving me crazy, *crazy*. . . ."

He bolted out the door, leaving a badly frightened man in his wake. Heavy face steaming with sweat, eyes popping in mingled terror and rage, Scuttlebottom pounded down the pavement and turned off at the little street, not far from his office, where he had bought "The Dormant Mind."

"That bookseller!" he snarled, hysterically angry. "He's the cause of all this. He sold me the book! I'll kill him with my bare hands——"

*"This is a stick-up, Mister! Hands up!"*

Out from behind an empty store stepped a slim figure. He held a revolver in his hand, a cap pulled slanting over his eyes. His voice was high-pitched, rasping.

Scuttlebottom stopped dead in his tracks. The maddened gleam in his hard blue eyes paled somewhat as the robber approached.

Under the dim light of a street lamp several stores away, Scuttlebottom made out his young assailant.

Thin, taut cheeks. Frightened, inexperienced eyes. Scuttlebottom looked into them and sneered.

The young thug was thinking: "I better make this good! My first job, and the gang won't take me in 'less I can hold my own. Gee, this guy looks big . . ."

Scuttlebottom stared a moment longer. Then his lips curled in a mean sneer.

"Bluff me, would you!" he snarled, and made a grab for the other.

The stick-up man jumped back with a scared cry. But Scuttlebottom was too quick for him. Scuttlebottom caught the youth's gun hand. Squirming, kicking, the thug jerked frantically at his wrist. The gun swiveled about to line on Scuttlebottom's sweaty head. Reflex action made the thief squeeze the trigger.

There was a nasty *crack!* Scuttlebottom's face dissolved in a gout of blood, and he slumped sickeningly to the pavement. The young thug took one look at the fresh corpse and passed out cold.

That was how the police cruiser found the two of them half a minute later, when the car came screaming to the curb in answer to the shot . . .

"You're lying!" the burly sergeant was snarling, and he made a pass at the youth.

Scuttlebottom's killer took the slap across the face, but he was crying anyway.

"I did not!" he sobbed. "I didn't kill him! *I thought the gun wasn't loaded . . .*"

## ADAM LINK'S VENGEANCE

By EANDO BINDER

*"If you are lonely," said Dr. Hillory, "why not make another robot, patterned after the woman you love?"*  
*And Adam Link agreed.*

TO ANY of you humans committing suicide, your last thought must be that death is after all so sweet and peaceful and desirable. Life is so cruel. And to be brought back from voluntary death at the last second must be a terribly painful experience.

So it was with me, though I am a robot.

My mind blinked back into consciousness. My mechanical brain was instantly alert. Full memory flooded back. What had happened to prevent my death? I had allowed my batteries to drain, and had lain myself flat to pass into oblivion with the last of the electrical energy. Over my head I had fixed a timed clockwork which would within an hour tip over a beaker of strong acid. I had removed my skull-piece so that the acid would bite deeply into my iridium-sponge brain and utterly destroy it.

Now I was alive again, feeling the strong pulse of electrical current surging through me. And the acid lay spattered over the stone floor beyond, hissing and bubbling. Someone had knocked it away at the last second. And had reconnected a battery to my central distributor.

All this passed through my mind in a split second, after opening my eyes. Then I turned my head and saw my self-appointed rescuer, standing a few feet away, slowly shaking his head.

"Are you all right, Adam Link?" he queried.

"Why didn't you let me die in peace?" I said. My voice, in human terms, was a groan. "I have known a great hurt—this is not my world."

That was the irrevocable decision I had come to, a month before, after leaving the world of men. Kay Temple had proved that to me. She had made it clear that a robot mind, knowing of but lacking the capacity for human love, must live only in a terrible, bitter loneliness. Think of yourself the only human being on Mars, among utterly alien beings. Beings with intelligent minds, but strange bodies and strange customs. You would know true loneliness.

I had fled to my secret retreat in the Ozark mountains—fled from Kay. But I could not escape myself. My mind knew human emotion, too much of it. I was determined, at first, to weed that out—make myself truly a machine. I experimented with my brain, trying to burn out those unmechanical things, but failed. I was doomed to remain a robot with human feelings.

Suicide was the only course left, so that with me would die the secret of the metal-brain. So that others of my kind would not be created and come to know the hurt I know—that this is not our world.

“Not your world?” returned my rescuer. “Your very existence in it makes you part of it. I’ll help you up.”

He came forward, tugging me to my feet, exactly with the manner of a solicitous person holding another who might be weak and spent. I needed no help, of course. I was not a starved, thin, haggard would-be suicide. With electrical current in me, I was immediately in full possession of my powers. I arose, shaking off his hand with a half-human petulance at his presence and interference in my life—or death.

I stared at him, wondering how he had found me. This spot was remote from the haunts of men. Not one of my personal friends had known of it.

“I’m Dr. Paul Hillory,” he introduced himself. He was a small, wizened man of late middle age, bald-headed as an egg. He had a certain sly look in his eye that I took for either humor or a cynical outlook such as comes, I suppose, from seeing much of life.



"I'm a scientist, retired. I have a small summer cabin a mile away. I saw you drive up here into the mountains like a demon, a month ago. In my next visit to the city, I heard the story of your trial and business venture, and sudden disappearance. I sought you out, but had some trouble finding this exact hideaway. I came just in time, it seems. I saw you lying on the floor, and then the clockwork began tipping the beaker of acid. I knocked it away with a rod. Then I took the battery from my car and connected it to your distributor. Your heart, by analogy. I realized I had brought you back from—death. It rather thrilled me."

I still stared at him, with an unvoiced question.

"I'd do the same for any wretch trying to take his own life," he responded rather sharply. His voice changed. A note of eagerness came in it. "You're a robot, Adam Link! A living, thinking creation of metal! I knew Dr. Link, your creator. I told him he was a fool to hope to succeed. Now I see he did. It—it amazes me!"

He sat down suddenly. Most people have known fear, or even panic at first seeing me. Dr. Hillory was too intelligent to be frightened. But he was obviously shaken.

"You have brought me back to a life I renounced," my phonelike voice said dully. "But against my will." I told my story in brief, terse phrases.

Then, without another word, I stalked from the cabin. I strode along the path through the trees that sheltered the place from prying eyes. Beyond was a clearing of a hundred feet. It ended abruptly in a cliff, which dropped sheerly for five hundred feet, to hard rocks below. I would find my death down there.

Dr. Hillory had followed me. When he divined my purpose, he cried in protest and tugged at my arm. He might as well have tried to hold back a tractor. I didn't know he was there. He grasped my middle—and dragged along like a sack of feathers.

The cliff edge was now fifty feet away. I would keep right

on walking. Suddenly he was running in front of me, pushing at me and talking.

"You can't do this, Adam Link!" he screeched. "You have the secret of the metal-brain. It must not go with you. Robots can be useful——"

He was talking to the wind. The cliff was twenty feet away. Suddenly a gleam came into his eyes.

"You are lonely, Adam Link. You have no one like yourself to talk to, to share companionship. Well, you fool, why not make another robot?"

I stopped. Stopped dead at the brink of the cliff. I stared down five hundred feet at the shattering rocks below. Then I turned away; went back. Dr. Hillory had won.

He stayed to help me. I had a completely equipped workshop and laboratory. Certain parts needed I ordered, through the devious channels I had thought necessary to my isolation, when I built the hideaway. Within a month, a second iridium-sponge brain lay in its head-case, on my workbench.

Dr. Link, my creator, had taken twenty years to build my complex metal brain. I duplicated the feat in a month. Dr. Link had had to devise every step from zero. I had only to follow his beaten path. As an added factor, I work and think with a rapidity unknown to you humans. And I work 24 hours a day.

The time had come to test the new metal-brain. Dr. Hillory was vastly nervous. And also strangely eager. His face at times annoyed me. I could not read behind it.

I paused when the electrical cord had been attached to the neck cable of the metal-brain head, resting with eyes closed on a porcelain slab.

"I had thought of this before, of course," I informed my companion. "Making a second metal-brain. But I had reasoned that it would come to life and know the bitter loneliness I knew. I did not think of her having my companionship, and I hers."

*"Hers!"*

Dr. Hillory was staring at me open-mouthed.

For a moment I myself was startled. I had given myself away, and somehow, before this elderly man, I felt—embarrassed. I felt before him now like a teen-age youngster, experiencing his first love affair. In all except the actual fact, I blushed. Metal, fortunately, does not act like the thermometer of human faces, to human feelings.

But it was too late to hide what I meant from the canny scientist. Besides, he had to know sooner or later. I went on.

“When you stopped me at the cliff, you said why not make another robot? I had been thinking of Kay Temple at the moment. The picture of the robot that leaped into my mind, then, was not one like myself. Not mentally. The outward form would not matter. I was ‘brought up’ from the masculine viewpoint. This robot-mind must be given the feminine outlook!”

My mechanical voice went down in tone.

“Her name will be—Eve!”

Dr. Hillory had recovered himself. “And how will you accomplish this miracle?” he said skeptically.

“Simply enough. She must be brought up in the presence of a woman. Her thought-processes, her entire outlook, will automatically be that of a woman. You must do this for me, Dr. Hillory. You are my friend. You must go to the city and see Kay Temple for me—now Mrs. Jack Hall. She is the only one who can make my plans come true. She must be the companion for—Eve!”

Dr. Hillory sat down, shaking his head a little dazedly. I could appreciate how he felt. Bringing a girl up here to teach a metal monster to be sweet, gentle-natured, feminine! Like trying to bring up a forest creature of lionlike build and strength to be a harmless, playful kitten! It was incongruous. Even I had my doubts. But I had equal determination.

“I suppose,” he said, with a trace of the cynicism that lurked somewhere in his character, “that you will want your—Eve—to learn to giggle, like a school-girl!”

I didn't answer.

Instead, I switched on the electric current. Slowly I re-stated it up, to reach the point at which electrons would drum through the iridium-sponge brain, as thoughts drum in the human mind, under the forces of life. I watched, holding my breath—no, I have no breath. Sometimes I forget I am a metal man. But the idiom stands as descriptive of my feelings.

For what if the metal-brain were a failure? What if my brain was what it was by sheer accident, not the result of Dr. Link's creative genius? What if after all the process could not be repeated again—ever!

Loneliness! Death! Again my life would be wedged in maddeningly between those two words.

I held my breath, I repeat. I heard the hum of the electron-discharge, coursing through the metal-brain I hoped to bring to life. And then— movement! The eyelids of the head flicked open. The brain saw. The eyelids clicked shut again, as though the brain had been startled at what it saw. Then open and shut several more times, exactly as a human being might blink, awaking from some mysterious sleep.

"It's alive!" whispered Dr. Hillory. "The brain is alive, Adam Link! We've succeeded!"

I looked down at the blinking head. The eyes seemed to look into mine, wonderingly.

"Eve!" I murmured. "My Eve!"

#### "EDUCATING" AN EVE

When we had completed the body, similar to mine but somewhat smaller, Dr. Hillory went to the city. He came back with Jack and Kay. They had come without question, immediately.

"Adam Link!" Jack called as soon as he stepped from his car. "Adam, old boy! We've been wondering and worrying about you. Why did you run off like that? Why didn't you get in touch with us sooner, you blithering idiot——"

Jack was just covering up his intense joy at seeing me,

with those words. It was good to see him too, he who was my staunch friend and looked upon me more as a man than robot.

Kay came up. The air seemed to hush. We stared at each other, not speaking a word.

Something inside of me turned over. My heart—as real as the “heart” with which you humans love and yearn—stopped beating. I had fled from her, but had not escaped. It was plain, now. And Kay? What was she thinking, she who had such a short time ago seen me as a man behind the illusion of metal. A man she could love. . . .

Jack glanced from one to the other of us. “Say what’s the matter with you two? You’re staring at each other as though you’d never met before. Kay——”

Jack of course didn’t know. She had not told him; he would not understand. And my last letter to Jack had told a half-truth, that there could never be another man in Kay’s life but Jack.

“Nothing, darling,” Kay spoke. She took a deep breath, squeezing his arm. And then I saw how radiantly happy she was. It was an aura about her, like that of any newlywed. They had been married two months. I felt a surge of joy. Kay had found herself. And I would too, soon, in a companion like myself in outward form, and like Kay inwardly.

They agreed enthusiastically.

“I take credit for the idea originally,” said Jack in mock boastfulness. “You remember once, Adam, that I suggested you make another robot, give it the feminine viewpoint, and you were automatically her lord and master!”

Kay touched my arm. “I’ll try to make her a girl you can be proud of, Adam!”

“With you training her, that is assured,” I returned, with more than mere gallantry.

“Well, let’s get to work,” said Dr. Hillory impatiently. He had stood by with a look in his face that seemed to say it was all rather foolish. “You two can use my cabin,” he said to Jack and Kay. “It’s only a mile away.”

Kay came every morning, promptly. She would turn the switch on Eve's frontal plate that brought her to life and begin her "lessons."

Eve learned to walk and talk as rapidly—within a week—as I had under Dr. Link's expert guidance. Eve, no less than myself, had a brain that learned instantly and thereafter never forgot. Once she had learned to talk, the alphabet and reading came swiftly. Then, like myself, she was given books whose contents she absorbed in page-at-a-time television scanning. She passed from "babyhood" to "schoolhood" to mental "maturity" in the span of just weeks.

The other process was not quite so simple—instilling in her growing mind the feminine viewpoint. It might take months of diligent work on Kay's part, and would take all of her time, much to Jack's ill-concealed dislike.

I had put quite a bit of thought into the matter. At last I devised an instrument that shortened the process. An aluminum helmet, fitted over Kay's head, transferred her thoughts directly, over wires, to Eve. Thoughts are electrical in nature. I found the way to convert them into electrical impulses, like in a telephone. Fitted to the base of Eve's skull-piece was a vibrator whose brush-contacts touched the base of her brain. Kay's thoughts then set up an electro-vibration that modulated the electron flow of Eve's metal brain.

Mind transference. Telepathy. Call it what you will. Kay's mind poured over into the receptive Eve's. I knew that Eve would then be a second Kay, a mental twin. It was Kay's mind I appreciated from the first, in an emotion as close to human love as I can reach.

Dr. Hillory and I watched developments with all the avid curiosity of the scientific mind. But I watched with more than scientific interest. We left the whole job to Kay. We seldom talked with or even went near Eve, for fear of upsetting this strange process of giving a robot a feminine mind.

Once, in fact, I was annoyed to find Dr. Hillory talking to Eve. Kay had left for a moment. What he had said I don't know. I didn't want to question Eve and perhaps con-

fuse her. But I pulled Dr. Hillory away, squeezing his arm with such force that he winced in pain.

"Keep away from her," I said bluntly.

Dr. Hillory said nothing, however. I began to wonder what to do about the scientist. But then I forgot about him, as the great moment neared.

The great moment arrived.

Jack, Dr. Hillory and I were in the sitting room. Kay brought Eve in, leading her by the hand. Kay had assured me, that morning, that she had done all she could. Mentally matured, Eve was as much a "woman" in outlook, as I was a "man."

I'll never forget that scene.

Outwardly, of course, Eve was just a robot, composed of bright metal, standing on stiff alloy legs, her internal mechanism making the same jingling hum that mine did. But I tried to look beyond that. Tried to see in this second intelligent robot a psychic reaction as different from mine as a human female's from a human male's. Only in that would I be satisfied.

I was Pygmalion, watching breathlessly as his ivory statue came to life.

"This is Adam Link, Eve," Kay said gravely, in our first formal introduction. "He is a wonderful man. I'm sure you'll like him."

Ridiculous? You who read do not know the solemnity of that scene, the tense expectancy behind it. Jack, Kay and Hillory, as well as myself, had become vitally interested in the problem. The future of the intelligent robot might here be at stake. We all felt that. How nearly human, and manlike and womanlike, could metal life be made?

We talked, as a group.

The conversation was general. Eve was being introduced to her first "social" gathering. I was pleased to note how reserved she was, how polite and thoughtful in the most trivial exchange of words. Gradually, I became aware of her "char-

acter" and "personality." She was demure, but not meek. She was intelligent, but did not flaunt it. Deeper than that, she was sweet, loyal, sincere. She was lovely, by nature. She was—well, Kay.

"I'll be darned," Jack suddenly said, slapping his knee. "Eve, you're more Kay than Kay herself!" He grinned impishly at his wife. "Kay, how would you like a little trip to Reno?"

It was a splendid thing for Jack to say. He had made me feel human that way too, when I first met him. He had shaken hands with me in prison, and had me play poker with the "boys." But he wasn't merely making a gallant gesture, here with Eve. He meant it! We all laughed, of course. Yes, I laughed too, inside. And I knew that Kay laughed, for she pressed her folded hands together. Kay always did that when she laughed.

Something of the tense atmosphere was relieved. Our conversation became more natural. And before we knew it, Eve and I, sitting together, were absorbedly engaged in a tete-a-tete. What would two robots talk about, you wonder? Not about electrons, rivets, gears. But about human things. She told me she liked good books, and the beauties of sunrise, and quiet moments of thought. I told her something of the world she hadn't seen.

It was then we noticed a queer phenomenon. Our conversation between ourselves gained in rapidity. Both of us thought and spoke instantaneously. Vaguely, I noticed that the others were looking at us in covert surprise. Our voices to them were an incoherent blur!

In the next few hours, Eve and I passed through what might have corresponded to days or weeks of human association.

Suddenly it happened.

"I love you, Adam!" Eve said.

I gasped, in human terms. My first reaction was one of astonishment. And I was a little repelled. It did not seem like a matured decision, rather a mere fancy of the moment



on her part. Nor did I want her to say that simply because she knew I was the only other living robot on Earth. I had wanted her to say that only from the depths of her being, as human beings did when the mighty forces of love awakened.

"But Eve," I protested, speaking to her as to a child, "you hardly know me. And you have been—well, forward. Nor have I given you any indication that I wanted you to say such a thing!"

Eve's folded hands pressed together. She was laughing.

"Adam, you poor dear," she returned. "You've been saying you love me for the past half hour, in every manner short of words. I just wanted to end your suspense. I say it again, as I will to the end of time—I love you!"

And in a sudden blinding moment, I knew my dream had come true. I couldn't fathom how this girl-mind worked. She was—mystery. She was to me what women have been to men since the dawn—mystery. And in that, I knew I had succeeded.

Kay had caught on, somehow. She arose, tugging Jack by the hand. "We're not needed here any more. We're going back to the city. Dr. Hillory, you go back to your cabin for a while." Turning to us she said, smiling, "Get in touch with us soon, Adam and Eve."

And they were all three gone.

And we—the Adam and Eve of robots—looked into each other's eyes and knew that we had achieved a pinnacle of human relationship—love.

### HAPPINESS AT LAST?

A month went by. I will draw the curtain over it, as is customary in your human affairs, when a man and woman adjust themselves to a new, dual life together. For the first time, in my sojourn among humans, I knew happiness. And Eve was radiantly happy, exactly as Kay in her new-found happiness with Jack.

We went to see Dr. Hillory finally, after that month. It would have been a strange sight to any human eyes, I suppose. Two robots, glinting in the sunlight, strolling hand in hand through the woods, chatting as merrily as a country boy and girl. A bird suddenly flew up and dashed itself against my chest-plate, blinded no doubt by the shine. It fell to the ground, stunned. Eve picked it up in her steel fingers, but with all the tenderness of a soft-hearted girl, and cuddled it to her. After a moment the bird recovered, chirped uncertainly, then flew away.

Dr. Hillory's cabin was only a mile away. He eyed us with his enigmatic expression.

"How are the honeymooners?" he grinned, with an innuendo that I didn't like. But outside of that, he seemed pleased to note how perfectly Eve—his creation and mine—had turned out.

"I've been doing a little experimenting myself," he confided. "You remember I took Kay's trans-mind helmet along. It's a fascinating gadget. I made some improvements. In fact, I eliminated the wires—made it work on the radio principle. Want to try it, Adam?"

I complied. He unhinged the skull-section next to the base of my brain and set the vibrator in contact. He had another one made, so Eve also joined the experiment.

No wires led from the vibrators to Dr. Hillory's helmet. A little two-masted radio aerial at its top sent out impulses that sped through the ether instead.

"Do you hear me clearly, Adam Link?" came Dr. Hillory's voice in my brain. Yet his lips hadn't moved. His thought-words had directly modulated the electron-currents of my brain, reproducing the same thought-words.

"Yes," I returned, also by thought, since the system was a two-way contact. "This is rather clever but of what use——"

Dr. Hillory's mental voice burst in. "Adam, strike Eve on the frontal-plate with your fist!"

To my surprise, I instantly balled my fingers and clanged my metal fist against Eve's frontal plate. It didn't hurt her,

of course. But Eve did a strange thing. With a short, frightened cry, she reached her hands behind her head, to rip the vibrator away.

"Stop, Eve!" commanded Dr. Hillory. "Put your hands down. Fold them in your lap."

She did. And she did not press them together; she wasn't laughing. I sensed that she was instead very, very frightened. As for myself, up till this moment, I was little more than startled at Dr. Hillory's commands, and his strange power over us.

"Adam!" Eve cried. "Don't you see? We're in his power——"

Lightning struck my brain. Instinctively I also raised my hands to rip away the little instrument that gave him such command over us.

"Stop, Adam! Put *your* hands in your lap!"

I fought. I strained with every steel muscle. But my machine's strength meant nothing. My hands dropped obediently.

Dr. Hillory was looking at us triumphantly. There blazed suddenly from behind his features the look of a man bent on evil designs. I had long suspected he was not a man to be trusted. Now he had revealed himself.

"Adam Link," he said gratingly, "your brain controls every cable and cog in your body. But your brain, in turn is under *my* control. I am amazed at my own success. Obviously a command given by me, impinging on your electron-currents, is tantamount to a command given by yourself. Perhaps you can explain it better than I. But this is certain—I can do with you as I will!"

I tried speaking and found I could, as long as he had made no direct command against it.

"Let us free, Dr. Hillory. You have no right to keep up this control. We are minds, like yourself, with the right of liberty."

Dr. Hillory shook his head slowly. "No, Adam. You will stay under my domination——"

It was then I acted—or tried to. I tried to leap at him. A swift mental command from him—and I stopped short. Fight-

ing an intangible force—fighting my own brain—I strained to move on. Every muscle cable was taut. Every wheel in my body meshed for movement. Electrical energy lay ready to spring forth in a powerful flood. But the mental command did not come from my brain. Instead, slowly, my body inched back and finally eased with a grind of unlocking gears.

Hillory had won.

He stood before me, my master. I had the strength of ten men in one arm, the power of a mighty engine at my fingertips. I could in three seconds have taken his puny, soft body and torn it to bloody shreds. Yet there he stood, my master.

Hillory eased his caught breath, as though not sure himself up till then that he could stop me. Color came back into his face.

"I'm your master," he hissed. "And I have plans——"

Eve and I looked at each other helplessly. What evil plans did this man, so suddenly revealed in his true colors, have? A sadness radiated from Eve's eyes. Our late happiness had suddenly shattered like a fragile soap-bubble.

If I had any hope of breaking from Hillory's clutch, it was quickly dispelled. First he made us lie down, then removed our frontal-plates. It was simple for him to unhook the cables from the batteries that gave us life. We blinked out of consciousness.

When we regained our senses—it was like a dreamless sleep—we realized our true hopelessness. Hillory had welded the vibrators to the backs of our skull-pieces, so firmly that it would be impossible for us to tear them away with our fingers. Secondly, he had installed turn-off switches in the battery-circuit, so that we could be turned off when he desired. Eve's switch had been removed before, when she reached "maturity." Now it was back, this means of "turning off" our life.

"While I wear the helmet, you are under my command," the scientist said matter-of-factly. "Whenever I wish to take the helmet off, I simply turn you two off first. You cannot escape me, and you must do as I wish."

In the following month, part of his plan unfolded. He forced me to devise a new and larger robot body. When the parts came, from factories, my fingers put them together, under his command.

Completed, the body stood eight feet high, without a head. It was a super-powerful mechanism, with muscle cables and cogs all proportionately larger than mine. Twice as much electrical power would be needed to run it. It was probably the upper limit in robot bodies, within the boundaries of flexibility, mobility and strength. Anything larger would have been clumsy. Anything stronger would have been too heavy to leave a useable margin.

Dr. Link had built my body as nearly in human proportion as possible. I stood five feet ten inches and weighed 300 pounds. This robot body was two feet higher and weighed 500 pounds. And when Hillory finally revealed his purpose, I screamed in protest.

"Put Eve's head on that robot body!" he had commanded.

"No!" I bellowed. "What monstrous motive have you behind all this——"

He let me rage on for a while. He did that once in a while, playing with me cat and mouse, knowing he had the upper hand. Eve pulled at my arm. "Please don't, dear!" she begged. "It's no use."

And it was no use. I quieted. Eve was turned off. Though it revolted me in every atom of my being, I unfastened her head-piece gently and attached it to the new body. I trembled doing it. Trembled with anguish. Though changing bodies does not mean so much to a robot as it would to a human being, it is nevertheless a disagreeable thought. I had come to love every contour, every dent and scratch on Eve's former body. She would be strange to me, in the new one.

Finally every little wire had been connected, between her brain and the relay switches in the body's neck. Then I bolted the neck-piece in place, holding the head firmly. At the last, under Hillory's command, I snapped the back-switch.

With a creak and groan of new metal, the body arose.

It towered above us both like a Goliath. I shed mental tears, and I could see the same in Eve's eyes as she looked down at me. This was as agonizing to us as to a human wife suddenly finding herself three feet taller than her husband. It was monstrous.

Hillory was ignoring our feelings, in this as in all previous things. Hopelessly, I tried to appeal to him.

"She's my mental mate," I said. "Don't you understand? She's my—wife! We have feelings. Please——"

The scientist laughed.

"Metal beings parading as humans," he spat out. "You, Adam, prating about loneliness, wanting a companion, mental love! It was sickening the day you and Eve talked of loving each other. That's all sentimental, twisted rot. Even among humans. You two, in the first place, are just metal beings. You have no rights, alongside humans. You were created by human hands. I'll show the world how to really use robots—as clever instruments!"

Instruments of what? What had he meant?

We soon found out. That very day, Hillory tested the range of his remote-control by radio. Eve, astride her new giant body, was sent step by step away, till she vanished in the woods. Still the scientist commanded her to move on, watching an instrument that recorded distance and control. Eve was sent a mile altogether, and came back obediently.

At no time, obviously, had she felt the slightest weakening of Hillory's remote-control, borne by high-frequency radio-waves. And radio-waves had a limitless range!

"You can easily be sent down to the city," Hillory remarked, pleased with the results. "Under my control, you can be made to do anything I want there."

"What are you planning, you devil?" I demanded.

A sly leer was my only answer.

That night, Eve was sent down to the city. Hillory was able to guide her easily enough, though she had never been there before. His mental commands told her every step. Con-

versely, her sharp comprehensive thoughts came back to him, whenever she was in doubt as to a road or turn. When she reached the city, in the dead of the night, Hillory read street signs through her and directed her footsteps. Svengali had never had the full, diabolical control over his Trilby that Hillory had over poor Eve!

At times, though the streets of the small city were nearly deserted at this hour, late wanderers spied the tall alien form. Eve involuntarily informed Hillory, and he would cause her to duck into shadowed doorways, or down alleys.

"This is perfect!" exulted Hillory to me. "I'm really there, by proxy. Through Eve, I can accomplish any deed within reason, without stirring a step from here!"

Eventually, Eve informed Hillory that she stood before a bank. Hillory sent her to the back entrance, and after a guarded look around, told her to shoulder down the door without making unnecessary noise. Inside her keen mechanical eyesight picked her way to the vault. It was not a particularly sturdy vault. The bank was a small one.

Hillory gave an amazing order.

I heard all these through my mental contact with Hillory's helmet. He told Eve to pull open the vault door! Through Eve's involuntary thoughts, we could almost picture her tugging at the heavy metal door. Finally she braced her feet. The stupendous strength of her giant steel body exerted itself in one furious tug. There must have been a terrific grind of strained, breaking metal, as the vault lock cracked apart. Eve's great new hands had done a job that might have balked a blast of nitroglycerine.

Eve did not know what money was, but Hillory did. He had her stuff great packets of bills in a sack and hurry out. The whole episode was over in three minutes. Eve arrived back without mishap, the sack dangling over her shoulder.

Hillory had robbed a bank, without the slightest personal danger! Was that his purpose to amass ill-gotten wealth? He read my thought.

"No, Adam," he said suavely. "This is a matter of personal

revenge. The President of the bank once refused me a loan!"

Which made his motive still more petty and unworthy. I looked at poor Eve. Her eyes were haunted. She knew she had been forced to do something wrong. Her Kay-mind told her that. She was miserable. But I was more miserable. I had brought her to life. I had not dashed myself to pieces, there at the cliff. On my soul—robot or not—rested the deed.

I tried to remonstrate with Hillory. He clicked us off, laughing, with little more regard for us than he would have had for cleverly trained dogs.

### A HORRIBLE SLAVERY

The following day, Hillory tuned the radio to the city's station. The news blared forth—

*The Midcity Bank was mysteriously robbed last night. The thief or thieves broke down the back door and raided the vault escaping with \$20,000. The vault door did not seem to be blown down. It had apparently been forced open by some amazingly powerful lever or instrument. Police are puzzled.*

*They are investigating strange reports that a robot form was seen last night by several people, described as a huge one ten feet tall. Is it Adam Link, the intelligent robot, with a new body? Has he returned, after five months of mysterious absence, to commit this deed? Before he left, Adam Link was accepted almost with human status. Has he returned now to vindicate those who said he was a Frankenstein monster, dangerous to human life and property?*

Frankenstein! Again that hideous allusion was springing up about me, when I had labored so hard to erase it in the minds of humans.

"You are ruining all my past efforts!" I accused Hillory. "I saved life, helped humans, showed that the intelligent robot would do good, not harm. Now you are destroying that——"

"Nothing of the sort," retorted Hillory evenly. "I have reasoned the matter out carefully. After perfecting my robot-control, and doing one or two other personal things, I'll take



my plans to big business interests in New York. The few little things that happen here won't matter. I'll sell you as a great new invention!"

He might have been speaking of a new type of radio, or automobile.

I tried to speak slowly, calmly in answer.

"You are making a frightful mistake, Hillory. When I came to life, and lived in the world a while, I saw the enormous difficulties of introducing robot-life. I saw from my own experiences that it would not be like introducing a new mechanical gadget. For I have a mind and feelings and human emotions. Human life is complicated enough, without adding another complex factor. Before the cliff there, I had made up my mind it was better for the secret of the metal-brain to vanish. Both for my sake and the world's. Foolishly, I let the thought of a companion robot sway me to stay in life. Yet perhaps the problem is not insoluble. But I tell you this, Dr. Hillory—I and I alone must decide! I alone, the Adam of intelligent robots, can find a way to introduce robot-life without creating future disaster!"

Hillory hardly heard.

"Rubbish! Your whole approach has been wrong. Who are you to tell humans what is best for them? You're no more than a clever mechanical toy, with pseudo-human reactions. I have figured out the way to introduce robots. Not as independent individuals who wander around in a half-human daze, looking for mental love. But as an organized, controlled force of workers, under the strict domination of their human creators and masters. As for your so-called 'feelings,' they are spurious. Like a phonograph, you have learned to imitate the human things. You are no more than a clever mechanism."

He looked at Eve and me as one might look at a piece of prized furniture—impersonally.

"We are life!" I said doggedly. I wished at that moment that my metallic larynx did not sound so cold, so expressionless. It destroyed the meaning of my words. "Life is in the

mind. We have minds. Dr. Link realized that. You must too——”

“Shut up!” roared Hillory in exasperation. “Why should I listen to your meaningless drivel?”

I was helpless to go on. He had commanded me to stop talking. He was master of every atom of my body. Eve and I looked at each other. She understood. The future of robots lay in my hand. But I was a pawn in Hillory’s hands. The dread thought loomed before us—what would be the fate of our future kind? Of the robot—*race*? Slavery! We must have felt then like the Adam and Eve of Biblical history, denied Eden, foreseeing only misery and suffering for their people.

The following night, Eve was again sent down to the city, like a metal zombie. This time Hillory directed her toward the residence section of town. She arrived at a certain house. She was sent quietly through a porch window. Hillory seemed to know the house thoroughly.

Then through a door. Hillory’s cautious mental-commands to make no noise were probably carried out to the letter. Merely by leaning her great weight against a locked door, slowly but steadily, Eve could force the lock with little more than a clink of snapping parts. Apparently no one had heard. The metal housebreaker was not detected.

Then Hillory gave a command that made something inside of me go cold. He told Eve to strangle the man lying there in bed, asleep! Strangle him, kill him! Hillory’s psychic command was a ruthless, eager whisper. Powered by radio, the heartless command sped to Eve, and those great metal hands had no choice.

Eve came back with human blood on her hands. She kept looking at them.

“Adam, what have I done?” she said. Behind the flat, metallic tone was sheer anguish. Eve was a gentle humanlike girl, in a metal body, remember that. “He gave a cry—one cry. A horrible cry. It is awful to take human life——”

She had cried this out in a rush, before Hillory could com-

mand her to stop sniveling. Then she stared at me. I could feel her poor, dazed mind tottering. It was a brutal introduction to the mystery of life and death to her, she who was so much like the gentle, warm-hearted Kay. I wanted to rush to her, comfort her, as any human would rush to his loved one in distress. Hillory made me stay where I was.

"You're a fiend, Hillory!" I managed to say before he locked my voice. "Your heart is harder than the hardest steel of my body. You call us non-human beings. Yet you are less a human—" He stopped me then.

The next day the radio blared angrily.

"A brutal murder last night again brings up the thought of Adam Link, the robot. Police say the door had been forced by a strength greater than any man's. The body's neck was almost severed. Adam Link's strong metal fingers could do that——"

"What would they say if they knew it was *Eve* Link?" said Hillory, glancing at us with a sidelong look of mockery. "That man was a personal enemy; now he's out of the way. Ah, this is so perfect, perfect!"

I have heard it said that every human being has at least one enemy he would like to kill, if there were no consequences. Hillory had no consequences to fear. It was perfect, for him.

He went on. "But you are being blamed, Adam Link. The myth of the free-willed robot who can do only good is being destroyed. When you have been definitely branded the culprit, I will announce to the authorities that mental-control is the only way to handle the robot problem that has arisen before mankind. I am doing the world a service. I am giving it the great gift of robot-labor, in a safe sure way!"

Hillory sent Eve out again the next night. His sly look told of some other hideous deed in mind. A man of his temperament and character had undoubtedly made many personal enemies.

A short time later, a car's motor and brakes sounded out-

side, and then its horn. Hillory glanced out of the window.

"Kay!" he breathed. But he seemed prepared.

Kay rushed in. She was alone. She glanced at us both.

"Adam!" she cried. "I had to come. Is there anything wrong? Where's Eve?"

"No, there is nothing wrong, Kay," I returned, but the words had been projected from Hillory's mind. I had no power to stop them, or utter words of my own. "Eve is all right. She just went out for a walk."

Kay heaved a tremulous sigh.

"Then all these ugly rumors are groundless, just as Jack said." Her voice held deep relief. "The robbery and murder naturally would be pinned on Adam Link, Jack said. People are like that. He said the criminals probably did things in such a way as to leave signs pointing to you. You're their perfect cover-up. I wanted to come up yesterday, but Jack said not to disturb you and Eve until you called for us. But I was so worried that tonight I jumped in the car and came up, just to make sure everything is all right."

There was still a trace of doubt in her voice. She was staring at Hillory, and the queer helmet he wore.

"Adam and I were just finishing a little experiment," Hillory said easily.

Kay turned to me again. "Then everything *is* all right."

"Of course, Kay. It was nice of you to be concerned and come up, but why not come back some other time, when we aren't so busy?"

Hillory's words, of course, through my helpless brain and larynx by proxy. I strained to put in a note of warning, distress. But a robot's voice is in the first place devoid of human emotion.

But strangely, instead of taking the hint to go, she seemed curious over the experiment. She moved toward the control board of the helmet, connected to it by wires.

"This looks something like the helmet I used with Eve," she said.

I could see Hillory's impatience for her to go. But he could

not afford to arouse her suspicions. He knew that she and Jack were much more my friends than they could ever be of Hillory. He began to describe the experiment in general, meaningless terms.

Suddenly Kay moved.

She moved with a swiftness and purpose that startled us both. Her hand grasped the switch cutting off current to the helmet. Hillory recovered and clutched at her wrist. With a furious effort, Kay opened the switch.

That was all that was needed.

### HEARTBREAKING COMBAT

The helmet went dead. I was no longer in Hillory's mental control. In two bounds I was before him. I grabbed the helmet from his head and flung it to the floor. Then I grasped his two shoulders in a vise-like grip and held him. I think if my face had shown any expression at that moment, I would have been grinning—but with no trace of humor.

Hillory's face had gone dead-white in fear. He squirmed and moaned in my adamant clutch, expecting immediate death.

Let me make a confession at this moment. For one split instant, with rage shaking every cell of my iridium-sponge brain, I thought of tearing Hillory's head from his body. But only for an unguarded instant. Then reason came to me. A robot must never kill a human, of his own free will. It was a thing I would never do. And a thing I will never let happen again—save for the deed poor Eve was driven to do.

I merely held Hillory firmly. To Kay I said: "Thanks, Kay. You've saved me——"

"I knew there was something wrong!" Her lips were quivering now, in reaction to the excitement. "I knew it couldn't be you, Adam that told me to go so brusquely. And Dr. Hillory is a poor actor." And Kay, I reflected, was an intelligent girl.

"What is this all about? What horrible—" Kay seemed about to go to pieces.

"Buck up!" I snapped. I told the story briefly. Then I instructed her to get a bottle of acid and apply it to the instrument welded on my skull-piece. A few minutes later the vibrator fell away. I was free entirely of the helmet control!

Not till then did I release Hillory. He staggered to a chair, mute and mortally frightened. The man who had been my master sat there now, a cowering wretch.

"Hillory—" I began.

There was an interruption, outside. The clank of metal feet sounded. Through the open door I could see Eve's body, glinting in moonlight. She had come back, also released from the mental control. She stood beside Kay's car, swaying on her feet, as though utterly dazed and lost.

I ran out.

"Eve!" I yelled. "We're free! Eve, dear——"

I suppose I felt at that moment as any man would, when he and his loved one are reunited after a deadly peril has passed. I extended my hand.

Eve took it, with a glad cry.

And then suddenly she yanked at my arm, throwing me to the ground. For an agonized moment I thought she had gone mad. Then, as her great body came at me I realized what had happened.

I leaped to my feet. A glance over my shoulder told me the situation. I saw within the open, lighted doorway of the cabin. Like a fool, I had forgotten about Hillory. He had picked up the helmet, turned on the power, and was fighting Kay off. Brutally, he crashed his fist against her chin and the girl toppled to the floor, knocked cold.

Hillory had no more control over me. But he did have over Eve!

Her great body came at me, under Hillory's command. Its mighty arms clutched for me, grabbed me, squeezed with machine-given power. My frontal plates groaned. I squirmed loose somehow, and staggered back. A stunning

blow from Eve's powerful hand caught me at the side of the head. My left tympanum went dead, ruptured. I reeled.

"Eve!" I shouted. "Eve—don't!"

But of course it was no use. It was not Eve who was attacking me. It was Hillory. And there we battled, Eve and I, two beings who loved one another but were battering at one another with the fury of giants. Eve was fighting to destroy me. I was fighting for my life.

I knew quickly that I had no chance. Eve's body was almost twice as heavy and powerful. I was slightly quicker in movement, and that alone saved me from almost instant destruction.

Mighty blows from her great fists thundered against my body. My return blows fell short. I danced out of her grasp. Those arms had crushing strength. I tried to flee. In three mighty strides Eve had caught up, knocked me off my feet. A powerful leg rained kicks at my fallen form, denting metal and endangering delicate mechanisms within. Then the great form jumped on me. Five hundred pounds crashed down on my chest. It was very nearly the fatal blow.

But I managed to roll aside, escaping the second such stroke, aimed at my head. Hillory wanted my brain crushed. He wanted to destroy me utterly, and have Eve left under his control.

The battle could not last much longer. Within seconds I would be crushed, broken, lifeless.

I did the only thing left. I ran—but this time to the cliff edge, where I had once nearly invited death. Eve's hands clutched at me, and then drew back. Hillory was willing to let me plunge over the cliff, and meet destruction five hundred feet below. I went over, dropping like a stone. . . .

The fall seemed interminable.

It is said that you humans, when falling or drowning, see your whole life before your mind. I saw mine—not once but a hundred times. Every detail stood out with stark clarity. But one livid thing stood out above all others—the thought

of Eve, my beloved creation, remaining alive in the hands of a human fiend. . . .

Yet one part of my brain, as I fell, was cool and calculating. It kept track of my descent, counting off the feet and yards by that automatic sense of timing and measurement which is part of me.

A hundred feet to the ground! It announced that and then acted. It made my arms and legs flail, shifting my center of gravity. My body had turned head over heels four times in falling. But when I landed, it was squarely on my feet. To have landed on my head would have been immediate destruction.

I have instant reflexes. The moment my feet-plates touched ground, my leg-cables flexed, taking up as much of the shock as possible. It might be the margin to save me. The rest was a clash of grinding, bending, breaking metal that horrified my own ear. I had fallen on a patch of grassy ground, but with the force of a motorcycle hitting a stone wall at 300 miles an hour.

My mind swam out of a blur. One eye was wrecked and useless, but with the other I looked over my body. My legs were twisted, crumpled lumps that had been driven up into my pelvic region. One arm was broken completely off and lay twenty feet away. My frontal plates had split in half and now stuck half-way over my sunken head. Every cog, wire and wheel below my shoulders was scattered around in an area of more than fifty feet.

But I lived! I lived!

My brain was whole, though badly jolted. By a miracle, the battery cable to my head was intact. The battery was cracked, but working. I could move one arm slightly. I was little more than a battery, head and arm, but I lived! Fortunately, I knew no pain.

And thus I had played out my one slim chance. I had thrown myself over the cliff—but not as a suicide. I had hoped this miracle would happen. Up above, Hillory must be looking down. He must be seeing the faint patch of metal shin-



ing in the moonlight, unmoving. He would be certain of my utter destruction.

Perhaps now he would be turning away, ordering Eve inside. And there plotting his scheme of bringing to life a horde of mind-enslaved robots!

But I lived. . . .

I began crawling. Little more than a head, battery and arm, I began crawling alone. The stump of my arm dug into the soil, flexed, and moved me an inch at a time. Behind me trailed shreds and tags of metal, all that was left of my body. My steel backbone, to which was attached the battery case, head and arm, moved as a unit, but the rest was shreds. Hour after hour I crawled along, like some strange half-mangled slug that clung to life.

Yes, I knew agony. The shattering of my body meant nothing, but my brain itself ached. Some few crushed cells were warping my electron-currents, creating a sort of hammering static. It throbbed like the beat of a great hammer. I do not know what your human pain is. But I would have gladly exchanged any possible form of it for the crashes and thuds within my brain that seemed like the sledge-blows of a mountain-tall giant.

But worse than that "physical" agony was my mental torment.

What if the twisted cables and gears of my arm failed? What if the battery cracked wide open? What if a little bolt or wire slipped out of place? At any moment it might happen. And I would lie there, dead. Or paralyzed, awaiting death. And up there in my cabin-laboratory, Hillory, and poor Eve. . . .

But metal is sturdy. And Dr. Link had built my body with care. I crawled all that night and the next day, through woods, meadows and stretches of boulder-strewn land. I knew where I was going, if I could get there. Twice humans passed near me. I lay still. They would probably destroy me, with the deeds of Hillory pinned on Adam Link. Once, reaching a brook, it took me an hour to figure a crossing. I could

not risk water, for fear of a short-circuit. I nudged a log into the stream. It caught against rocks. I crawled across.

But I will not go into the nightmarish detail of that journey. Forty-eight hours later, again at night, I had crawled five miles. Before me lay a farmhouse, the nearest one, I had known, to my hideaway. It had a telephone.

“VENGEANCE IS MINE!”

I reached the back door. Luckily, as with many unmolested farmer folk, it was unlocked. I made my way in and found the telephone, but it was on the wall out of my stunted reach. Working as soundlessly as I could, I pulled a chair over. From that perch, I was barely able to reach the phone. It was the old-fashioned hand-ringing type, still prevalent in that region.

With my one good hand I lifted the receiver, let it dangle, and rang the bell. A sleepy operator answered. I hurriedly gave the long-distance number in the city nearby. Jack's number. He had mentioned it to me during his visit.

I heard the ringing of the phone at the other end. I also heard a stir from one of the other rooms. Jack answered at the same time that a burly farmer appeared, snapping on the lights.

“Jack!” I yelled. “It's Adam Link! Come and get me! “Trace this call——”

That was all I had time for. The farmer blazed away at me with a shotgun he carried. The first shot wrecked my arm, making me completely helpless. The second, by its concussion, tumbled me from my perch. I fell to the floor with a clatter and lay still. The farmer did not know what he had shot at, whether beast or nameless thing. He shut himself up in the next room, then, with his wailing family. I will never know what he thought of the whole thing.

Jack arrived within an hour, in his car and took me away, explaining to the farmer as incoherently as the farmer stammered his story. In the car were Kay and Tom Link.

Kay wept unashamedly.

"Adam! You're alive—thank God!"

I told my story briefly. Kay told hers. Hillory had released her, of course, after I was gone. Kay had returned to the city. In a red rage at Hillory, Jack had driven to his place, the next day—yesterday. He had not met Hillory, only the menacing form of Eve, who waved for him to leave. Hillory spoke, through Eve, saying he was preparing papers for patent, on the helmet-control of robots.

Back in the city, Jack had called Tom, who came by plane from the east. They had been discussing, when I called, some legal way to forestall Hillory.

Tom Link, my "cousin," looked at me sadly. "Meeting you this way hurts, Adam!" he said sincerely. "I didn't know you were in trouble." My last letter to him had not revealed my hideaway or purpose.

He went on grimly. "We must stop Hillory some way. We can try to pin the murder and robbery on him, with yourself as chief witness. You have legal status, since your trial, Adam. Failing in that, we can contest his patent, or file counter-patent, or——"

Tom was vague, uncertain. It was a tricky situation. I thought of a court trial, which I had once sat through, and all the clumsy machinery of law. And I thought of Eve in Hillory's hands all that while, going mad perhaps. . . .

I think my voice must have startled them, as I broke in. Perhaps for once something of the burning emotion I felt reflected in my dead, mechanical tones.

"Vengeance," I said, "is mine!"

Three days later, working day and night at an accelerated, driving pace, I had a new body. I was in Dr. Link's old workshop, my "birthplace." Tom had locked the place without removing its contents, for sentimental reasons. I had been created here, over a year before. Now a new Adam Link was replacing the old.

My new body was eight feet tall. Bringing me only as a

living head, Tom and Jack had, under my instructions, connected me to a broken, partly dismantled robot body Dr. Link had first made for me, then discarded as not quite what he wanted. Working with this basis, I rebuilt the body piece by piece, strengthening, improving, employing greatly advanced mechanical principles.

At last it was done, and I prepared to leave.

Kay, Jack and Tom wore solemn faces. Within, I was solemn too. I knew what I had to do.

"I'll bring Hillory down alive," I promised grimly. "But before that—" I could not finish the thought.

Kay burst out into tears. She loved Eve too.

I left. I had told them to come up, if I did not return in twenty-four hours, with police. Hillory could be arrested for living on my property, already signed over to Jack and Kay. Perhaps then they might win a legal victory over him.

I was there at dawn. If I had thought to surprise Hillory asleep, I saw my mistake. Eve's form, sitting before the cabin, rose up mechanically, with a shout of alarm. Hillory had somehow rigged her up as a sentry.

The cabin door flew open and Hillory's bald head peered out. He saw me running up as fast as I could. His eyes popped. I must have seemed to him like a ghost from the dead—a robot's vengeful ghost.

But he darted back in, obviously to his helmet-control, and Eve's great form lumbered out to meet me. This I knew was inevitable, that I would have to battle Eve again.

"You escaped death somehow, Adam Link!" Eve's voice said. But I knew it was Hillory talking, through her. I had no way of telling whether he was perturbed or not. "I'll smash you completely this time, before my eyes!" he concluded defiantly.

I stopped ten feet before Eve's crouching, waiting form.

"Eve, listen. I know you can hear and understand." I went on rapidly. "I have to battle you, perhaps kill you! It is the only way. I must destroy you if I can, so that Hillory does not

destroy me. Hillory must not be allowed to introduce robot-slaves. This is all torture to you, darling, I know. You are fighting me when you don't want to. And I will be bent on your destruction—even, if necessary, that of your brain. Your life! I love you, Eve. Forgive me——”

“Love!” scoffed the robot before me. For a moment I thought it was Eve. Then I knew it was Hillory, hearing my words, and mocking. “Mechanical puppets, both of you!”

And then we were battling.

How can I describe that battle? A battle between two metal titans each with the ruthless machine-powered strength of dozens of men? It seemed unreal even to me.

We came together with a clang that resounded through the still mountain air like a cannon's roar. We locked arms, straining to throw each other. But now I was no longer at a disadvantage. We were equally matched. Two robots constructed for maximum power, speed and endurance. Unyielding metal against unyielding metal.

We looked into each other's eyes, told each other that though our bodies fought, our minds loved.

We broke apart. We came at each other with swinging arms. Mailed fists clanked against our adamant armors. The blows would have broken the back of an elephant. Within us, gears, cogs and wheels clashed in spurts and reverses as we weaved and danced around like boxers in a ring. We did not move as agilely as human boxers, however. The robot body must ever be inferior, in sheer efficiency, to nature's organic robots.

Suddenly my adversary—I no longer thought of her as Eve, but Hillory—stepped back, stooping. He shot forward in a football tackle, toppling me backward. Then, while I lay slightly stunned, he picked me up by heel and arm and flung me over his head. I landed with a metallic crash. The next second a huge boulder whizzed past my head. Then another . . . but I was dodging.

I was on my knees when he came at me, hammering at my skull-piece with his ponderous arms. I flung my arms

up in protection. He sought to destroy my brain. Once that was crushed, my powerful body was senseless junk.

I lunged forward at his knees, hurling him to the ground with a thunderous crash. I had my chance then—a perfect chance to stamp my iron heel down on the head, crunching it. But I didn't. Eve's eyes stared at me.

The chance passed, as my enemy rolled away, swung erect. But I had been a fool. One blow and Eve would have known non-existence. It would have been sheer mercy, to save her from a living death. If the chance came again, I would not hesitate. . . .

I hardly know what went on in the following minutes. Once my enemy picked up a boulder that ten men could not have budged and hurled it at me like a bomb. I dodged but it scraped my side, tearing three rivets loose. Again, he locked his arms around me from the back and crunched them together so fiercely that metal screamed. But I heaved him over my back, breaking the hold.

We fought on, like two mad giants. Our colossal blows at one another would have felled the largest dinosaur of Earth's savage past. Our mechanical apparatus within began to feel the repeated shock. Parts were being strained to the breaking point. It couldn't go on forever. One of us would break down.

I had a dim hope that my enemy would first. Hillory had had to fight by proxy, from a distance. I had fought from a closer range. I had gotten more telling blows in. His inner mechanisms had received the most terrific jolting. It was his second battle. I had punched at the head as often as I could, jarring the brain within—even though it was Eve's.

I cannot describe the hollow ache that came with the thought of winning by killing Eve. But I had to win. I had to save the future robot race from slavery. And the human race, beyond that, from the eventual catastrophe of such a stupid course.

I aimed another blow, straight for what would be the human jaw.

Suddenly it was over.

The other robot's arms dropped. There was a stunned, dazed air about the whole body. It swayed a moment, then its knee swivels bent and it crashed to Earth. It lay sprawled, eyes closed.

For a long moment I stared. I heard no sound from the other body. It lay utterly rigid, quiet. And then I realized it was dead. The brain had died first. My final blow had killed Eve!

I stood looking down at the battered wreck. I looked beyond it. I could almost see a body like Kay's lying there, a human body, the real Eve. Her eyes were closed. Perhaps there was a peaceful smile on the lips.

I turned slowly.

Slowly, my steps dragging, I strode for the cabin, to confront the man who had killed my Eve. The man who considered us nothing more than mechanical puppets, with which he could play as he desired.

Hillory darted out of the door. His face was a ghastly white. I clutched at him, caught his coat, but he tore loose. He ran, as though from some monster. And at that moment, I *was* a monster. I pounded after him. What things I screeched, I do not know.

He ran past the edge of the cliff, taking the shortest course to the road. Abruptly a great piece of the cliff-edge parted from its matrix. The stupendous vibrations of our battle had loosened the piece. It plunged below. Hillory was on it.

I dug my foot-plates into the soil and leaned backward, barely halting at the edge of the fissure. I looked down. I saw the white dot of Hillory's body land. I knew he hadn't survived the fall.

I am writing this now, in the cabin. When I am done, I will go with Eve. There may not be a heaven for robots. But neither is there a hell—unless Earth is it.





## TRUTH IS A PLAGUE

By DAVID WRIGHT O'BRIEN

*Suddenly the citizens of Weston found themselves in a plague of truth, and there was the devil to pay that a few lies might easily have prevented*

ALMOST everyone in Weston saw the planes that morning. Crowds pouring from the subways and elevateds on their way to work stopped in the middle of the business district to crane their necks heavenward in gaping astonishment. Traffic became horribly snarled, and the policemen let it stay that way while they, too, watched the writing in the sky.

Ordinary commercial smokewriting would not have merited more than a passing glance from the citizenry of Weston. But this was certainly different. To begin with there were ten planes printing the sky message. Secondly, they were flying so low that it appeared as if they would inevitably crash into the office buildings of the district. And at last but not least, there was the message itself.

“HONESTY,” it read, “IS THE BEST POLICY!”

The skywriting continued for another half hour, during which time the message must have been spelled out fifty times in all. Then the smoke planes departed, and Weston was shrouded by the cloak of blue vapor left in their wake.

On the twenty-first floor of the Radio Building, located in the heart of Weston, Jack Train, staff announcer for Station W-E-S-T, left the window where he had been watching the skywriting. It was two minutes to nine, and he was due in Studio F at nine o'clock.

“Whew!” snorted Train, “those ships were flying so low you could even smell the smoke.” He sniffed deeply as if to prove it to himself.

"Funny smoke at that," he said as he entered Studio F. "It's sort of sweet and fresh smelling."

• He cleared his throat and looked at the glass partition behind which the engineer was sitting. The engineer signalled the "on-the-air."

"Gooooood morning, ladies and gentlemen. This is Jack Train, your Pobo Toothpaste announcer, greeting you. Have you brushed your teeth today? Don't forget, Pobo is the Toothpaste Supreme. It gives your molars that brilliant luster so necessary to movie stars. It removes dirty, dingy stains."

As if in a dream, Train heard his voice continuing gaily on past the point where the commercial ended.

"Yes indeed. It removes stains. It removes enamel. Give it a little time and it removes your teeth, too!" . . .

The business man was coughing slightly. Smoke always made his throat harsh, and those blankety-blank skywriters spread enough smoke around the city to gag a man. He turned into his office building and was standing in front of the elevator when someone slapped him on the back. It was Jones, another business associate whom he hadn't seen in several weeks.

"Good old J. T.," boomed Jones. "Glad to see you, old boy. How have you been? Where've you been keeping yourself? Really great to see you, great!"

A mechanical smile came to the business man's face as he opened his mouth to reply. Something, at that moment, seized control of his tongue.

"You're a damned liar," he heard himself saying. "We hate one another's guts and you know it." . . .

Linda Meade, salesgirl in Weston's most exclusive millinery shop, brought forth another hat for Mrs. Blythe. It was the fourteenth hat that Linda had tried on the society matron in the last half hour. Mrs. Blythe coughed disapprovingly as Linda adjusted the hat. "Terribly smoky in here, m'dear."

"It's from those skywriters, modom," Linda explained

patiently. "They flew so low that the entire city seems to be filled with it."

Mrs. Blythe, hat on head, began peering this way and that into the mirror before her. She turned to Linda, smiling sweetly. "What do you think of this one, m'dear?"

"It makes you look," said Linda, horrified at what she knew was coming, "like a rather pretty mountain goat!"

Lance Randell placed the telephone back in its cradle and turned to face Professor Merlo. "It's a call from the airport," he stated. "The planes are all in. They've covered the city with our smokewriting."

Professor Merlo, a sparse, bird-like little man, ran a nervous hand through his white hair. "Fine," he said, "splendid. In another hour we should be getting reports on the effect of our experiment."

Randell grinned. "You mean *your* experiment, Professor. *Your* experiment, not mine."

"Without your financial backing," the Professor reminded him, "it would still be a dream. It is yours as much as mine." He beamed fondly on the rugged young man.

"It's still hard to believe," said Randell reflectively. "A gas made from Truth Serum. If it has effect, Professor, are you still sure it will make everyone tell the truth?"

"Yes, my boy. Dishonesty will be an impossibility, provided the gas works."

"Utopia?"

"Maybe. We must first see what effect it has on one city. If it works on Weston we can change the world. At the end of this hour, every citizen in Weston should be affected by it."

Lance Randell lit a cigarette as the Professor fell silent. For the first time in his life, Randell told himself, he was putting his wealth to a good use. A world of Truth! Little shivers of excitement ran through him at the thought of how near they were to changing the course of destiny. He drummed

his fingers impatiently on the arm of his chair. This waiting was nerve-racking.

Restlessly he went to the window and gazed for a moment at the serenity of the countryside. "Nice out here," he observed. "So quiet. But right this minute, this peace is killing me."

He turned back from the window. "If you don't mind, I'm going into the city."

Professor Merlo smiled. "Go ahead. I'm a little old to be impatient. I'll stay here to get the reports, and then you might drive back to give me a first hand account."

Randell grabbed his hat. "Swell. Soon as I take a look at our Utopia, I'll call you."

A few minutes later, behind the wheel of his roadster, Randell said to himself, "Somehow this is like—like playing God!"

It sent a shudder through him.

It was only a fifteen minute drive from Professor Merlo's suburban laboratories to the city limits of Weston, but Randell tried to make it in ten. Halfway there, two sirens began to scream behind him.

"Pull over," snarled the motorcycle copper on his right. Randell brought his car to an abrupt stop. His pursuers walked over to his car. They looked grim and determined and were pulling little black books from their hip pockets.

"Thought you'd shake us at the city limits, eh?"

"I suppose you're gonna tell us you didn't know how fast you was going?" said the second, a tall, morose fellow, the sarcasm dripping from him. "A lousy seventy-five per."

Randell would have sworn that it wasn't his own voice replying with such cheerful unconcern. "Yes," he heard himself saying, "I had been hoping to shake you fellows at the city limits. You wouldn't have been able to pinch me in Weston, y'know. I was not, however, doing seventy-five. Last time I looked, I was inching up close to ninety."

During the ominous silence that followed this announce-

ment, Randell collected the pieces. He sniffed the air suspiciously. Yes, there it was, that faint, sweet freshness! No wonder: the Truth Gas extended all the way to the city limits.

Suddenly the realization hit him. The officers, themselves, must be affected by the gas, too!

Randell kept his face straight during his next question. "Haven't you policemen ever broken the speeding laws?"

The policemen started to speak and stopped. They looked at each other queerly. "Of course," they declared in stupefied unison. "Lots of times!"

"Fun, ain't it?"

"Great sport," said the flabbergasted motorcycle cops.

"Now," said Randell severely, "after admitting that you break the speed laws yourselves, adding that it's great fun, do you still think you ought to give me a ticket?"

"No," said the morose cop, with an oddly bright glance. "It wouldn't be fair!"

"Well," said Randell, putting his car into gear, "so long, then!"

In his rear vision mirror Lance Randell could see the bewildered motor cops standing at the city limits, scratching their heads. He couldn't hold back any longer. He broke into peals of laughter. But he wasn't laughing by the time he arrived in Weston's business district.

### THE UNEXPECTED TRUTH

Doris Martin sat at her neat little desk in the ornate offices of Lance Randell Enterprises, Inc., sorting the batch of morning mail. The clock on her desk told her that it was almost ten o'clock. She sighed. The Boss could be expected about noon, if he came in at all that day.

At the thought of Lance Randell, Doris permitted herself another sigh, and still sighing she stared for a moment into mirror. An oval face, framed by auburn hair and presenting a pert, freckled nose, level gray eyes and mischievous mouth, stared back at her.

The mouth smiled, revealing an even row of dazzlingly white teeth. "You," declared the mouth, "might as well be an office fixture." Doris snapped the compact shut. She coughed slightly. The office seemed terribly smoky this morning. Probably due to those planes that had been sky-writing over the city.

She got up to close the window next to her desk when she saw the familiar blue roadster roll up in front of the building. She watched the rugged figure of her boss get quickly out of the car and walk swiftly to the entrance.

She walked back to her desk and sat down, making a conscientious effort to assemble the mail. It wasn't any use. There were little thoughts spinning around in her mind. . . .

Doris heard the doorknob turning, and her heart did a more than its usual routine flip-flop. Randell came into the room.

"How's the staff?"

He always said that to her. It was his standard form of greeting, rain or shine, day in and day out. And he seldom waited for an answer. He just kept walking into his office.

Doris followed him.

"Here's your mail, Mr. Randell," she said, keeping her voice carefully impersonal.

She watched him while he sorted swiftly through the letters, noticing the way he hunched his wide shoulders in pre-occupation. Then fearing that he might glance up, she turned back to some trivial matter.

"Ahhh." She knew from the sound of his sigh that he'd come to the letter he was looking for. The perfumed message from the bubble dancer.

"Darling," Randell read to himself, "even a day away from you seems like simply years." As he read on, all thoughts of the past twenty-four hours vanished. From time to time he repeated his sigh. Finally there was the signature, "Your darling Edie.\*"

He looked up from the letter, entranced. "She's wonderful," he said rhetorically to his secretary, "isn't she?"

"Do you mean Miss Dalmar?" Doris heard herself reply.

Randell seemed startled back to reality. He wasn't expecting an answer to his statement. "Why, yes," he said, "who else would I mean?"

Doris was flustered. Something had happened. She never meant to say that. It just popped out, and to her astonishment a torrent of words were following her first unintended sentence. She heard her voice continue.

"If you mean she's wonderful," Doris was saying, "I don't think she is. As a matter of fact I think she's nothing but a cheap, gold-digging little vixen. If you'd remove her warpaint, keep her away from the beauty parlor, and eliminate the dubious glamour of her profession, you'd see nothing but a washed-out, frizzled haired little know-nothing!"

Randell's jaw was hanging foolishly agape at the outburst.

"You are just sap enough," Doris went on, "to think that she loves you. She hasn't room enough in that shallow heart of hers for love of anything but money and herself. You have plenty of money, and that's what she's after. Everyone in town knows it but you." Her voice was shaking now, and she knew that she would be crying in another minute.

Automatically Doris was picking up her things, moving toward the door. "It probably never entered your skull that there might be someone in the world who'd care for you even if you didn't have a——"

She was at the door, now, her hand on the knob, speaking again. "It probably never occurred to you that someone could love you so much that nothing else mattered except to see you do something with your utterly pleasant and equally worthless life besides waste it on a bubble dancer!"

For five full minutes Lance sat on the edge of his desk, staring at the door. "Well, I'll be damned," he kept repeating to himself. "Well, I'll be damned!"

His brain was going through the futile thought mechanisms that confront any man when trying to arrive at a logical reason for the actions of a woman. Suddenly the explanation flashed before him. He had forgotten all about the experiment, all

about the gas! Doris was affected by the Truth Gas, that explained it all!

But if she—no, it couldn't be. Lance tried to eliminate the logical conclusion to his deductions. With a sinking feeling he was realizing that if the Truth Gas was the cause of her outburst, what she said must have been true, even about Edie!

Lance dashed for the door. There was only one answer to the agony of doubt that filled his mind. Edie was the only person who could supply that answer!

### THE PLAGUE GROWS

The ash tray next to the radio in Professor Merlo's study was heaped with cigarette stubs. Slumped in an armchair before the radio ever since Randell's departure, Professor Merlo had been listening to news flashes from the scene of his Truth Gas experiment.

To be precise about it, the first bulletin was read at 9:45.

"The Weston Board of Health," said the announcer, "is investigating the rumor that an odd epidemic of insanity has broken forth in the heart of the city's business district. Victims of this strange malady are reported to be possessed with the desire to make preposterous and often insulting statements. As yet, however, these rumors have not been authenticated." Professor Merlo smiled. The announcer concluded with, "This bulletin has come to you through the courtesy of the Weston Daily Herald, the World's Worst Newspaper!"

Professor Merlo had guffawed. Now several hours after that, however, his laughter was changed to shocked amazement.

"It can't be so," the white haired little man was telling himself. "All this is but the first spasm. When it has spent itself, everything will settle into our expected pattern. Out of it will grow perfect order and Utopia. It is only natural that confusion should be the first result of such an experiment. By noon everything should be well again!"

But even as he spoke, the Professor had a feeling of uneasi-



ness. He'd been saying the same thing for the last hour and a half. The Professor gulped, his Adam's apple bobbing along his scrawny neck like an egg in a hose. He wished fervently that Randell would return.

The radio news announcer was jabbering excitedly once more. Dully, like a man expecting an unavoidable blow, Merlo turned his head to listen.

"As the strange epidemic of mass insanity grows in Weston, today, it has been learned that three more suicides have occurred in the business district. These happened when the owners of Weston's three largest department stores leaped to their deaths rather than meet the financial ruin facing their establishments."

The Professor shuddered. He was expecting something like that ever since the bulletin of an hour ago which stated that the clerk's in the downtown department stores were selling all goods at less than cost price. Fifteen minutes after that particular bulletin it was announced that delighted shoppers were buying up every bit of stock in the stores—at a net loss of several million dollars to the owners of the stores.

The announcer was babbling on, "This brings today's death rate to the staggering total of one hundred persons. Many of these, as you probably learned in previous flashes, were victims of murder."

Professor Merlo cringed, remembering the thirty-or-so husbands whose wives dispatched them to their Maker over blood-stained breakfast tables, the fifty-odd revenge slayings perpetrated by persons who learned of long-concealed treacheries by friends or partners, the suicides whose doctors were forced to admit that they were victims of incurable diseases.

"God," Professor Merlo muttered, covering his face with his hands, "God!"

"Police have stated," continued the announcer, "that they are as yet unable to control the army of a thousand men and women who have formed a marching brigade through the streets of the city. These marchers, victims of the strange malady, were all thrown out of work early this morning when

they told insulted employers what they thought of them. At present they are fairly orderly, but it is feared that, once they realize their power, looting and bloodshed will result."

Professor Merlo winced, thinking of the hundreds more who would join the marchers the moment the department stores shut down.

The telephone was jangling insistently, and Merlo crossed the room slowly to where it stood. He knew what the call would probably be. He'd had nine of them already. He picked the receiver off the hook. "Yes?"

"Hello, Professor Merlo?" a voice on the other end inquired. In an almost toneless whisper the Professor admitted it was.

"This is J. Weems Sharp," said the voice. The Professor was sure of the call now. "Yes," said Merlo, "I think I understand what you're calling for. You want to tell me that you're withdrawing your endowment from my Civic Scientific Foundation."

The voice was amazed. "Yes, that's right. How did you know?"

Merlo ignored the question. "You want to withdraw your endowment from the Foundation because you are quite willing to admit that you don't give a damn for the betterment of your fellows."

"That's right," agreed the voice. "I never cared what happened to the masses. No sense in my wasting money on other people when I can keep it all for myself. I was a chump to let you talk me into it for the past ten years. Now it can go to the devil, I—" Professor Merle put his thumb down on the hook, breaking the connection.

"That makes the tenth one," he told himself bitterly, beginning to pace the floor. "They can all tell the truth, now. They'll admit that they're miserly monsters, and refuse to give any more to scientific charity. It's just about the end of my Foundation. Oh Lord," he thought, "for ten years I've been able to play on the hypocrisy of those money-bags, making them shell out money for the good of their fellowman, pleasing their egos by giving their charity a lot of publicity. But

now," he shuddered, "they admit that they don't give a damn for charity!"

The Civic Scientific Foundation had been the pride and joy of Merlo's existence, and seeing it crumble was one of the hardest blows of the day. Ten years of progress was being wiped out in the space of several hours.

It was clear to the Professor, now, what he and Lance failed to take into consideration before the experiment. People affected by the Truth Gas would not only tell what they *knew* to be true, but would also admit to things which had been lying under the hypocritical cloak of their subconscious thoughts for years. In other words, the gas was exposing ideas which people never even previously suspected they cherished!

"Something," muttered the tight-lipped scientist, "has to be done, and done fast." He paused before the window. And as he looked out across the country-side, it seemed as though nature itself had fallen under the mood of gloomy foreboding. The sun was hidden behind ominous formations of black rain-laden clouds.

#### LANCE MAKES A TEST

If Lance Randell hadn't been so preoccupied with the doubts that clouded his romance he might have noticed the growing confusion in Weston. As it was, however, he looked neither left nor right as he put his high-powered roadster into gear and shot out for the Weston Tower Hotel where the blonde Edie had an apartment.

The crowds that were beginning to surge through the streets escaped his notice, the clang of speeding ambulances and police wagons failed to enter his brain, so one-tracked was his determination.

In a little less than three minutes after he'd left the office Randell drew up in front of the elaborate canopy marking the entrance to the skyscraping Weston Tower Hotel. Edie's apartment was on the fortieth floor, and Randell didn't bother to telephone from the lobby. He crossed the room swiftly and stepped into an elevator.

Edie Dalmar, when she opened the door, was astonished to see a breathless and strangely intense Lance Randell standing there with his hat in his hand. For a moment her oval, doll-like features registered amazement, then Weston's Loveliest Bubble Dancer regained her composure. She arched delicately penciled eyebrows in a smile.

"Daahhling, what a surprise! What are you doing heah at this hour?"

Lance entered the room and put his hat on the mantel. He turned and spoke.

"Edie, there are some things I have to ask you. It's very important, and I don't want you to be angry with me."

Edie moved sinuously across the room, smoothing her blonde hair with scarlet nailed fingers. She sat down on the couch and turned violet eyes on Lance. "Why, deah, ah don't know jes' what it's all about, but go right ahead and ask me anything you want to."

Lance removed an enormous, floppy Cupid doll from the cushion next to her and sat down. For a moment he was silent. This wasn't going to be easy. He knew that any question he'd ask would bring a starkly truthful answer. But he had to know. He forced himself to speak.

"Edie, do you really love me?"

The bubble dancer opened her slightly petulant lips to protest, but Lance went on. "I mean, do you love me for myself? Is it, is it me that you love, or is it my money?"

There, Lance told himself, it was done. He felt his heart hammering wildly as Edie started to speak. He felt as though the answer would mean the difference between life and death.

"Why, daahhling, of course I love you! Honey, whatever made you fancy that I cared a speck about your money? I'd marry you even if you were a pauper!"

Randell was ecstatic in his relief. They were all wrong! Doris had been a spiteful, jealous wench. Edie was true! He knew it all along, Edie was true! She didn't give a damn for his money. She loved him for himself alone.

By now, however, Edie was pouting. Two enormous tears

began to trickle down her cheeks. She was sobbing silently, dabbing at her eyes with a scrap of lace.

"Honey," said Randell, sensing that he had wounded her feelings, "I never meant to doubt you, honestly. I'm sorry I ever asked you, but I was desperately unsure. I had to know. Please forgive me."

Eddie, however, was not so easily consoled. She increased her snuffling. "You thought I, I, I, I was cheap!" she wailed.

Lance Randell had a sudden inspiration. "Eddie!"

No reply, merely more snuffling.

"Eddie," he repeated. This time she looked up.

"What?" she asked between sobs.

"You know that coat you admired so much the other day?"

Eddie's snuffling lessened perceptibly. "Yes?"

"I'd like you to have it as a present, dear."

Gone were the tears, silenced was the sobbing. Eddie's doll face was wreathed in smiles. She was in his arms.

"Daahhling," breathed Eddie.

"My dear," said Randell.

The floppy Cupid doll looked up from the floor where it had been dropped, its button eyes shining cynically.

With singing heart Lance left Eddie's apartment. The world was once more righted, and now he had time to think of the second most important thing in his life, the experiment. Then, too, he'd almost forgotten that Merlo was waiting for a call from him back in the laboratories.

He glanced at his watch. 10:30. Plenty should be happening by now. The gas had had more than an hour and a half to take effect on the populace. There should be some interesting developments. There were.

As he stepped from the elevator into the lobby, Randell was immediately aware that things were popping in the Weston Tower Hotel. There had been a scant twenty people sitting about in the spacious room when Randell had first arrived there. Now, not more than a half hour later, the place was literally jammed with people. Everyone seemed to be

talking at once, and in the voices there was current of hysteria.

The fever spot seemed to be located around and Randell began elbowing through the that direction.

*"Stand back, buddy!"*

Lance Randell was in the front of the Desk, when a blue-clad arm shot out to stop noticed, then, that a cordon of eight policemen a space around the Desk, and were holding

In the middle of the space, face downward man dressed in morning coat and striped t was pillowed in a pool of his own blood, a held a death-like clutch on an automatic pis

Horrified, Randell addressed the police his way.

"What happened, Officer?"

"Suicide," was the terse reply. "Shot I were on the way to get him."

A pop-eyed little man on his right sup the rest of the information. "It's Gordon man blurted. "He's killed himself, rather t

Gordon Carver! Randell was stunned. G Weston's greatest philanthropist, most char a leading citizen! He looked at the mill queerly sprawled out across the cold marbl eyed champ was still talking.

"Yeah," said Pop-Eyes, "he called the Po an hour ago, confessed that he had comm years ago, and was an escaped convict. He t

## TRUTH IS A PLAGUE

voices all around him were still floating to his con-  
 "What's happened to this town?" "It's the end of t  
 "Terrible, out in the streets, rioting." "I saw a little  
 killed . . ."

Randell found a telephone booth, managed to pu  
 With a hand that trembled slightly, he fished th  
 pockets until he found a nickel. Then he was di  
 fessor Merlo's number. After what seemed like an  
 heard the old scientist's voice.

"Professor, it's me—Lance. I—" he was cut o  
 sharp voice on the other end of the wire.

"Yes," he heard Merlo saying, "I know all abo  
 it all through news flashes. We haven't any tim  
 Have to act quickly. Where are you?"

"At the Weston Towers, but—" Randell began.

"Stay there," Merlo continued, "I'll meet you  
 as possible. Every moment that this gas stays ove  
 means more lives. I think I've hit on a solution."

"How? What?" Randell began. Then he curs  
 had hung up.

What did the old man mean? What possible solu  
 there be? They had no anti-toxin to the gas. They  
 it would wear off in twenty-four hours, of cour  
 twenty-four hours—. He shuddered at the thought  
 was in store for Weston if the gas held that long!

A feeling of utter hopelessness, complete futility  
 Randell as he stepped back into the lobby of th  
 Towers. Another twenty-four hours before the g  
 drift from the city. Twenty-four hours in which l

was still time. Desperately, Randell began to push back through the crowded lobby toward the elevators.

### LANCE GETS A SHOCK

Professor Merlo waited a moment after hanging up on Lance Randell. Then he picked up the telephone again and dialed a number. As the receiver buzzed in his ear he drummed his fingers impatiently on the table, staring out the window at the darkening skies.

"It should work," the old man muttered to himself. "It has to work." Then he heard a voice on the other end of the wire.

"Weston Contractors," said the voice.

Merlo began speaking excitedly, emphatically, allowing his listener no time for interruptions. After several minutes he concluded, "Is everything straight? It's a question of time. I want them there as quickly as possible."

"Certainly, Professor," was the reply. "I understand. We'll get them there as fast as is humanly possible. But such an enormous load of sand, I can't imagine what you intend——"

"Damn you," shouted Merlo, his face purpling, "you don't have to imagine. All you have to do is get them there, and get them there in a hurry!"

"Yes, Professor," the voice was startled, "never fear. They'll be there on time."

Merlo slammed the instrument back on its cradle and stood up. He seized his hat from the top of a bookcase and stamped out of the room. A few moments later he was turning his black sedan out of his garage and onto the highway leading to Weston. Then he pushed the accelerator down to the floorboards. . . .

Less than a mile from the Weston Tower Hotel, a pretty, red-headed young girl was being swept along by the semi-frantic crowds thronging the business district. For the first time since she dashed tearfully from the offices of Lance Randell Enterprises, over an hour ago, Doris Martin was becoming aware of the frenzied hysteria gripping the city.



Despair at what she said to the man she loved had driven her into the streets, made her wander about aimlessly, until finally, Doris Martin knew what she had to do. And she was going to do it. No one on earth could stop her.

People were passing her, crowds elbowed by, the ordinary hum of the city increased to a tone approaching an angry howl, but Doris walked on, scarcely conscious of anything but the pavement beneath her feet. Where she was going, how long she'd been walking, nothing made any difference.

"Watch where ye're goin', sister!"

Doris had a confused vision of a fat red face peering angrily at her. A sweaty, shirt-sleeved fellow in a sailor straw hat had wrapped his pudgy hand around her arm and jerked her backward. Her first instinct was one of anger, and she started to speak.

"Ya wanna get kilt?" The fat man was pointing to the cars rushing by in the street, and then Doris realized that they were standing on the curbing, that the fat fellow had pulled her out of the path of the automobiles hurtling past them.

Her ears were torn by the screech of hastily applied automobile brakes. Out of the corner of her eye she saw a black sedan jolting to an abrupt stop. Terrified, she stood rooted in the center of the street.

"Good God, girl," someone shouted. "I might have killed you!" Doris saw that it was the driver of the sedan, and that he was climbing out of his car. The driver was walking over to her now, his face white, jaws shut.

"Doris!" The driver stopped short in shocked amazement.

It was then that she recognized Professor Merlo. He had her by the arm, was propelling her to his car and talking rapidly. "What are you doing here? Life isn't safe anywhere in Weston. You must be mad to be roaming the streets while this turmoil is raging. Don't you know, haven't you seen it?"

They were in Merlo's sedan now, once more moving along in the stream of traffic. Doris found her voice at last. "Where

are you going, Professor? What, what has happened to the city?"

"Plenty," Merlo snapped. "We're going to the Weston Towers. Lance is there, waiting for me. There's a lot to be done. Can't explain it all now."

At the mention of Lance, Doris paled. "Good!" she said firmly. "I was on my way there. I've a little business of my own there."

"Not with Lance, I suspect?" said Merlo, looking at her with less surprise than he might have.

"No," Doris' voice was amazingly different. "I'll tend to that——"

Suddenly the little black sedan shot across an intersection at the same moment that a lumber truck came hurtling through from the side street. It was too late for Merlo to swing the sedan out of its path. The sickening, futile squealing of brakes preceded the rending crash of a side-on collision. In the blackness that was closing around him, Merlo heard a woman scream. . . .

It had only been his dogged determination that enabled Lance Randell to get Edie Dalmar to leave her apartment. At first she was coyly amused at his insistence that she dress and leave with him immediately. Then, as she began to notice the unsmiling set to his mouth, the feverish gleam in his eyes, she became a little frightened and decided to humor him.

They stepped out of the elevator into the lobby and Randell looked swiftly through the crowd in an effort to see if Merlo had arrived yet. Edie tugged at his sleeve.

"Jus' what is this heah all about, daahling?" she demanded.

Randell tore his eyes from the crowd. Wordlessly he took her arm, piloting her across the room to a quiet corner. They found a lounge.

"What's this all about?" repeated Edie, her voice oddly different in accent. She jerked her arm out of his grasp.

"Look, Honey," he began in a rush of words. "As I said

before. Something terrible has happened to the city. I can't tell you any more than that for the present. You'll have to trust me. It isn't safe in Weston any more, and I'm going to get you out of here as soon as Merlo comes!"

Edie's starry eyes narrowed perceptibly. "Have you gone daffy?"

Lance Randell groaned. Then, remembering Edie had seen nothing of the effects of the gas, hadn't even heard of it yet, he made another effort to explain.

"Listen, Darling. Weston is a city suddenly gone mad. Something has happened. It's no longer safe to go out into the streets. Business is being ruined. Financial houses are collapsing. Lives are being taken recklessly. You must understand me, you have to believe me. If this keeps up, dear, everything will be ruined. It begins to look like you'll have to keep your promise about marrying me even if I were a pauper." Lance stopped abruptly. Edie was staring at him strangely.

"What's that you just said?" she demanded frigidly.

"I said that all business is being ruined. It means that all my investments will be wiped out if this continues, that I'll be a pauper," said Lance in confusion.

"Are you sure of that?" Her tone was like an Arctic breeze.

"I'm afraid so." Randell had pushed his hat back on his forehead and was staring in amazement at the expression that crossed Edie's face.

"Then," said Edie deliberately, "you might as well get out of my sight, you boob. Do you think for a minute that I have any time for a pauper. Why, you sap, all I ever wanted was your dough. This little gal looks out for herself. If you haven't got the bankroll I can get a guy that has." She was standing up now, looking scornfully at him. "Excuse me, chump. I'm leaving. Don't bother to come again!"

Feeling as if he had just been thoroughly gone over by a steam roller, Randell sat gazing in aching astonishment at Edie's retreating back.

## SAND—AND RAIN

For a time Lance Randell was unable to do more than stare dumbly into space. Edie Dalmar's look had affected him just as forcibly as a left-handed punch, leaving him dazed, uncomprehending, paralyzed. His reactions were those of hurt and bewilderment and heartbreak. Then reason began to return, and he demanded for an explanation of her actions.

She undoubtedly was acting under the influence of the gas, he was certain of that much. But why had she told him the truth when he talked to her in her laboratory? Didn't the gas influence her until they were in the lobby?

Suddenly Randell looked at his watch. He had seen at that moment that Merlo should be somewhere in the laboratory. The Professor had had more than enough time to get there. His personal troubles vanished as he realized that Weston was coming to the brink of utter madness. And then, as he looked in the direction of the revolving doors at the end of the lobby, he gasped.

A grotesque caricature of a man was entering the lobby. He was a battered fedora, mashed down over his eyes, and a blood-caked brow. His suit was in shreds, the left pants leg torn off at the knee, and his hands sticky with oil and blood. He looked wild and desperate in an instant—

Randell gasped again, "Professor Merlo!"

## TRUTH IS A PLAGUE

"Where is Doris—" But Randell stopped, fighting all other thoughts from his mind. One thing alone was important than any others. "Remember you said you had a solution?"

"Yes," Merlo said quietly. "It's in the weather."

Lance Randell felt suddenly sick inside. The old man was out of his head, delirious from the accident. His mind was dry, and all at once he knew it was all over.

They were beaten. There would be no solution. The only chance of saving the city was in the Professor's plan. And that plan had evidently been jarred from the old man's mind in the collision. Automatically he listened, and the Professor went on:

"Did you notice the weather?"

"No," Randell said, trying to keep the bitterness from his voice.

"Rainclouds," said Merlo, "huge formations of the kind that came out of Weston. I called the weather bureau. But they said it wouldn't be expected until evening. Then it will be too late. We must wait for evening, Lance. We must have rain, now. If we wait, it will be too late." The Professor stopped, and looked at Lance strangely. "My God, Lance, don't you see what I'm talking about? Do you think I'm out of my head? Rain! Rain! Save us, man. Remember your elementary chemistry. Rain will destroy our Truth Gas, will disintegrate its molecular formation! Water can do that to gas, don't you see?"

There was life once more in Randell's expression, in his eyes as he spoke. Gone was his conviction that the Professor was babbling. "Good Lord, I see what you mean. I

and smoking orchards. Those planes are going to fly above the raincloud formations. They're going to *bomb* the clouds, with sand!" \*

"But——"

"With sand!" repeated Merlo. "The sand will shatter the cloud formations, release the rain on the city immediately!"

Lance Randell was on his feet. "You say the planes and the sand are waiting at the Airport?"

Merlo nodded. "I'd planned that we both go to the field. It will make it easier if there are two of us to direct the operations."

The youth helped the old scientist to his feet. "Think you'll be okay, Professor?"

"I think so," said Merlo. But his face was a sickening white.

Randell looked quickly at the Professor, indecision crossing his face. At that instant confusion broke forth in the lobby of Weston Towers, signalled by a hoarse shout of terror from the direction of the elevators. Then a woman screamed and every voice in the place became raised in bedlam.

The Professor and Randell wheeled in the direction of this fresh outburst. People were rushing back and forth in front of a corner elevator like so many frightened chickens. They seemed desperately eager to get away from that particular spot.

Then they saw the cause of the terror, a mousey little man who was standing alone in the elevator, shouting hysterically. The fellow had one hand on the controls and the other was clutching a small, vial-like object.

"Going up, going up, going up," his voice carried to where Randell and Professor Merlo were standing.

"Good Lord," someone cried, "stop him before it's too late."

"Get the Manager," a woman was screaming. "He wants to kill himself."

\* Nothing is so tantalizing to drought sufferers as rainclouds which, because of some peculiar quirk in atmospheric conditions, refuse to precipitate rain. In the Southwestern section of the country, considerable success in the past was achieved by airplanes which sprayed or "bombed" with sand stubborn rainclouds above drought-stricken crops or sun-baked city streets. Action of the sand on the clouds released the rain.—Ed.

Lance cursed in anguish. Another one. He struggled through the retreating crowds until he stood behind a cordon of the more courageous spectators, some twenty feet from the elevator row. Merlo had followed directly behind him.

"Get back," the bespectacled little fellow in the elevator was shouting. "Get away from here, all of you, unless you want to come with me!"

The man peered owlshly at the crowd through the thick lenses of his glasses, raising the object in his hand aloft. "This is nitroglycerine! It can blow us all to eternity! *Stand back!*"

Instinctively, the row in front of Lance and Merlo surged back. Lance turned to Merlo. "It's another suicide attempt!"

The little man was shouting at the crowd again. "I'm going up through this roof. Up in a blaze of glory. Glory, for the first time in my miserable life! I've been kidding myself too long. My worthless hide doesn't mean a thing in the scheme of things, and all the time I've been a miserable failure, a fraud. But this morning I stopped lying to myself. Now I'm going out—out and up—with this nitro in my hand! Who wants to come along, eh? Who wants to come along?"

The Professor put a hand to his head, wiping away beads of perspiration. He looked at Randell. "There's nothing we can do about it."

"Good God," Randell cried, "we can't let him kill himself. It's our fault if he dies!" His voice had become anguished, impassioned, and Merlo placed a quieting hand on his arm.

"Steady, Lance. We couldn't foresee all this. There's nothing we can do about it. Every minute we stand here means at least ten such similar deaths throughout the city. Our duty is at the Airport. Let's get out of here, immediately."

Suddenly Lance Randell trembled. Then he quieted.

"You're right. Sorry. Let's get going!" He turned, pushing back through the crowd, when he noticed that Merlo was not moving. The Professor stood frozen motionless, staring in astonishment at the elevator.

"*Going up! Going up!*" Randell heard the demoniacal little man chanting. He also heard a gasp from the crowd, heard

Merlo mutter a familiar name incredulously. Randell spun around to face the elevator.

"Doris!" the name tumbled from his lips in horror, for from a side entrance to the lobby Doris Martin was walking in a direct line toward the madman's elevator!

In the brief agonized glimpse Lance Randell had of the girl he could see instantly that something was wrong. She walked with the measured step of a sleepwalker, her face blank, eyes unseeing. And in the shocked hush that fell over the lobby he heard her muttering almost inaudibly.

"Lance Randell, you're a fool. A fool." She seemed to be sobbing. "I love you, Lance. She'll never take you . . ."

"*Going up! Going up!*" The wild cry of the maniac rang out through the sudden silence like an unclean cackle. He swung the grilled doors of the elevator open momentarily, and in that instant Doris Martin, unseeingly, stepped inside the cage.

"Ha—ha! Going up, sister! Glad you're coming along!"

As the elevator door clanged shut Lance Randell's mind became a crimson blot. With an animal snarl he lashed out at the bodies that had blocked his way to the elevator, beating a path before him, hurling himself through the opening. He didn't notice Merlo barging along behind him. He didn't notice anything but the cage with the little suicide and the dazed young girl.

A wild laugh came from the tiny cage, and Randell shouted as he saw it start upward. The light above the door flickered white. Merlo was beside Randell by this time, grabbing him by the arm. He wheeled as he felt the old man's fingers digging into his sleeve.

"What in the hell are we standing here for?" Randell yelled. "Doris is in that elevator, and by God I'm going after her!"

"Get a grip on yourself, Lance," Merlo's fingers dug deeper into his arm and his voice was low, fierce. "Remember what I told you, man. For every moment that we're delayed from the Airport, something like this happens somewhere else in Weston. We've wasted too much time already!"



The Professor's voice brought calm back to Randell—calm and agony at the full import of the situation. "Professor," he muttered shakily, "Doris will be blown to eternity. I have to follow!"

"You'll be sacrificing a hundred lives for one."

Randell looked at the small puddle of blood forming beneath Merlo's leg. "Can you make it alone, Professor?"

"You love the girl?" The Professor's voice was soft.

"Yes . . . I never realized . . ." said Randell, and he realized with bitter irony that the Truth Gas was at work once more.

Merlo held out his hand. "I'll make it, Lance, somehow. God give you luck, lad, and speed!" Then the Professor was gone, moving unsteadily off through the crowds. The open door of an adjoining elevator caught Randell's eye and he stepped toward it without hesitation.

"Don't be a fool," snapped a voice directly behind him.

Lance Randell wheeled to see a tall, broad shouldered fellow standing behind him. "Keep out of that elevator. Get back into the crowd. There's a lunatic loose in an elevator with a vial of nitroglycerine. We're clearing the lobby."

"Thanks," Randell grated, "for the information!" As he spoke his fist swung simultaneously. The efficient-looking young gentleman went down heavily. The elevator doors closed with a wild clang.

Lance Randell grabbed the controls of the car, throwing them forward instantly. In his heart was the horrible fear that he'd wasted too much time, that he would be too late. The car lurched forward from the quick start, then shot upward. From the moment when he first spied the insane operator in the elevator, something had been hammering at the back of his consciousness. It seemed to hinge, somehow with Edie Dalmar. And now, with every second holding the answer between life and death, he racked his brain in an effort to hit upon a plan.

He knew that his only hope of stopping the suicide, saving Doris, lay in that elusive subconscious discovery. He glanced swiftly about the narrow confines of the cage, mentally thank-

ing God that it was not one of the modern, room-type elevators enclosed on all sides. Instead, the upper half of the walls were merely spaced iron grillwork, making it possible to see across the shaft from one elevator to another.

He peered out through the grill. With a silent prayer of thanks he saw that the cables in the adjoining shaft were moving slowly.

"He's taking his time," he muttered. "If I can catch the car before he drives it through the roof I—" Suddenly the elusive plan that had been hiding in his subconscious was crystallized for Randell. He had it.

Of course! The Truth Gas didn't carry to the upper floors of the hotel. It was a heavier than air substance. That accounted for Edie being unaffected by it when she was in her apartment!

His plan was clear in his mind, now. He knew that his one chance of saving Doris lay in forcing the lunatic to the upper floors of the Hotel without discharging the nitro. Once above the gas, the little man would return to normality, would listen to reason.

The little car shot past the twenty-fifth floor. Five floors more and Randell caught a glimpse of the understructure of his quarry's elevator.

Face taut, Randell began to slow his own cage. Three seconds, and he was adjoining the death car. He threw his controls back to stop.

"*Ha!*" He could see the crazed little man turn from where he stood at the controls of the car. He peered through the grillwork at Randell.

Suddenly the suicide's voice cackled, "So you want to come along, too?"

His eyes sweeping desperately across the car in an effort to see Doris, Randell called, "Where's the girl?"

The little man glanced downward in devilish amusement. "She's lying on the floor. Passed out a moment after we started up."

Randell was talking rapidly, "You can't take that girl to her

death. For the love of heaven, man, she has nothing to do with you or your life. Let her out!"

Another hysterical burst of laughter from the demented little fellow was the only answer. Randell opened his mouth to speak, when the other car began to ascend once more. Cursing, he threw the controls forward again.

"32" flashed by.

"33" dropped past. "36" faded by, and cold sweat trickled off Randell's forehead, smarting into his eyes. He forced himself to look upward, catching a glimpse of the car above. Suddenly he cursed. Something was wrong.

The other car had come to a stop, and was bobbing between floors. "He's going to drop the nitro," Randell thought desperately. He slowed his tiny cage down until he was beside the other.

Looking across the shaft, he was startled. Neither Doris nor the nitro-man was visible!

Instinctively he called out, "Doris!" The silent elevator shafts echoed and re-echoed his cry.

He set his controls, rushing to the grillwork wall, trying to get a better view of the cage in the opposite shaft. Then he saw them. In one corner of the elevator Doris was lying face downward. In the front, next to the controls, the madman was stretched out flat on his back. Next to his open hand was the vial of nitroglycerine—rolling gently back and forth on the floor of the car!

With a numbing sensation of horror, Randell saw that the controls of the car were not set correctly, that they might slip any moment!

Steeling himself, he swept his eyes across the cage in the opposite shaft, looking frantically for some solution to the dilemma. The car was stuck between floors, making it impossible to get to it from a hall door.

Randell realized as much instantly. There was only one other solution, and breathing a silent supplication for time, he set to work on the wall grillwork of his cage.

Precious moments rushed by as he began the laborious effort

required to unscrew the thick screen fastenings. It would have been a difficult enough job with tools, but Randell had only his hands, and inside of two minutes they were torn and bleeding.

Sobbing under his breath, knowing that the controls might loosen in the opposite car at any instant, Lance Randell paused only to wipe away the sweat that clouded his eyes. Then at last one side of the screen was loosened.

It was enough. Calling on every last ounce of strength, he pulled backward on the grilling, bending it enough to push his head and shoulders through the scant opening. Hoisting himself up to the ledge where the screening began, he stood teetering, looking down thirty-seven floors of elevator shaft.

He closed his eyes for a moment, grating his teeth against the pain he knew was coming, then seized one of the black, greasy cables with his lacerated hands. It was an almost super-human act of will that let him swing his feet from the comparatively safe ledge of his own car out into space.

For an agonized second, Randell was sure that his grip on the cable was loosening, that he was going to pitch headlong down the shaft. He wrapped his legs around the huge black coil, hoping to God that the grease wouldn't make such a grip impossible. It was now or never.

One hand lost the cable. The motion made him slide several sickening feet. His hand caught the grilling on the death car, held him there.

With his free hand Randell went to work on the screen fastenings of the cage in which Doris was lying. Time was a blur now, and every frantic second spent in tearing at the bolt fastenings seemed like a section of eternity. He knew he wasn't going to make it, felt his legs growing weak in their grip around the cable, felt the flesh tearing open wider and wider on the hand clutching the coil. But he continued feverishly.

The grilled siding was almost opened, one more bolt, it was loose. . . .

Through the daze of sweat, exhaustion and pain Randell knew that he had to throw all his weight over the half-side of

the death car, and as he realized the fact, he caught a split-second vision of the vial of nitroglycerine on the floor, of the control lever that might slip with the slightest jarring of the cage.

He grabbed, releasing all but his legs from the cable, got his elbows over the side of the car. Now his legs were free, and he was clambering into the tiny elevator, making for the controls. . . .

Doris stood close against Lance Randell, and his arms were around her. They stood in the street outside the Weston Towers. The angry howl of the city had subsided to a tranquil hum, above which could be heard the drone of many airplanes, growing softer, fainter.

Tiny grains of sand were falling in many places over the city, but they were unfelt, locked in droplets of rain. And the rain kept falling gently, steadily, washing away the madness and sorrow and death that a plague of truth had given freedom.

Lance Randell looked down at the girl.

"Why, darling," he said softly, "you're crying!"

She turned her face upward. "No," she murmured, "it's just the rain on my cheeks."

He drew her tighter. "Liar," he whispered. . . .



## THE FOURTH-DIMENSIONAL DEMONSTRATOR

*A delightful piece of satirical fiction*

By MURRAY LEINSTER

PETE DAVIDSON was engaged to Miss Daisy Manners of the Green Paradise floor show. He had just inherited all the properties of an uncle who had been an authority on the fourth dimension, and he was the custodian of an unusually amiable kangaroo named Arthur. But still he was not happy; it showed this morning.

Inside his uncle's laboratory, Pete scribbled on paper. He added, and ran his hands through his hair in desperation. Then he subtracted, divided, and multiplied. But the results were invariably problems as incapable of solution as his deceased relative's fourth-dimensional equations. From time to time a long, horselike, hopeful face peered in at him. That was Thomas, his uncle's servant, whom Pete was afraid he had also inherited.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Thomas tentatively.

Pete leaned harassedly back in his chair.

"What is it, Thomas? What has Arthur been doing now?"

"He is browsing in the dahlias, sir. I wished to ask about lunch, sir. What shall I prepare?"

"Anything!" said Pete. "Anything at all! No. On second thought, trying to untangle Uncle Robert's affairs calls for brains. Give me something rich in phosphorus and vitamins; I need them."

"Yes, sir," said Thomas. "But the grocer, sir——"

"Again?" demanded Pete hopelessly.

"Yes, sir," said Thomas, coming into the laboratory. "I hoped, sir, that matters might be looking better."

Pete shook his head, regarding his calculations depressedly.

"They aren't. Cash to pay the grocer's bill is still a dim and misty hope. It is horrible, Thomas! I remembered my uncle as simply reeking with cash, and I thought the fourth dimension was mathematics, not debauchery. But Uncle Robert must have had positive orgies with quanta and space-time continua! I shan't break even on the heir business, let alone make a profit!"

Thomas made a noise suggesting sympathy.

"I could stand it for myself alone," said Pete gloomily. "Even Arthur, in his simple, kangaroo's heart, bears up well. But Daisy! There's the rub! Daisy!"

"Daisy, sir?"

"My fiancée," said Pete. "She's in the Green Paradise floor show. She is technically Arthur's owner. I told Daisy, Thomas, that I had inherited a fortune. And she's going to be disappointed."

"Too bad, sir," said Thomas.

"That statement is one of humorous underemphasis, Thomas. Daisy is not a person to take disappointments lightly. When I explain that my uncle's fortune has flown off into the fourth dimension, Daisy is going to look absent-minded and stop listening. Did you ever try to make love to a girl who looked absent-minded?"

"No, sir," said Thomas. "But about lunch, sir——"

"We'll have to pay for it. Damn!" Pete said morbidly. "I've just forty cents in my clothes, Thomas, and Arthur at least mustn't be allowed to starve. Daisy wouldn't like it. Let's see!"

He moved away from the desk and surveyed the laboratory with a predatory air. It was not exactly a homey place. There was a skeletonlike thing of iron rods, some four feet high. Thomas had said it was a tesseract—a model of a cube existing in four dimensions instead of three.

To Pete, it looked rather like a medieval instrument of torture—something to be used in theological argument with a heretic. Pete could not imagine anybody but his uncle wanting it. There were other pieces of apparatus of all sizes, but



largely dismantled. They looked like the product of some one putting vast amounts of money and patience into an effort to do something which would be unsatisfactory when accomplished.

"There's nothing here to pawn," said Pete depressedly. "Not even anything I could use for a hand organ, with Arthur substituting for the monk!"

"There's the demonstrator, sir," said Thomas hopefully. "Your uncle finished it, sir, and it worked, and he had a stroke, sir."

"Cheerful!" said Pete. "What is this demonstrator? What's it supposed to do?"

"Why, sir, it demonstrates the fourth dimension," said Thomas. "It's your uncle's life work, sir."

"Then let's take a look at it," said Pete. "Maybe we can support ourselves demonstrating the fourth dimension in shop windows for advertising purposes. But I don't think Daisy will care for the career."

Thomas marched solemnly to a curtain just behind the desk. Pete had thought it hid a cupboard. He slid the cover back and displayed a huge contrivance which seemed to have the solitary virtue of completion. Pete could see a monstrous brass horseshoe all of seven feet high. It was apparently hollow and full of cryptic cogs and wheels. Beneath it there was a circular plate of inch-thick glass which seemed to be designed to revolve. Below that, in turn, there was a massive base to which ran certain copper tubes from a refrigerating unit out of an ice box.

Thomas turned on a switch and the unit began to purr. Pete watched.

"Your uncle talked to himself quite a bit about this, sir," said Thomas. "I gathered that it's quite a scientific triumph, sir. You see, sir, the fourth dimension is time."

"I'm glad to hear it explained so simply," said Pete.

"Yes, sir. As I understand it, sir, if one were motoring and saw a pretty girl about to step on a banana peel, sir, and if

one wished to tip her off, so to speak, but didn't quite realize for—say, two minutes, until one had gone on half a mile——”

“The pretty girl would have stepped on the banana peel and nature would have taken its course,” said Pete.

“Except for this demonstrator, sir. You see, to tip off the young lady one would have to retrace the half mile and the time too, sir, or one would be too late. That is, one would have to go back not only the half mile but the two minutes. And so your uncle, sir, built this demonstrator——”

“So he could cope with such a situation when it arose,” finished Pete. “I see! But I'm afraid it won't settle our financial troubles.”

The refrigeration unit ceased to purr. Thomas solemnly struck a safety match.

“If I may finish the demonstration, sir,” he said hopefully. “I blow out this match, and put it on the glass plate between the ends of the horseshoe. The temperature's right, so it should work.”

There were self-satisfied clucking sounds from the base of the machine. They went on for seconds. The huge glass plate suddenly revolved perhaps the eighth of a revolution. A humming noise began. It stopped. Suddenly there was another burnt safety match on the glass plate. The machine began to cluck triumphantly.

“You see, sir?” said Thomas. “It's produced another burnt match. Dragged it forward out of the past, sir. There was a burned match at that spot, until the glass plate moved a few seconds ago. Like the girl and the banana peel, sir. The machine went back to the place where the match had been, and then it went back in time to where the match was, and then it brought it forward.”

The plate turned another eighth of a revolution. The machine clucked and hummed. The humming stopped. There was a third burnt match on the glass plate. The clucking clatter began once more.

“It will keep that up indefinitely, sir,” said Thomas hopefully.

"I begin," said Pete, "to see the true greatness of modern science. With only two tons of brass and steel, and at a cost of only a couple of hundred thousand dollars and a lifetime of effort, my Uncle Robert has left me a machine which will keep me supplied with burnt matches for years to come! Thomas, this machine is a scientific triumph!"

Thomas beamed.

"Splendid, sir! I'm glad you approve. And what shall I do about lunch, sir?"

The machine, having clucked and hummed appropriately, now produced a fourth burnt match and clucked more triumphantly still. It prepared to reach again into the hitherto unreachable past.

Pete looked reproachfully at the servant he had apparently inherited. He reached in his pocket and drew out his forty cents. Then the machine hummed. Pete jerked his head and stared at it.

"Speaking of science, now," he said an instant later. "I have a very commercial thought. I blush to contemplate it." He looked at the monstrous, clucking demonstrator of the fourth dimension. "Clear out of here for ten minutes, Thomas. I'm going to be busy!"

Thomas vanished. Pete turned off the demonstrator. He risked a nickel, placing it firmly on the inch-thick glass plate. The machine went on again. It clucked, hummed, ceased to hum—and there were two nickels. Pete added a dime to the second nickel. At the end of another cycle he ran his hand rather desperately through his hair and added his entire remaining wealth—a quarter. Then, after incredulously watching what happened, he began to pyramid.

Thomas tapped decorously some ten minutes later.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said hopefully. "About lunch, sir——"

Pete turned off the demonstrator. He gulped.

"Thomas," he said in careful calm, "I shall let you write the menu for lunch. Take a basketful of this small change and go shopping. And—Thomas, have you any item of currency larger than a quarter? A fifty-cent piece would be about right.

I'd like to have something really impressive to show to Daisy when she comes."

Miss Daisy Manners of the Green Paradise floor show was just the person to accept the fourth-dimensional demonstrator without question and to make full use of the results of modern scientific research. She greeted Pete abstractedly and interestedly asked just how much he'd inherited. And Pete took her to the laboratory. He unveiled the demonstrator.

"These are my jewels," said Pete impressively. "Darling, it's going to be a shock, but—have you got a quarter?"

"You've got nerve, asking me for money," said Daisy. "And if you lied about inheriting some money——"

Pete smiled tenderly upon her. He produced a quarter of his own.

"Watch, my dear! I'm doing this for you!"

He turned on the demonstrator and explained complacently as the first cluckings came from the base. The glass plate moved, a second quarter appeared, and Pete pyramided the two while he continued to explain. In the fraction of a minute, there were four quarters. Again Pete pyramided. There were eight quarters—sixteen, thirty-two, sixty-four, one hundred twenty-eight— At this point the stack collapsed and Pete shut off the switch.

"You see, my dear? Out of the fourth dimension to you! Uncle invented it, I inherited it, and—shall I change your money for you?"

Daisy did not look at all absent-minded now. Pete gave her a neat little sheaf of bank notes.

"And from now on, darling," he said cheerfully, "whenever you want money just come in here, start the machine—and there you are! Isn't that nice?"

"I want some more money now," said Daisy. "I have to buy a trousseau."

"I hoped you'd feel that way!" said Peter enthusiastically. "Here goes! And we have a reunion while the pennies roll in."

The demonstrator began to cluck and clatter with bills instead of quarters on the plate. Once, to be sure, it suspended all operations and the refrigeration unit purred busily for a time. Then it resumed its self-satisfied delving into the immediate past.

"I haven't been making any definite plans," explained Pete, "until I talked to you. Just getting things in line. But I've looked after Arthur carefully. You know how he loves cigarettes. He eats them, and though it may be eccentric in a kangaroo, they seem to agree with him. I've used the demonstrator to lay up a huge supply of cigarettes for him—his favorite brand, too. And I've been trying to build up a bank account. I thought it would seem strange if we bought a house on Park Avenue and just casually offered a trunkful of bank notes in payment. It might look as if we'd been running a snatch racket."

"Stupid!" said Daisy.

"What?"

"You could be pyramiding those bills like you did the quarters," said Daisy. "Then there'd be lots more of them!"

"Darling," said Pete fondly, "does it matter how much you have when I have so much?"

"Yes," said Daisy. "You might get angry with me."

"Never!" protested Pete. Then he added reminiscently. "Before we thought of the bank note idea, Thomas and I filled up the coal bin with quarters and half dollars. They're still there."

"Gold pieces would be nice," suggested Daisy, thinking hard, "if you could get hold of some. Maybe we could."

"Ah!" said Pete. "But Thomas had a gold filling in one tooth. We took it out and ran it up to a half a pound or so. Then we melted that into a little brick and put it on the demonstrator. Darling, you'd really be surprised if you looked in the woodshed."

"And there's jewelry," said Daisy. "It would be faster still!"

"If you feel in the mood for jewelry," said Pete tenderly,

"just look in the vegetable bin. We'd about run out of storage space when the idea occurred to us."

"I think," said Daisy enthusiastically, "we'd better get married right away. Don't you?"

"Sure! Let's go and do it now! I'll get the car around!"

"Do, darling," said Daisy. "I'll watch the demonstrator."

Beaming, Pete kissed her ecstatically and rushed from the laboratory. He rang for Thomas, and rang again. It was not until the third ring that Thomas appeared. And Thomas was very pale. He said agitatedly:

"Beg pardon, sir, but shall I pack your bag?"

"I'm going to be— Pack my bag? What for?"

"We're going to be arrested, sir," said Thomas. He gulped. "I thought you might want it, sir. An acquaintance in the village, sir, believes we are among the lower-numbered public enemies, sir, and respects us accordingly. He telephoned me the news."

"Thomas, have you been drinking?"

"No, sir," said Thomas pallidly. "Not yet, sir. But it is a splendid suggestion, thank you, sir." Then he said desperately: "It's the money, sir—the bank notes. If you recall, we never changed but one lot of silver into notes, sir. We got a one, a five, a ten and so on, sir."

"Of course," said Pete. "That was all we needed. Why not?"

"It's the serial number, sir! All the one-dollar bills the demonstrator turned out have the same serial number—and all the fives and tens and the rest, sir. Some person with a hobby for looking for kidnap bills, sir, found he had several with the same number. The secret service has traced them back. They're coming for us, sir. The penalty for counterfeiting is twenty years, sir. My—my friend in the village asked if we intended to shoot it out with them, sir, because if so he'd like to watch."

Thomas wrung his hands. Pete stared at him.

"Come to think of it," he said meditatively, "they are counterfeiters. It hadn't occurred to me before. We'll have to plead

guilty, Thomas. And perhaps Daisy won't want to marry me if I'm going to prison. I'll go tell her the news."

Then he started. He heard Daisy's voice, speaking very angrily. An instant later the sound grew louder. It became a continuous, shrill, soprano babble. It grew louder yet. Pete ran.

He burst into the laboratory and was stunned. The demonstrator was still running. Daisy had seen Pete piling up the bills as they were turned out, pyramiding to make the next pile larger. She had evidently essayed the same feat. But the pile was a bit unwieldy, now, and Daisy had climbed on the glass plate. She had come into the scope of the demonstrator's action.

There were three of her in the laboratory when Pete first entered. As he froze in horror, the three became four. The demonstrator clucked and hummed what was almost a hoot of triumph. Then it produced a fifth Daisy. Pete dashed frantically forward and turned off the switch just too late to prevent the appearance of a sixth copy of Miss Daisy Manners of the Green Paradise floor show. She made a splendid sister act, but Pete gazed in paralyzed horror at this plethora of his heart's desire.

Because all of Daisy was identical, with not only the same exterior and—so to speak—the same serial number, but with the same opinions and convictions. And all six of Daisy were convinced that they, individually, owned the heap of bank notes now on the glass plate. All six were trying to get it. And Daisy was quarreling furiously with herself. She was telling herself what she thought of herself, in fact, and on the whole her opinion was not flattering.

Arthur, like Daisy, possessed a fortunate disposition. He was not one of those kangaroos who go around looking for things to be upset about. He browsed peacefully upon the lawn, eating up the dahlias and now and again hopping over the six-foot hedge in hopes that there might be a dog come along the lane to bark at him. Or, failing to see a dog, that

somebody might have come by who would drop a cigarette butt that he might salvage.

At his first coming to this place, both pleasing events had been frequent. The average unwarned passer-by, on seeing a five-foot kangaroo soaring toward him in this part of the world, did have a tendency to throw down everything and run. Sometimes, among the things he threw down was a cigarette.

There had been a good supply of dogs, too, but they didn't seem to care to play with Arthur any more. Arthur's idea of playfulness with a strange dog—especially one that barked at him—was to grab him with both front paws and then kick the living daylight out of him.

Arthur browsed, and was somewhat bored. Because of his boredom he was likely to take a hand in almost anything that turned up. There was a riot going on in the laboratory, but Arthur did not care for family quarrels. He was interested, however, in the government officers when they arrived. There were two of them and they came in a roadster. They stopped at the gate and marched truculently up to the front door.

Arthur came hopping around from the back just as they knocked thunderously. He'd been back there digging up a few incipient cabbages of Thomas' planting, to see why they didn't grow faster. He soared at least an easy thirty feet, and propped himself on his tail to look interestedly at the visitors.

"M-my heavens!" said the short, squat officer. He had been smoking a cigarette. He threw it down and grabbed his gun.

That was his mistake. Arthur liked cigarettes. This one was a mere fifteen feet from him. He soared toward it.

The government man squawked, seeing Arthur in mid-air and heading straight for him. Arthur looked rather alarming, just then. The officer fired recklessly, missing Arthur. And Arthur remained calm. To him, the shots were not threats. They were merely the noises made by an automobile whose carburetor needed adjustment. He landed blandly, almost on the officer's toes—and the officer attacked him hysterically with fist and clubbed gun.



Arthur was an amiable kangaroo, but he resented the attack, actively.

The short, squat officer squawked again as Arthur grabbed him with his forepaws. His companion backed against the door, prepared to sell his life dearly. But then—and the two things happened at once—while Arthur proceeded to kick the living daylights out of the short, squat officer, Thomas resignedly opened the door behind the other and he fell backward suddenly and knocked himself cold against the doorstep.

Some fifteen minutes later the short, squat officer said gloomily: "It was a bum steer. Thanks for pulling that critter off me, and Casey's much obliged for the drinks. But we're hunting a bunch of counterfeiterers that have been turning out damn good phony bills. The line led straight to you. But if it had been you, you'd have shot us. You didn't. So we got to do the work all over."

"I'm afraid," admitted Pete, "the trail would lead right back. Perhaps, as government officials, you can do something about the fourth-dimensional demonstrator. That's the guilty party. I'll show you."

He led the way to the laboratory. Arthur appeared, looking vengeful. The two officers looked apprehensive.

"Better give him a cigarette," said Arthur. "He eats them. Then he'll be your friend for life."

"Hell, no!" said the short, squat man. "You keep between him and me! Maybe Casey'll want to get friendly."

"No cigarettes," said Casey apprehensively. "Would a cigar do?"

"Rather heavy, for so early in the morning," considered Pete, "but you might try."

Arthur soared. He landed within two feet of Casey. Casey thrust a cigar at him. Arthur sniffed at it and accepted it. He put one end in his mouth and bit off the tip.

"There!" said Pete cheerfully. "He likes it. Come on!"

They moved on to the laboratory. They entered—and tumult engulfed them. The demonstrator was running and Thomas—pale and despairing—supervised its action. The demonstra-

tor was turning out currency by what was, approximately, wheelbarrow loads. As each load materialized from the fourth dimension, Thomas gathered it up and handed it to Daisy, who in theory was standing in line to receive it in equitable division. But Daisy was having a furious quarrel among herself, because some one or other of her had tried to cheat.

"These," said Pete calmly, "are my fiancée."

But the short, squat man saw loads of greenbacks appearing from nowhere. He drew out a short, squat revolver.

"You got a press turning out the stuff behind that wall, huh?" he said shrewdly. "I'll take a look."

He thrust forward masterfully. He pushed Thomas aside and mounted the inch-thick glass plate. Pete reached, horrified, for the switch. But it was too late. The glass plate revolved one-eighth of a revolution. The demonstrator hummed gleefully; and the officer appeared in duplicate just as Pete's nerveless fingers cut off everything.

Both of the officers looked at each other in flat, incredulous stupefaction. Casey stared, and the hair rose from his head. Then Arthur put a front paw tentatively upon Casey's shoulder. Arthur had liked the cigar. The door to the laboratory had been left open. He had come in to ask for another cigar. But Casey was hopelessly unnerved. He yelled and fled, imagining Arthur in hot pursuit. He crashed into the model of a tesseract and entangled himself hopelessly.

Arthur was an amiable kangaroo, but he was sensitive. Casey's squeal of horror upset him. He leaped blindly, knocking Pete over on the switch and turning it on, and landing between the two stupefied copies of the other officer. They, sharing memories of Arthur, moved in panic just before the glass plate turned.

Arthur bounced down again at the demonstrator's hoot. The nearest copy of the short, squat man made a long, graceful leap and went flying out of the door. Pete struggled with the other, who waved his gun and demanded explanations, growing hoarse from his earnestness.

Pete attempted to explain in terms of pretty girls stepping

on banana peels, but it struck the officer as irrelevant. He shouted hoarsely while another Arthur hopped down from the glass plate—while a third, and fourth, and fifth, and sixth, and seventh Arthur appeared on the scene.

He barked at Pete until screams from practically all of Daisy made him turn to see the laboratory overflowing with five-foot Arthurs, all very pleasantly astonished and anxious to make friends with himself so he could play.

Arthur was the only person who really approved the course events had taken. He had existed largely in his own society. But now his own company was numerous. From a solitary kangaroo, in fact, Arthur had become a good-sized herd. And in his happy excitement over the fact, Arthur forgot all decorum and began to play an hysterical form of disorganized leapfrog all about the laboratory.

The officer went down and became a take-off spot for the game. Daisy shrieked furiously. And Arthur—all of him—chose new points of vantage for his leaps until one of him chose the driving motor of the demonstrator. That industrious mechanism emitted bright sparks and bit him. And Arthur soared in terror through the window, followed by all the rest of himself, who still thought it part of the game.

In seconds the laboratory was empty of Arthurs. But the demonstrator was making weird, pained noises. Casey remained entangled in the bars of the tesseract, through which he gazed with much the expression of an inmate of a padded cell. Only one of the short, squat officers remained in the building. He had no breath left. And Daisy was too angry to make a sound—all six of her. Pete alone was sanely calm.

“Well,” he said philosophically, “things seem to have settled down a bit. But something’s happened to the demonstrator.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” said Thomas pallidly, “I’m no hand at machinery!”

One of Daisy said angrily to another of Daisy: “You’ve got a nerve! That money on the plate is mine!”

Both advanced. Three more, protesting indignantly, joined in the rush. The sixth—and it seemed to Pete that she must

have been the original Daisy—hastily began to sneak what she could from the several piles accumulated by the others.

Meanwhile, the demonstrator made queer noises. And Pete despairingly investigated. He found where Arthur's leap had disarranged a handle which evidently controlled the motor speed of the demonstrator. At random, he pushed the handle. The demonstrator clucked relievedly. Then Pete realized in sick terror that five of Daisy were on the glass plate. He tried to turn it off—but it was too late.

He closed his eyes, struggling to retain calmness, but admitting despair. He had been extremely fond of one Daisy. But six Daisies had been too much. Now, looking forward to eleven and—

A harsh voice grated in his ear.

"Huh! That's where you keep the press and the queer, huh—and trick mirrors so I see double? I'm going through that trapdoor where those girls went! And if there's any funny business on the other side, somebody gets hurt!"

The extra officer stepped up on the glass plate, inexplicably empty now. The demonstrator clucked. It hummed. The plate moved—backward! The officer vanished—at once, utterly. As he had come out of the past, he returned to it, intrepidly and equally by accident. Because one of Arthur had kicked the drive lever into neutral, and Pete had inadvertently shoved it into reverse. He saw the officer vanish and he knew where the supernumerary Daisies had gone—also where all embarrassing bank notes would go. He sighed in relief.

But Casey—untangled from the tesseract—was not relieved. He tore loose from Thomas' helpful fingers and fled to the car. There he found his companion, staring at nineteen Arthurs playing leapfrog over the garage. After explanations they would be more upset still. Pete saw the roadster drive away, wabbling.

"I don't think they'll come back, sir," said Thomas hopefully.

"Neither do I," said Pete in a fine, high calm. He turned to the remaining Daisy, scared but still acquisitive. "Darling,"

he said tenderly, "all those bank notes are counterfeit, as it develops. We'll have to put them all back and struggle along with the contents of the woodshed and the vegetable bin."

Daisy tried to look absent-minded, and failed.

"I think you've got nerve!" said Daisy indignantly.



## ALAS, ALL THINKING!

*A New Theory of the End of the World  
In Which We Contact a Human Baroque!*

By HARRY BATES

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL. (This is dynamite! Be careful who sees it!)

*From:* Charles Wayland.

*To:* Harold C. Pendleton, Chairman of the Human Salvage Section of the National Lunacy Commission.

*Subject:* Report on the conversations and actions of Harlan T. Frick on the night of June 7, 1963.

*Method:* I used the silent pocket dictograph you gave me; and my report is a literal transcription of the record obtained, with only such additions of my own as are needed to make it fully intelligible.

*Special Notes:* (a) The report, backed by the dictograph record, may be considered as one third of the proof that your "amateur neurosis detective" Wayland is not himself a subject for psychopathic observation, since this fantastic report can be corroborated in all its details by Miles Matson, who was with us that night, and would be, I think, by Frick himself.

(b) Pending any action by you, I have cautioned both Matson and Frick to maintain absolute silence with regard to the conversation and events covered. They may be trusted to comply.

(c) So that you may follow the report more intelligently, I feel that it is necessary to say here, in advance, that Frick will be proved to be wholly sane, but that never again may his tremendous talents be utilized for the advancement of science. As his friend, I have to recommend that you give up all hope of salvaging him, and leave him to go his prodigal, pleasure-seeking way alone. You might think of him as a great scien-

tist who has died. He is reasonable, but human, and I see his waste of his life as humanly reasonable. You will see, too.

*Report:* The amazing events of the evening started in a manner commonplace enough at the Lotus Gardens, where I had made a dinner engagement with Frick and our old mutual friend, Miles Matson, chemist and recent author of an amusing mathematical theory of inverse variables as applied to feminine curves, which Frick had expressed a desire to hear. I should have preferred to observe Frick alone, but was not sure that alone I would be able to hold the interest of his restless, vigorous mind for a third time within two weeks. Ten minutes of boredom and my psychological observations would come to a sudden end, and you would have to find and impress some one else to do your psychological sleuthing.

I got to our reserved table fifteen minutes early, to get settled, set up the dictograph in my pocket, and review for the last time my plans. I had three valuable leads. I had discovered (see my reports of May 26th and May 30th) peculiar, invariable, marked emotional reactions in him when the words "brains," "human progress," and "love" were mentioned. I was sure that this was symptomatic. And I hoped to get nearer the roots of his altered behavior pattern by the common method of using a prepared and memorized list of words, remarks, and questions, which I would spring on him from time to time.

I could only trust that Frick was not too familiar with psychoanalysis, and so would not notice what I was doing.

I confess that for a moment while waiting I was swept with the feeling that it was hopeless, but I soon roused from that. One can do no more than try, and I was going to try my hardest. With another I might have been tempted to renege, but never with Frick. For he was my old friend of college days, and so eminently worth saving! He was still so young; had so much to give to mankind!

I guessed once more at the things that might have altered his pattern so. A physicist, perhaps the most brilliant and certainly the most promising in the world, enters his laboratory



after his graduation from college and for eleven years hardly so much as sticks his nose outside its door. All the while he sends from it a stream of discoveries, new theories, and integrations of old laws the like of which has never before been equaled; and then this same physicist walks out of his laboratory, locks the door, shuns the place, and for two years devotes himself with casual abandon to such trivialisms of the modern idler as golfing, clothes, travel, fishing, night clubs, and so on. Astounding is a weak word for this spectacle. I could think of nothing that would remotely suit.

Miles Matson arrived a minute early—which was, for him, a phenomenon, and showed how the anticipation of dining with Frick had affected him. Miles is forty-five, short, solid, bald—but then I needn't describe him.

"He'll come?" were his first words, before seating himself on the other side of the table.

"I think so." I assured him, smiling a little at his apparent anxiety. He looked a little relieved, and fished from the jacket of his dinner clothes that abominable pipe he smokes whenever and wherever he pleases, and be damned to frowning head waiters. He lighted it, took a few quick puffs, then leaned back, smiled, and volunteered frankly:

"Charles, I feel like a little boy about to have dinner with the principal of his school."

I could understand that, for most scientists would feel that way where Frick was concerned. I smiled, too, and chaffed him.

"What—you and that pipe intimidated by a mere playboy?"

"No—by the mystery behind the playboy," was his serious rejoinder. "What's your guess at the solution? Quick, before he comes," he asked earnestly.

I shrugged my shoulders. Miles, of course, was not in my confidence.

"Could it be a woman?" he went on. "I haven't heard of any one woman. A disappointment in his work? Some spoiled-child reaction? Is he crazy? What's made the change?"

If I only knew!

"Frick, further than any man alive, has touched out to the infinite unknowable," he continued almost grumbling; "and I want to know how such a man can trade his tremendous future for a suit of evening clothes!"

"Perhaps he is just relaxing a little," I suggested with a smile.

"Ah, of course—relaxing," he answered sarcastically. "For two years!"

I knew at once Frick had heard what we had been saying, for at that moment I looked up and around just in time to see him, lean and graceful in his dinner clothes, his mouth twisted with amusement, stepping past the head waiter to his place at the table. Miles and I rose; and we must have shown our confusion, for one simply did not mention that topic in Frick's hearing. But he showed no offense—indeed, he seemed in unusually good spirits—for he lightly acknowledged our greeting, waved us back in our places, and, seating himself, added to our dialogue:

"Yes, for two years. And will for forty-two more!"

This opening of the conversation threw me unexpectedly off stride, but I remembered to switch on the dictograph, and then seized the opportunity to ask what otherwise I would never have dared.

"Why?"

Still he showed no offense, but instead, surprisingly, indulged in a long low chuckle that seemed to swell up as from a spring of inexhaustible deliciousness. He answered cryptically, bubblingly, enjoying our puzzlement with every word.

"Because Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. Because thought is withering, and sensation sweet. Because I've recovered my sense of humor. Because 'why' is a dangerous word, and makes people unhappy. Because I have had a glimpse of the most horrible cerebral future. Yes!" He laughed, paused for a moment, then said in a lower voice with dramatic impressiveness, "Would you believe it? I have terminated the genus *Homo Sapiens*."

## II

He was not drunk, and, as you will see, not crazy—though I would not have bet any money on it just then. His mood was only one of extraordinary good humor. Vastly amused at our reaction to his wild words, he allowed himself to shock us, and did it again and again. I might say here that it is my opinion that all the revelations of the night were, in the main, the result of Frick's sudden notion to shock us, and that no credit whatever is due me and my intended plan of psychological attack.

Miles' face showed blank dismay. Frick ceased chuckling, and, his gray eyes gleaming, enjoyed our discomfiture in quiet for a moment. Then he added:

"No. Strictly speaking, there is one piece of unfinished business. A matter of one murder. I was sort of dallying with the idea of committing it tonight, and finishing off the whole affair. Would you two like to be in on it?"

Miles looked as if he would like to excuse himself. He coughed, smiled unhappily, glanced doubtfully at me. I at once decided that if Frick was going to attempt murder, I was going to be on hand to prevent it. I suppose that the desperate resolution showed in my face, for Frick, looking at me, laughed outright. Miles then revived enough to smile wanly at Frick and suggest he was joking. He added:

"I'm surprised that any one with the brains you have should make so feeble a joke!"

At the word "brains" Frick almost exploded.

"Brains!" he exclaimed. "Not me! I'm dumb! Dumb as the greasy-haired saxophone player over there! I understand that I used to have brains, but that's all over; it's horrible; let's not think about it. I tell you I'm dumb, now—normally, contentedly dumb!"

Miles did not know how to understand Frick any more than did I. He reminded him:

"You used to have an I. Q. of 248——"

"I've changed!" Frick interrupted. He was still vehement, but I could see that he was full of internal amusement.

"But no healthy person's intelligence can drop much in the course of a few years," Miles objected strongly.

"Yes—I'm dumb!" Frick reiterated.

My opportunities lay in keeping him on the subject. I asked him:

"Why have you come to consider the possession of brains such an awful thing?"

"Ah, to have seen what I have seen, know what I know!" he quoted.

Miles showed irritation. "Well, then, let's call him dumb!" he said, looking at me. "To insist on such a stupid jest!"

I took another turn at arousing Frick. "You are, of course, speaking ironically out of some cryptic notion that exists only in your own head; but whatever this notion, it is absurd. Brains in quantity are the exclusive possession of the human race. They have inspired all human progress; they have made us what we are to-day, masters of the whole animal kingdom, lords of creation. Two other things have helped—the human hand and human love; but even above these ranks the human brain. You are only ridiculous when you scoff at its value."

"Oh, love and human progress!" Frick exclaimed, laughing. "Charles, I tell you brains will be the ruination of the human race," he answered with great delight.

"Brains will be the salvation of the human race!" Miles contradicted with heat.

"You make a mistake, a very common mistake, Miles," Frick declared, more seriously. "Charles is of course right in placing man at the top of creation, but you're very wrong in assuming he will always remain there. Consider. Nature made the cell, and after a time the cell became a fish; and that fish was the lord of creation. The very top. For a while. For just a few million years. Because one day a fish crawled out of the sea and set about becoming a reptile. He became a magnificent one. Tyrannosaurus Rex was fifty feet long, twenty high; he had teeth half a foot long, and feet armed with

claws that were terrible. No other creature could stand against him; he had speed, size, power and ferocity; *he* became the lord of creation.

“What happened to the fish? He had been the lord of creation, but, well, he never got anywhere. What of tyrannosaurus Rex? He, too, was the lord of creation, but he, alas, is quite, quite extinct.

“Nature tried speed with the fish, then size with the saurians. Neither worked; the fish got stuck, the saurian died off. But did she quit experimenting at that? Not at all—she tried mobility, and we got the monkey. The first monkey swung from limb to limb screeching, ‘I am the lord of creation!’ and, by Jove, he was! But he could not know that one day, after a few millions of years, one of his poor relations would go down on the ground, find fire, invent writing, assume clothing, devise modern inconveniences, discover he had lost his tail, and crow, ‘Behold, I am the lord of creation!’

“Why did this tailless monkey have his turn? Because his make-up featured brains? You will bellow yes—but I hear Mother Nature laughing at you. For you are only her *latest* experiment! The lord of creation! That you are—but only for a little while! Only for a few million years!”

Frick paused, his eyes flashed, his nostrils distended contemptuously. “How dare man be so impertinent as to assume nature has stopped experimenting!” he exclaimed at length.

In the quiet which followed this surprising outburst I could see Miles putting two and two together. But he took his time before speaking. He relighted his pipe and gave it a good, fiery start before removing it from his mouth and saying, almost in a drawl:

“It amounts to this, then. Anticipating that nature is about to scrap brains and try again along new lines, you choose to attempt immortality by denying your own undoubted brains and trying to be the first to jump in the new direction.”

Frick only laughed. “Wrong again, Miles,” he said. “I’m just standing pat.”

“To go back a little,” I said to Frick; “it seems to me you’re

assuming far too much when you tell us that the human race is not the last, but only the most recent of nature's experiments."

The man acted almost shocked. "But have you forgotten what I told you just a little while ago? I said I have *terminated* the genus *Homo Sapiens*!"

Miles snorted with disgust. I was alarmed. Miles tried sarcasm.

"Have you and Mother Nature already decided, then, what the next lord of creation is to be?"

"I myself have nothing to say about it," Frick replied with assumed naïveté, "nor do I know what it will be. I could find out, but I doubt if I ever shall. It's much more fun not to know—don't you think? Though, if I had to guess," he added, "I should say she will feature instinct."

This was too much for Miles. He started to rise, saying, as he pushed his chair back, "This is enough. You're either crazy or else you're a conceited fool! Personally, I think it's both!"

But Frick held him with a gesture, and in a voice wholly sincere said:

"Sit down, Miles; keep your shirt on. You know very well I neither lie nor boast. I promise to prove everything I have said."

Miles resumed his seat and looked at Frick almost sneeringly as he went on:

"You're quite right about my being a fool, though. I was one; oh, a most gorgeous fool! But I am not conceited. I am so little conceited that I offer to show you myself in what must surely be the most ridiculous situation that a jackass or a monkey without a tail has ever been in. I'll exchange my dignity for your good opinion; you'll see that I'm not crazy; and then we'll have the most intelligent good laugh possible to Genus *Homo*. Yes? Shall we?"

Miles gave me a look which clearly expressed his doubt of Frick's sanity. Frick, seeing, chuckled and offered another inducement.

"And I'll throw in, incidentally, a most interesting murder!"

Our friend was completely disgusted. "We came here to eat," he said. "Let's get it over with." And with the words he picked up the menu which had been lying in front of him all this time. Frick looked at me.

"I'm not hungry," he said. "Are you?"

I wasn't. I shook my head.

"Shall we two go, then?"

I hesitated. I was not overanxious to accompany, alone, a madman on a mission of murder. But I caught Miles' eye, and like the noble he is, he said he'd come too. Frick smiled softly.

### III

Ten minutes later we had made the short flight along the north shore to Glen Cove, where Frick has his estate, and were escorted by him into a small, bare room on the second floor of the laboratory building which adjoins his beautiful home.

While we stood there wondering, Frick went into an adjoining room and returned with two chairs, and then, in two more trips, with a third chair and a tray on which rested a large thermos bottle and a tea service for three. The chairs he arranged facing each other in an intimate group, and the tray he set on the floor by the chair he was to take himself.

"First I have to tell a rather long story," he explained. "The house would be more comfortable, but this room will be more convenient."

Frick was now a changed man. His levity of before was gone; tense, serious lines appeared on his rugged face; his great head lowered with the struggle to arrange thoughts that were difficult, and perhaps painful, to him. When he spoke, it was softly, in a voice likewise changed.

My dictograph was still turned on.

"Charles, Miles," Frick began, "forgive me for my conduct back in the Gardens. I had so much on my mind, and you were so smugly skeptical, that the inclination to overpower you with what I know was irresistible. I had not expected

to make any of these revelations to you. I offered to on impulse; but do not fear, I shall not regret it. I think—I see now that I have been carrying a very heavy load—

“What I have to say would fill a large book, but I will make it as short as I can. You will not believe me at first, but please be patient, for proof will eventually be forthcoming. Every single thing I said to you is true, even to the murder I must commit—”

He paused, and seemed to relax, as if tired. Unknown black shadows closed over my heart. Miles watched him closely, quite motionless. We waited. Frick rubbed the flat of his hand slowly over his eyes and forehead, then let it drop.

“No,” he said at length, “I have never been conceited. I don’t think so. But there was a time when I was very proud of my intelligence. I worked; I accomplished things that seemed to be important; I felt myself a leader in the rush of events. Work was enough, I thought; brain was the prime tool of life; and with my brain I dared try anything. Anything! I dared try to assemble the equation of a device that would enable me to peer into the future! And when I thought I had it, I started the construction of that device! I never finished it, and I never shall, now; but the attempt brought Pearl to me—

“Yes,” he added, as if necessary that he convince himself, “I am certain that had I not attempted that, Pearl would not have come. Back through the ages she had somehow felt me out—don’t ask me how, for I don’t know—and through me chose to enter for a brief space this, our time.

“I was as surprised as you would have been. I was working in this very room, though then it was twice as large and fairly cluttered with clumsy apparatus I have since had removed. I had been working feverishly for months; I was unshaven, red-eyed and dirty—and there, suddenly, she was. Over there, beyond that door at which I’m pointing. She was in a golden-glowing cylinder whose bottom hung two feet off the floor. For a moment she stood suspended there;



and then the glow disappeared and she stepped through to the floor.

"You do not believe me? Well, of course, I don't expect you to. But there will be proof. There will be proof.

"I was surprised, but somehow I wasn't much frightened. The person of my visitor was not intimidating. She was just a barefooted young woman, very slender, of average height, clad in a shiny black shift which reached her knees. I cannot say she was well formed. Her body was too thin, her hips too narrow, her head too large. And she was miles from being pretty. Her hair and eyes were all right; they were brown; but her face was plain and flat, with an extraordinary and forbidding expression of dry intellectuality. The whole effect of her was not normal, yet certainly not weird; she was just peculiar, different—baroque.

"She spoke to me in English! In nonidiomatic English with the words run together and an accent that was atrocious! She asked severely:

"Do you mind too much this intrusion of mine?"

"Why—why no!" I said when I had recovered from the shock of the sound of her speech. "But are you real, or just an illusion?"

"I do not know," she replied. "That is a tremendous problem. It has occupied the attention of our greatest minds for ages. Excuse me, sir." And with these last words she calmly sat herself down on the floor, right where she was, and appeared to go off into deep thought!

"You can imagine my astonishment! She sat there for a full two minutes, while I gaped at her in wonder. When she rose again to her feet she finished with:

"I do not know. It is a tremendous problem."

"I began to suspect that a trick was being played on me, for all this was done with the greatest seriousness.

"Perhaps there is a magician outside," I suggested.

"I am the magician," she informed me.

"Oh!" I said ironically. "I understand everything now."

"Or no, fate is the magician," she went on as if in doubt.

'Or no, I am— A very deep problem'— Whereupon she sat down on the floor and again went off into meditation!

"I stepped around her, examining her from all angles, and, since she was oblivious to everything outside of herself, I made a cursory examination of the thing she had come in on. It looked simple enough—a flat, plain, circular box, maybe four feet in diameter and six inches deep, made of a some sort of dull-green metal. Fixed to its center, and sticking vertically upward, was a post of the same stuff capped with a plate containing a number of dials and levers. Around the edge of the upper surface of the box was a two-inch bevel of what seemed to be yellow glass. And that was all—except that the thing continued to remain fixed in the air two feet off the floor!

"I began to get a little scared. I turned back to the girl and again looked her over from all sides. She was so deep in her thoughts that I dared to touch her. She was real, all right!

"My touch brought her to her feet again.

"'You have a larger head than most men,' she informed me.

"'Who are you, anyway?' I asked with increasing amazement. She gave me a name that it took me two days to memorize, so horrible was its jumble of sounds. I'll just say here that I soon gave her another—Pearl—because she was such a baroque—and by that name I always think of her.

"'How did you get in?' I demanded.

"She pointed to the box.

"'But what is it?' I wanted to know.

"'You have no name,' she replied. 'It goes to yesterday, to last year, to last thousand years—like that.'

"'You mean it's a time traveler?' I asked, astounded. 'That you can go back and forth in time?'

"'Yes,' she answered. 'I stopped to see you, for you are something like me.'

"'You wouldn't misinform me?' I asked sarcastically, feeling I must surely be the victim of some colossal practical joke.

“‘Oh, no, I would not misinform you,’ she replied aridly.

“I was very skeptical. ‘What do you want here?’ I asked.

“‘I should like you to show me the New York of your time. Will you, a little?’

“‘If you’ll take me for a ride on that thing, and it works, I’ll show you anything you want,’ I answered, still more skeptical.

“She was glad to do it.

“‘Come,’ she commanded. I stepped gingerly up on the box. ‘Stand here, and hold on to this,’ she went on, indicating the rod in the center. I did so, and she stepped up to position just opposite me, and very close. I was conscious of how vulnerable I was if a joke was intended.

“‘You must not move,’ she warned me. I assured her I would not. ‘Then, when do you want to go?’

“‘A week back,’ I said at random, with, in spite of everything, a creeping sensation going up and down my spine.

“‘That will do,’ she decided; and again she warned me not to move. Then her hands went to the controls.

“A golden veil sprang up around us and the room grew dim through it, then disappeared. A peculiar silence came over me, a silence that seemed not so much outside of me as within. There was just a second of this, and then I was again looking into the room through the golden veil. Though it dimmed the light I could clearly make out the figure of a man stretched full length on the floor working on the under part of a piece of apparatus there.

“‘It’s I!’ I exclaimed, and every cell in my body leaped at the miracle of it. That this could be! That I could be standing outside of myself looking at myself! That last week had come back, and that I, who already belonged to a later time, could be back there again in it! As I peered, thoughts and emotions all out of control, I saw happen a thing that stilled the last thin voice of inward doubt.

“The man on the floor rolled over, sat up, turned his face—*my* face—toward us, and, deep in thought, gently fingered

a sore place on his head—from a bump that no one, positively, knew anything about. Trickery seemed excluded.

“But a contradictory thing occurred to me. I asked Pearl, ‘Why doesn’t he see us, since he’s looking right this way? I never saw anything at the time.’

“‘It is only in the next stage toward arriving that we can be seen,’ she explained with her hands still on the controls. ‘At this moment I’m keeping us unmaterialized. This stage is extremely important. If we tried to materialize within some solid, and not in free space, we should explode.’

“‘Now, let us return,’ she said. ‘Hold still.’

“The room disappeared; the peculiar silence returned; then I saw the room again, dim through the golden veil. Abruptly the veil vanished and the room came clear; and we stepped down on the floor on the day we had left.

“My legs were trembling so as to be unreliable. I leaned against a table, and my amazing visitor, as it seemed her habit, sat down on the floor.

“That was my introduction to Pearl.”

#### IV

Frick rose and walked to the far corner of the room and back. The thoughts in his mind were causing some internal disturbance, that was obvious.

I prayed that my dictograph was working properly!

When Frick sat down again he was calmer. Not for long could any emotion sweep out of control his fine mind and dominating will. With a faint smile and an outflung gesture of his arm he said:

“That was the beginning!”

Again he paused, and ended it with one of his old chuckles. “I showed Pearl New York. I showed her!

“Charles, Miles, there is just too much,” he resumed at a tangent, shaking his head. “There is the tendency to go off into details, but I’ll try to avoid it. Maybe some other time. I want to be brief, just now.

“Well, I got her some clothes and showed her New York City. It was a major experience. For she was not your ordinary out-of-towner, but a baroque out of far future time. She had learned our language and many of our customs; she was most amazingly mental; and yet, under the difficult task of orienting herself to what she called our crudeness, she exhibited a most delicious naïveté.

“I showed her my laboratory and explained the things I had done. She was not much interested in that. I showed her my house, others too, and explained how we of the twentieth century live.

“‘Why do you waste your time acquiring and operating gadgets?’ she would ask. She liked that word ‘gadgets’; it became her favorite. By it she meant electricity, changes of clothing, flying, meals in courses, cigarettes, variety of furniture, even the number of rooms in our homes. She’d say, ‘You are a superior man for this time; why don’t you throw out all your material luxuries so as to live more completely in the realms of the mind?’

“I would ask her what standard she judged our civilization against; but whenever I did that she’d always go obscure, and say she guessed we were too primitive to appreciate the higher values. She consistently refused to describe the sort of civilization she had come from; though, toward the end, she began promising me that if I were a good guide, and answered all her questions, she might—only might—take me there to see it. You can imagine I was a good guide!

“But meanwhile, I got nothing but my own inferences; and what an extraordinary set I acquired from her questions and reactions! You make your own set as I go along!

“I showed her New York. She’d say, ‘But why do the people hurry so? Is it really necessary for all those automobiles to keep going and coming? Do the people *like* to live in layers? If the United States is as big as you say it is, why do you build such high buildings? What is your reason for having so few people rich, so many people poor?’ It was like that. And endless.

"I took her to restaurants. 'Why does everybody take a whole hour just to eat?' I told her that people enjoyed eating; it seemed not to have occurred to her. 'But if they spent only a few minutes at it they'd have that much more time for meditation!' I couldn't but agree.

"I took her to a night club. 'Why do all those men do all the carrying, and those others all the eating?' I explained that the first were waiters, the latter guests. 'Will the guests have a turn at carrying?' I told her I thought so, some day.

"'Is that man a singing waiter?'

"'No, only a crooner.'

"'Why do those men with the things make such an awful noise?'

"'Because dance bands get paid for making it.'

"'It must be awfully hard on them.' I told her I hoped so. 'Are those people doing what you call dancing?'

"'Yes.'

"'Do you like to do it?'

"'Yes.'

"'The old ones, too?'

"'I doubt it.'

"'Then why do they do it?' I didn't know. At the end she asked me almost poignantly, 'Don't they *ever* spend any time in meditation?' and I had to express my doubts.

"In our little jaunts it became increasingly clear to her that there was very little meditation being done in New York. It was the biggest surprise that our civilization gave her.

"However, she continued to indulge her peculiar habit of going off into meditation when something profound, or interesting, or puzzling came to her attention; and the most extraordinary thing about it was that she had to sit down at it, no matter where she was. If there was a chair handy, all right, but if not, she would plunk right down on the floor, or, outside, even in the street! This was not so bad when we were alone, but once it happened under Murphy's flagpole in Union Square as we stood observing the bellowings of a soap-box orator, and once again in Macy's, where we lingered

a moment listening to a demonstrator with the last word possible in beauty preparations. It was quite embarrassing! Toward the end I grew adept in detecting signs of the coming descent and was fairly successful in holding her up!

"In all the six days I spent showing Pearl New York, not once did she show any emotion other than that of intellectual curiosity; not once did she smile; not once did she so much as alter the dry expression on her face. And *this*, my friends, was the creature who became a student and an exponent of love!

"It bears on my main theme, so I will tell you in some detail about her experiences with love, or what she thought was love.

"During the first three days she did not mention the word; and from what I know of her now, I can say with surety that she was holding herself back. During those three days she had seen one performance of 'Romeo and Juliet,' had read two romantic novels containing overwhelming love themes, had observed everywhere the instinct for young people to seek each other out, had seen two couples kiss while dancing, had seen the fleet come in and the sailors make for Riverside Drive, and had heard I don't know how many hours of crooning on radio broadcasts.

"After all this, one day in my drawing-room, she suddenly asked me, 'What is this love that every one is always talking about?'

"Never dreaming of the part love was to play between us, I answered simply that it was nature's device to make mature humans attractive to each other and insure the arrival of offspring and the maintenance of the race. That, it seems, is what she thought it was, but what she couldn't understand was why everybody made such a to-do about it. Take kissing, for instance. That was when a male and female pushed each other on the lips. Did they like that? I assured her they did. Was it, since they held it so long, a kind of meditation? Well, no, not exactly. Would I try it with her?

“Don’t smile yet, you two—that’s nothing! Wait! Anyway, you wouldn’t want me to spoil my chances of being taken for a visit to her own time, would you?”

“Well, we kissed. She stood on tiptoe, her dry face looking up at mine, her arms stiffly at her sides, while I bent down, my sober face looking down at hers, and my arms stiffly at my sides. We both pushed; our lips met; and we stayed that way a little. Then, almost maintaining contact, Pearl asked me, ‘Is it supposed to sort of scrape?’ I assured her it was—something like a scrape. After a moment she said, ‘Then there’s a great mystery here, somewhere—’ And damned if she didn’t squat right down on the floor and go off into a think! I couldn’t keep a straight face, so I bounced out of the room; and when I returned several minutes later there she was still meditating on her kiss. *O tempora!*”

“That kiss happened on the third day, and she stayed six, and for the remainder of her visit in our time she said not one thing more about this thing called love—which told me it was a mystery always on her mind, for she asked questions by the score about every other conceivable thing.

“But I also knew from another thing. For the three days following that kiss she went innumerable times to my radio and tuned in dance and vocal programs whose songs would, of course, inevitably be about love. She fairly saturated herself with love’s and above’s, star’s and are’s, blue’s and you’s, June’s and moon’s. What a horrible flock of mangy clichés must have come to flap around in her mental—all too mental—mind! What peculiar notions about love they must have given her!

“But enough of that phase. You have an idea. You have seen Pearl in New York, tasting of love. Six nights to the very hour after she first appeared to me I stood again on the round base of the time traveler, and this time I accompanied her forward to her time. I do not know how far in the future that was, but I estimate it to be around three million years.”



## V

Frick paused, rose, and, without asking us if we wanted any, served some cold tea from the thermos bottle by his chair. This time we were glad to have it.

By then I was as close to fully believing as was, I think, Miles. We wasted little time over the tea, but, considerably refreshed and extremely eager with anticipations of what would follow, leaned forward and were again lost in Frick's extraordinary story.

"The trip forward took what seemed to be only half a minute, and I believe it might have been instantaneous but for the time needed to bring the machine to a stop on exactly the right day. As before, the passage was a period of ineffable silence; but I was aware that all the time Pearl fingered the controls. Very suddenly I saw we were in a dimly-lighted room; with equal suddenness the golden screen vanished and normal daylight took its place. We had arrived.

"I stepped off the traveler and looked curiously about. We were in a small place, the walls of which were partitions which projected perhaps ten feet up toward a very high ceiling. Everything I could see was made of an ugly, mud-yellow metallic substance, and everything seemed to be built on the square. Light entered from large windows on all sides. The section of the great room in which we had arrived was bare of everything but our traveler. I saw that this time it rested firmly on the floor—a very dirty floor.

"I suppose it would be superfluous to paint the tremendous state of excitement and curiosity I was in. To be the only man of our time to have voyaged forward! To be the only one allowed to see the human race in marvelous maturity! What honor, glory, luck, that such an unmerited distinction should fall upon me! Every atom of my body was living and tingling at that moment. I was going to drink in and remember everything that crossed my senses.

"I was full of questions at once, but Pearl had warned me not to talk. She had told me that there were several care-

takers from whose sight I was to remain hidden; and now the first thing she did was to put her finger to her lips and peer down the corridor outside. She listened a moment, then stepped out and beckoned me to follow.

"I did—and all but exclaimed out loud to see that the corridor was carpeted with fine dust fully an inch deep!

"How could this be in an important building of so advanced an age? For surely that building was important, to house, as it did, so marvelous a device as the traveler!

"But I had no time for wonderment, for Pearl led me rapidly toward the far side of the great room. At our every step clouds of dust billowed out on each side, so that a hasty glance behind showed such diffusion of it that all there was hidden. The corridor was quite wide, and ran lengthwise of the building on one side of the center. At varying distances we passed doorways, all of them closed, and at the end we turned to the left, to come quickly to a high, wide door. It was open, and golden sunlight was shining through. For a second Pearl held me back while she peered around the edge, then, taking me by the hand, she led me out into our world of the future.

"What would you have expected to see, Charles? You, Miles? Towering buildings, perhaps, transversed on their higher levels by aerial traffic ways? And crowds of people strangely mannered and curiously dressed? And mysterious-powered aerial carriers? And parks? And flowers? And much use of metal and synthetic marble? Well, of these there was nothing. My eyes looked out over a common, ordinary, flat, 1963 field. In the distance were some patches of trees; near by were some wild grass, low bushes, and millions of daisies; and that was all!

"My first thought was that Pearl had made some mistake in our time of destination, and when I sought her face, and saw that this was only what she expected, I grew alarmed. She misread my thoughts, though, and saying 'Don't be afraid,' led me along a wide walk to a corner of the building, where she peeped around the edge, and, apparently satisfied

with what she found, stepped forth and motioned me to follow. Then she spoke:

“‘Here we are,’ she said.

“Before me stretched the same sort of landscape as on the other quarter, except that here the immediate field was tenanted with a square block of large metallic boxes, six on a side, and each separated by about ten yards from its neighbors.

“I suppose I stood there and gaped. I didn’t understand, and I told Pearl as much. Her tone in replying came as near surprise as I ever heard it.

“‘Not understand?’ she asked. ‘What do you mean? Isn’t this just what you expected?’

“Eventually I found words. ‘But where is your city?’ I asked.

“‘There,’ she answered, with a gesture of her arm toward the boxes.

“‘But the people!’ I exclaimed.

“‘They are inside.’

“‘But I—I—there’s something wrong!’ I stammered. ‘Those things are no city, and they couldn’t hold ten people apiece!’

“‘They hold only one apiece,’ she informed me with dignity.

“I was completely flabbergasted. ‘Then—then your total population is——’

“‘Just thirty-six, out here; or, rather, thirty-five, for one of us has just died.’

“I thought I saw the catch. ‘But how many have you that aren’t out here?’

“‘Just us younger ones—four, including myself,’ she answered simply. She added, ‘And, of course, the two who are not yet born.’

“All before this had turned my head; her last statement came near turning my stomach. Clutching at straws, I blurted out:

“‘But this is just a small community; the chief centers of your population lie elsewhere?’

“‘No,’ she corrected levelly, ‘this is the only center of our civilization. All human beings are gathered here.’ She fixed me with her dry gaze. ‘How primitive you are!’ she said, as a zoölogist might, looking at a threadworm. ‘I see that you expected numbers, mere numbers. But I suppose that a comparative savage like you might be expected to prefer quantity of life to quality of life.’

“‘We have here quality,’ she went on with noble utterance, ‘—the finest of the finest, for ten thousand generations. Nature has need of quantity in her lower orders, but in allowing the perfection of such towering supermen as are my friends out here she has indulged in the final luxury of quality.’

“‘Nor is that all. With quality we have at last achieved simplicity; and in the apotheosis of humanity these two things are the ultimates.’

“All I could do was mumble that simplicity was too weak a word.”

Frick stopped here, laughed, and rose. “She had my mind down and its shoulders touching! And from that moment—I assure you, my friends—the whole thing began to amuse me.”

He took a few steps about the room, laughing silently; then, leaning with one shoulder against the wall, he went on:

“Pearl was on an awfully high horse, there, for a moment, but she soon dismounted and considered what she might offer for my entertainment. She expressed polite regret that her civilization contained so little for me to see with my eyes. She implied that the vast quantities of intellectual activity going on would be far past my understanding.

“I asked, then, if there was any way I might have a peep at their quality group in action; and to this she replied that her countrymen never came together in groups, and neither did they indulge in actions, but that it would be easy to show me one or two of the leading citizens.

“I, of course, told her I did not want her to run a risk of getting in trouble, but she assured me there was no danger

of that. The guardians of the place—they were the three other ‘younger ones’ she had just mentioned—were quiet somewhere, and as for the adults, ‘They,’ she said, ‘will be able neither to see nor hear you.’

“Well, she showed me two. And merciful heavens!”

Frick laughed so that for a moment he could not go on. Miles by now was reflecting Frick’s every mood, and would smile in anticipation when he laughed. I suppose I was doing the same. We were both completely under Frick’s spell.

“She escorted me openly across the field to the nearest box, and I remember that on the way I got a bur in my ankle which I stopped to remove. I found from close up that the boxes were about ten feet square and made of the same ugly yellow metal used in the big building. The upper part of each side had a double row of narrow horizontal slits, and in the middle of each front side there was a closely-fitted door. I was remembering Pearl’s promise that they would be able neither to see nor hear me, so I was alarmed when without ceremony she opened the door and half pushed me in.

“What I saw! I was so shocked that, as Pearl told me later, I gasped out an involuntary ‘Oh!’ and fairly jumped backward. Had she not been right behind me and held me, I might have run. As it was I remained, hypnotized by the sight before my eyes, trembling, and I think gagging.

“I saw a man; or some kind of a man. He sat right in front of me, nude from the waist up, and covered as the floor was covered from the waist down. How shall I adequately describe him!

“He was in some ways like an un-wrapped mummy, except that a fallen-in mummy presents a fairly respectable appearance. And then he was something like a spider—a spider with only three legs. And again, looking quickly, he was all one gigantic head, or at least a great mass on whose parchment surface appeared a little round two-holed knoll where the nose customarily is, lidded caverns where the eyes belong, small craters where the ears commonly are, and, on the under side, a horrible, wrinkled, half-inch slit, below which more

parchment backed almost horizontally to a three-inch striated and, in places, bumpy pipe.

“By not the slightest movement of any kind did the monster show he knew I was there. He sat on a high dais; his arms were only bones converging downward; his body, only half the usual thickness, showed every rib and even, I think, the front side of some of his vertebrae; and his pipe of a neck, unable alone to support his head, gave most of that job to two curved metal pieces that came out of the wall.

“He had a musty smell.

“And, final horror, the stuff that covered him to the waist was dust; and there were two inches of dust on the top of his head and lesser piles of it on every little upper surface!

## VI

“It was horrible; but I swear that as I stood there goggling at him he began to strike me funny. It grew on me, until I think I should have laughed in the old gent’s face had I not been restrained by a slight fear that he might in some way be dangerous.

“Goodness knows what all I thought of as I stood there. I know I eventually asked Pearl, for caution’s sake:

“‘You’re sure he can’t see or hear me?’

“She told me he could not.

“I was not surprised; he looked too old for such strenuous activities. I scrutinized him, inch by inch. After a little I announced with conviction:

“‘He’s dead! I’m sure of it!’

“She assured me he was not.

“‘But look at the dust! He can’t have moved for years!’

“‘Why should he move?’ she asked.

“That stopped me for a little.

“‘But—but,’ I stammered eventually, ‘he’s as good as dead! He’s not doing anything!’

“‘He certainly is doing something,’ was her dignified correction. ‘He’s meditating.’

"All I could think to say was 'Goodnight!'

"At that, Pearl turned on me reproachfully. 'Your attitude is bestial,' she said. 'I have done you the honor of bringing you to witness the highest flowering of the human race, and you act like a pig. Life can hold nothing more beautiful than this man you see here; he is the ultimate in human progress, one who is in truth perfection, whose every taint of animal desire has been cleaned away, who is the very limit in the simplicity of his life and the purity of his thoughts and intentions.'

"Not to miss anything she added, 'He embodies the extension of every quality that makes for civilization; he's reached the logical end of man's ambitious climb up from the monkey.'

"'My Lord!' I said. 'Here's a dead end!'

"'For myself, I sum it all in five words,' she went on nobly: 'He leads the mental life.'

"After a little my emotions suddenly got out of control. 'Does—does he *like* it?' I blurted out. But that was a mistake. I tried: 'Do you mean to imply he spends his life sitting here and thinking?'

"'Pure living and high thinking,' she put it.

"'No living, I'm thinking!' I retorted. 'What does he think of?'

"'He is probably our greatest æsthetician,' she answered proudly. 'It's a pity you can't know the trueness and beauty of his formulations.'

"'How do you know they are beautiful?' I asked with my primitive skepticism.

"'I can hear his thoughts, of course,' was the answer.

"This surprising statement started me on another string of questions, and when I got through I had learned the following: This old bird and the others could not hear me think because my intellectual wave length was too short for their receivers; that Pearl, when talking and thinking with me, was for the same reason below their range; and that Pearl shared with the old guys the power of tuning in or out of

such private meditations or general conversations as might be going on.

“‘We utilize this telepathic faculty,’ Pearl added, ‘in the education of our young. Especially the babies, while they are still unborn. The adults take turns in tutoring them for their cells. I, it happens, was a premature baby—only eleven months—so I missed most of my prenatal instruction. That’s why I’m different from the others here, and inferior. Though they say I was bad material all the way back from conception.’

“‘Her words made my stomach turn over, and the sight of that disproportioned cadaver didn’t help it any, either. Still I stood my ground and did my best to absorb every single detail.

“‘While so engaged I saw one of the most fantastic things yet. The nasty little slit of a mouth under our host’s head slowly separated until it revealed a dark and gummy opening; and as it reached its maximum I heard a click behind my back and jumped to one side just in time to see a small gray object shoot from a box fastened to the wall, and, after a wide arc through the air, make a perfect landing in the old gentleman’s mouth!

“‘He felt the need for some sustenance,’ Pearl explained. ‘Those pellets contain his food and water. Naturally he needs very little. They are ejected by a mechanism sensitive to the force of his mind waves.’

“‘Let me out,’ I said.

“‘We went out into the clean, warm sunshine. How sweet that homely field looked! I sat down on the grass and picked a daisy. It was not one whit different from those of my own time, at home.

“‘Pearl sat down beside me.

“‘We now have an empty cell,’ she said, ‘but one of our younger men is ready to fill it. He has been waiting until we installed a new and larger food receptacle—one that will hold enough for seventy-five years without refilling. We’ve just finished. It is, of course, the young of our community who take care of the elders by preparing the food pellets and



doing what other few chores are necessary. They do this until they outgrow the strength of their bodies and can no longer get around—when they have the honor of maturity and may take their place in one of the cells.’

“‘But how in the devil do creatures like—like that in there, manage to have children?’ I had to ask.

“‘Oh, I know what you mean, but you’ve got the wrong idea,’ came her instant explanation. ‘That matter is attended to while they are still comparatively young. From the very beginning the young are raised in incubators.’

“I have always had a quick stomach—and she insisted on trying to prove it!

“‘With us, it takes fifteen months,’ she went along. ‘We have two under way at present. Would you like to see them?’

“I told her that I would see them, but that I would not like it. ‘But first,’ I asked, ‘if you don’t mind, show me one other of these adults of yours. I—I—I can’t get over it. I still can’t quite believe it.’

“She said she would. A woman. And at that we got up and she led me to the next cell.

“I did not go in. I stood outside and took one look at the inmate through the door. Horrible! Female that she was, it was at that moment I first thought what a decent thing it would be—yes, and how pleasant—to hold each one of the necks of those cartoons of humankind in the ring of my two strong hands for a moment—

“But I was a trusted visitor, and such thoughts were not to be encouraged. I asked Pearl to lead on to the incubators.

“We had left the block of cells and were rounding the corner of the building when Pearl stopped and pulled me back. Apparently she had gotten some thought warning just in time, for in a moment three outlandish figures filed out of the very door of the big building that we had been making for. All wore black shiny shifts like Pearl’s, and they were, very obviously, young flowers of Genus Homo in full perfection.

“The first was the size, but had not nearly the emaciated

proportions, of the old æsthetician, and his great bald head wobbled precariously on his outrageous neck as he made his uncertain way along. The second—a girl, I think—was smaller, younger, stronger, but she followed her elder at a respectful distance in the same awful manner. The third in the procession was a male, little more than a baby, and he half stumbled after the others in his own version of their caricature of a walk.

“They walked straight out into the field; and do you know, that little fellow, pure monster in appearance, ugly as ultimate sin, did a thing that brought tears to my eyes. As he came to the edge of the walk and stepped off into the grass, he bent laboriously over and plucked a daisy—and looked at it in pre-occupied fashion as he toddled on after the others!

“I was much relieved that they had not discovered us, and so was Pearl. As soon as they were a safe distance away, she whispered to me:

“‘I had to be careful. They all can see, and the two younger ones still can hear.’

“‘What are they going to do out there?’ I asked.

“‘Take a lesson in metaphysics,’ she answered, and almost with her words the first one sat down thoughtfully out in the middle of the field—to be followed in turn by the second and even the little fellow!

“‘The tallest one,’ Pearl informed me, ‘is the one who is to take a place in the vacant cell. He had better do it soon. It’s becoming dangerous for him to walk about. His neck’s too weak.’

“With care we edged our way up and into the building, but this time Pearl conducted me along the corridor on the other side. The dust there was as thick as in the first, except along the middle, where many footprints testified to much use. We came to the incubators.

“There I saw them. I saw them; I made myself look at them; but I tell you it was an effort! I—I think, if you don’t mind, I won’t describe them. You know—my personal peculiarity. They were wonderful. Curvings of glass and tubes.

Two, in them. Different stages. I left right away; went back to the front door; and in a few minutes felt better.

“Pearl, of course, had to come after me and try to take me back; and I noticed an amusing thing. The sight of those coming babies had had a sort of maternal effect on her! I swear it! For she *would* talk about them; and before long she timidly—ah, but as dryly as ever!—suggested that we attempt a kiss!—only she forgot the word and called it a scrape. Ye gods! Well, we scraped—exactly as before—and that, my friends, was the incident which led straight and terribly to the termination of the genus *Homo Sapiens*!

“You could never imagine what happened. It was this, like one-two-three: Pearl and I touched lips; I heard a soft, weird cry behind me; I wheeled; saw, in the entrance, side by side, the three creatures I had thought were safely out in the field getting tutored; saw the eldest’s face contort, his head wobble; heard a sharp snap; and then in a twinkling he had fallen over on the other two; and when the dust had settled we saw the young flowers of perfect humanity in an ugly pile, and they lay still, quite still, with, each one, a broken neck!

“They represented the total stock of the race, and they were dead, and I had been the innocent cause!

“I was scared; but how do you think their death affected Pearl? Do you think she showed any sign of emotion? She did not. She ratiocinated. She was sorry, of course—so her words said—the tallest guy had been such a beautiful soul!—a born philosopher!—but it had happened; there was nothing to do about it except remove the bodies, and now it was up to her alone to look after the incubators and that cemetery of thinkers.

“‘But first,’ she said, ‘I’d better take you back to your time.’

“‘But no!’ I said, and I invented lots of reasons why I’d better stay a little. Now that there was no one to discover my presence I more than ever did not want to go. There were a hundred things I wanted to study—the old men, how they functioned, the conditions of the outside world, and so

on—but particularly, I confess, I wanted to examine the contents of that building. If it could produce a time traveler, it must contain other marvels, the secrets of which I might be able to learn and take back home with me.

“We went out into the sun and argued, and my guide did a lot of squatting and meditating, and in the end I won out. I could stay three days.

“On the afternoon of the first day something went wrong with the incubators, and Pearl came hurrying to tell me in her abstracted fashion that the two occupants, the last hopes of the human race, were dead.

“She did not know it, but I had done things to the mechanisms of the incubators.

“I had murdered those unborn monsters——

“Charles, Miles, let’s have some more tea.”

## VII

Frick went over to the thermos bottle, poured for us, returned it to the floor, and resumed his chair. We rested for several minutes, and my dictograph shows that again not a word was spoken. I will not try to describe my thoughts except to say that the break in the tension had found me in need of the stimulation I was given.

When Frick resumed, it was suddenly, with unexpected bitterness and vehemence.

“Homo Sapiens had become a caricature and an abomination!” he exclaimed. “I did not murder those unborn babies on impulse, nor did I commit my later murders on impulse. My actions were considered; my decisions were reached after hours of the calmest, clearest thinking I have ever done; I accepted full responsibility, and I still accept it!

“I want now to make a statement which above all I want you to believe. It is this. At the time I made up my mind to destroy those little monsters, and so terminate Genus Homo, I expected to bring Pearl back to live out her years in our time. That was the disposition I had planned for her. Her

future did not work out that way. To put it baldly, Mother Nature made the most ridiculous ass of all time out of me; but remember, in justice to me, that the current of events got changed *after* my decision.

"I have said that Pearl took the death of the race's only young stock in her usual arid manner. She certainly did; but, as I think back over those days, it seems to me she did show a tiny bit, oh, a most infinitesimal amount, of feeling. That feeling was directed wholly toward me. You may ask how she could differ temperamentally—and physically—from those others, but I can only suggest that the enigma of her personal equation was bound up in the unique conditions of her birth. As she said, she may have been 'bad material' to start with. Then, something had gone wrong with an incubator; she was born after only eleven months; was four months premature; had received remote prenatal tutoring for that much less time; and had functioned in a different and far more physical manner much earlier, and with fewer built-in-restraints, than the others.

"It was this difference in her, this independence and initiative, that caused her to find the time traveler, the unused and forgotten achievement of a far previous age. It was this difference that allowed her to dare use it in the way we know. And it was this difference—now I am speaking chiefly of her *physical* difference—that gave rise in me to the cosmic ambitions which took me from farce to horror, and which I will now try to describe.

"Toward the evening of the second day we sat out on the wild grass before that corroboree of static philosophers and discussed the remaining future of the human race.

"I argued, since there was no one else to look after them now, and since they could live only as long as she lived, it was clear that the best thing—and, in the event of accident to her, the most humane thing—would be for me to kill them all as painlessly as possible and take her back to my time to live.

"I need not mention the impossibility of there being any more descendants from them.

"But for the only time during all the period I knew her she refused to face the facts. She wouldn't admit a single thing; I got nowhere; argue and plead as I would, all she would say, over and over, was that it was a pity that the human race had to come to an end. I see now that I was dense to take so long to get what she was driving at. When I did finally get it I nearly fell over backward in the grass.

"My friends, she was delicately hinting that I was acceptable to her as the father of a future race!

"Oh, that was gorgeous! I simply couldn't restrain my laughter; I had to turn my back; and I had a devil of a time explaining what I was doing, and why my shoulders shook so. To let her down easily, I told her I would think it over that night and give her my decision in the morning. And that was all there was to it at the time.

"Now comes the joke; now comes the beginning of my elevation to the supreme heights of asshood, and you are at liberty to laugh as much as you please. That night, under the low-hung stars of that far future world, I *did* decide to become the father of a future race! Yes—the single father of ultimate humanity!

"That night was perhaps the most tremendous experience of my life. The wide thinking I did! The abandoned planning! What were not the possibilities of my union with Pearl! She, on her side, had superb intellectuality, was the product of millions of years' culture; while I had emotion, vitality, the physicalness that she and the withered remains of her people so lacked! Who might guess what renaissance of degenerated humanity our posterity might bring! I walked, that night; I shouted; I laughed; I cried. I was to become a latter-day god! I spent emotion terrifically; it could not last till dawn; morning found Pearl waking me, quite wet with dew, far out in the hills.

"I had settled everything in my mind. Pearl and I would mate, and nature would take her course; but there was one

prime condition. There would have to be a house cleaning, first. Those cartoons of humanity would have to be destroyed. They represented all that was absurd and decadent; they were utterly without value; they were a stench and an abomination. Death to the old, and on with the new!

"I told Pearl of my decision. She was not exactly torrid with gratitude when she heard me say I would make her my wife, but she did give some severely logical approval, and that was something. She balked, however, at my plan to exterminate her redoubtable exponents of the mental life. She was quite stubborn.

"All that day I tried to convince her. I pointed out the old folks' uselessness; but she argued they were otherwise; that usefulness gives birth to the notion of beauty; that, therefore, beauty accompanies usefulness; and that because the old gentlemen were such paragons of subjective beauty they were, therefore, paragons of usefulness. I got lost on that airy plane of reasoning. I informed her that I, too, was something of an æsthetician, and that I had proved to myself they smelled bad and were intolerable; and how easy it would be to exterminate them!—how slender their hold on life!

"Nothing doing. At one time I made the mistake of trying vile humor. Here's a splendid solution of the in-law problem! As if she could be made to smile! She made me explain what I had meant! And this seemed to give her new thinking material, and resulted in her going down into squat-thinks so often that I was almost ready to run amuck.

"I suppose there must be a great unconscious loyalty to race in humans, for even in that attenuated time Pearl, unsentimental as she always was, doggedly insisted that they be allowed to live out their unnatural lives.

"I never did persuade her. I forced her. Either they had to go or I would. Late that night she gave me her permission.

"I awoke the morning of the fourth day in glorious high spirits. This was the day that was to leave me the lord of creation! I was not at all disturbed that it entailed my first assuming the office of high executioner. I went gayly to meet

Pearl and asked her if she had settled her mind for the work of the day. She had. As we breakfasted on some damnable stuff like sawdust we talked over various methods of extermination.

“Oh, I was in splendid spirits! To prove to Pearl that I was a just executioner, I offered to consider the case of each philostatician separately and to spare any for whom extenuating circumstances could be found. We started on the male monster of my first day. Standing before him in his cell I asked Pearl:

“‘What good can you say of this alleged æsthetician?’

“‘He has a beautiful soul,’ she claimed.

“‘But look at his body!’

“‘You are no judge,’ she retorted. ‘And what if his body does decay?—his mind is eternal.’

“‘What’s he meditating on?’

“Pearl went into a think. After a moment she said, ‘A hole in the ground.’

“‘Can you interpret his thoughts for me?’ I asked.

“‘It is difficult, but I’ll try,’ she said. After a little she began tonelessly, ‘It’s a hole. There is something—a certain something about it— Once caught my leg in one— I pulled. Yes, there is something—ineffable— So-called matter around— air within— Holes—depth—moisture—leaks—juice— Yes, it is the *idea* of a hole— Hole—inverse infinity—holiness—’

“‘That’ll do!’ I said—and pulled the receptacle of all this wisdom suddenly forward. There was a sharp crack, like the breaking of a dry stick, and the receptacle hung swaying pendulously against his ribs. ‘Justice!’ I cried.

“‘The old woman was next. ‘What’s there good about her?’ I asked.

“‘She is a mother,’ Pearl replied.

“‘Enough!’ I cried, and the flip of my arm was followed by another sharp crack. ‘Justice to the mother who bore Homo Sapiens! Next!’

“‘The next was an awful-looking wreck—worse than the first. ‘What good can you say of him?’ I asked.



“‘He is a great scientist.’

“‘Can you interpret his thoughts?’

“‘Pearl sunk and thunk. ‘Mind force—’ she said tonelessly. ‘How powerful—mm—yes, powerful— Basis of everything living—mm—really is everything—no living, all thinking—in direct proportion as it is not, there is nothing— Mm, yes, everything is relative, but everything together makes unity— therefore, we have a relative unit—or, since the reverse is the other half of the obverse, the two together equal another unity, and we get the equation: a relative unit equals a unit of relativity— Sounds as if it might mean something. Einstein was a primitive. I agree with Wlyxzso. He was a greater mind than Yutwexi. And so it is proved that mind always triumphs over matter—’

“‘Proved!’ I said—and crack went his neck! ‘Justice!’ I cried. ‘Next!’

“The next, Pearl told me, was a metaphysician. ‘Ye gods’ I cried; ‘don’t tell me that among this lot of supermetaphysicians there is a specialist and an ultra. What’s he thinking?’

“But this time poor Pearl was in doubt. ‘To tell the truth we’re not sure whether he thinks or not,’ she said, ‘or whether he is alive or dead. Sometimes we seem to get ideas so faint that we doubt if we really hear them; at others there is a pure blank.’

“‘Try,’ I ordered. ‘Try hard. Every last dead one must have his chance to be killed.’

“She tried. Eventually she said, ‘I really think he is alive— Truth—air—truth firmly rooted high in air—ah, branching luxuriantly down toward earth—but never touching, so I cannot quite reach the branches, though I so easily grasp the roots—’

“Crack! went his neck.

“I cracked a dozen others. It got easier all the time. Then Pearl presented me to the prize of the collection. He had a head the size of a bushel basket.

“‘What good can you say of him?’

“‘He is the greatest of us all, and I do beg that you will

spare him,' was her reply. 'I don't know what his specialty is, but every one here regarded him so highly!'

"'What is he thinking?'" I asked.

"'That's it,' she replied. 'No one knows. From birth he has never spoken; he used to drool at the mouth; no one has been able to detect any sign of cerebration. We put him in a cell very early. One of us gave an opinion that he was a congenital hydrocephalic idiot, but that was an error of judgment, for the rest of us have always been sure that his blankness is only apparent. His meditations are simply beyond our gross sensibilities. He no doubt ponders the uttermost problems of infinity.'

"'Try,' I said. 'Even he gets his chance.'

"'Pearl tried, and got nothing. Crack! went his neck.

"'And so it went. One by one, with rapid dispatch, and with a gusto that still surprises me when I think of it, I rid the earth of its public enemies. By the time the sun was high in the heavens the job was complete, and I had become the next lord of creation!

## VIII

"The effect of the morning's work sent Pearl into a meditation that lasted for hours. When she came out of it she seemed her usual self; but inside, as I know now, something was changed, or, let us say, accelerated; and when this acceleration had reached a certain point my goosish ambition was ignominiously cooked. Ah, and very well cooked! Humorous and serious—I was well done on both sides!

"But realization of my final humiliation came late and suddenly. My thoughts were not at all on any danger like that, but on millions of darling descendants in whose every parlor would hang my picture, when Pearl came out of her extended trance.

"I had decided to be awfully nice to her—a model father even if not the perfect lover—so it was almost like a courtier that I escorted her out on the field and handed her over to a large stone, where she promptly sat and efficiently asked

what I wanted. I imagined she showed a trace of disappointment when I told her I only wished to talk over some arrangements relative to our coming civilization; but she made no remark, let me paint a glowing picture of the possibilities, and agreed with me on the outlines of the various plans I had formed.

"I was in a hurry. I asked her if she desired to slip back to my time to have the ceremony performed.

"This offer was, I thought, a delicate gesture on my part. She came back with what amounted to a terrific right to the heart. She said severely:

"Yes, Frick, I will marry you, but first, you must court me."

"Observe, now, Miles, and you, Charles, my rapid ascent to asshood's most sublime peak. Countless other men have spent their lives trying to attain that dizzy height; a few have almost reached its summit, but it remained for me, the acting lord of creation, to achieve it. For—there was nothing else to do about it—I began to court her!

"Hold my hand," she said—and I held her hand. She thought. "Tell me that you love me," she required. I told her that I loved her. "But look at me when you say it," she demanded—and I looked into her fleshless face with the thin lips that always reminded me of alum and said again that I loved her. Again she took thought, and I got the impression that she was inspecting her sensations. "Kiss me," she ordered; and when I did she slid to the ground in a thump!

"There are mysteries in there somewhere," she said when I pulled her up. "I shall have to give a great deal of thought to them."

"I was in a hurry! I told her—Lord forgive me!—that she was clearly falling in love with me! And within herself she found something—I can't imagine what—that encouraged the idea. I struck while the iron was—well, not at absolute zero.

"Oh, come on," I urged her. "You see how we love each other: let's get married and get it over with."

"No, you'll have to court me," she answered, and I'll swear she was being coy. "And court me for a long time, too," she

added. 'I found out all about it, in your time. It takes months.'

"This was terrible! 'But why wait? Why? We love each other. Look at Romeo and Juliet! Remember?'"

"'I liked that young man Rudy better,' she came back at a tangent.

"'You mean the man in the night club?' I asked.

"'Yes,' she answered. 'He seemed to be singing just to me.'

"'Not singing—crooning!' I corrected irritably.

"'Yes, crooning,' she allowed. 'You croon to me, Frick.'

"Imagine it! Me, of all people; she, of all people; and out in the middle of that field in broad daylight!

"But did I croon? I crooned. You have not seen me at the heights yet!

"'More,' she said abstractedly. 'I think I feel something.'

"I crooned some more.

"'Something with love and above in it,' she ordered.

"I made up something with love and above in it.

"'And something with you and true,' she went on.

"I did it.

"'Now kiss me again.'

"And I did that!

"Thank Heaven she flopped into another think! I escaped to the woods while she was unconscious, and did not see her again till the next day.

"My friends, this was the ignoble pattern of my life for the two weeks that followed.

"I suffered; how I suffered! There I was, all a-burning to be the author of a new civilization, luxuriating in advance at thought of titanic tasks complete; and there she was, surely the most extraordinary block to superhuman ambition that ever was, forever chilling my ardor, ruthlessly demanding to be courted! I held hands with her all over that portion of time; I gazed into her eyes at the tomb of old Hydrocephalus himself; I crooned to her at midnight; and I'll bet that neighborhood was pitted for years in the places she suddenly sat down to meditate on in the midst of a kiss!

"She had observed closely—all too closely—the technique

of love overtures here in our time, and noted particularly the effect on the woman, so she must needs always be going off into a personal huddle to see if, perhaps, she was beginning to react in the desired manner!

“Ah, there was brains! How glad I am that I’m dumb!

“I began to lose weight and go around tired. I saw that our courtship could go on forever. But she saved me with an idea she got out of one of those novels she had read. She told me one rainy morning, brightly, that it might be a good thing if we did not see each other for a couple of months. She had so very, very much to think over, and, incidentally, how sorry she was for her poor countrymen who had died without dreaming life could hold such wealth of emotional experience as she had accumulated from me!

“By then I was as much as ever in a rush to get my revised race off under their own power, but I was physically so exhausted that my protests lacked force, and I had to give in. So we made all arrangements and had our last talk. It was fully understood that I was to come back in two months and take her as my bride. She showed me how to operate the traveler. I set the controls, and in a matter of a minute I was back here in this room.

“But I tricked her. That is, in a sense. For I didn’t wait two months. The idea occurred to me to straddle that period in the traveler—so in only another minute I was materializing in the time two months away that I was to call back and claim her! I was thankful for that machine, for the long ordeal had left my body weak and my nerves frazzled, and I don’t know how I could have stood so long a delay. You see, I was in such a hurry!

“Ah, had I known! The catastrophe was already upon me! Note its terrible, brief acceleration!

“When I arrived, all was exactly as before. The great building was as dusty, the community as deserted, the block of cells just as morbid as when I left. Only the fields had changed. I found Pearl sitting before the tomb of Hydrocephalus, meditating.

“‘I’m surprised to find you back so soon,’ were her words of greeting. ‘It seemed only a week.’

“‘Did you have a good time, my Pearl-of-great-price?’ I asked tenderly. (She had come to insist on that name. Once, near despair, I had used it with a different meaning, and afterward she required me to lash myself with it whenever I addressed her.)

“‘It was a period of most interesting integration,’ she replied. ‘In fact, it has been a precious experience. But I have come to realize that we were hasty in terminating the noble lives of my fellow men.’

“‘This was ominous! I made her go for a walk in the fields with me. Three times on the way out she found things I lightly mentioned to be problems requiring immediate squatting and meditating!

“‘I sensed that this was the crisis, and it was. I threw all my resources into an attempt to force immediate victory. I held her hands with one of mine, hooked my free arm around her waist, placed my lips to hers and crooned, ‘Marry me right now, darling! I can’t wait! I love you, I adore you, I am quite mad over you!’—and damn it, at the word mad she squatted!

“‘I picked her up and tried it again, but like clockwork, on the word mad she went down again. Oh, I was mad over her, all right!

“‘I was boiling! You see, I had to hurry so! She was changing right under my nose!

“‘I fairly flew back to the time machine. I was going to learn once and for all what my future with regard to a potential human race was to be. I set its dials one year ahead.

“‘This time I found Pearl in the vacant cell. She was distinctly older, dryer, thinner, and her head was larger in size. She sat on the dais as had the others; and there was a light dust on her clothing—

“‘It is strange that you should come at this moment,’ she said in a rusty voice. ‘I was thinking of you.’

“‘With the last word she closed her eyes—so she should

not see me, only think of me. I saw that the food box was full. Despair in my heart, I went back to the traveler.

"For a long time I hesitated in front of it. I was close to the bottom. The change had happened so quickly! To Pearl it took a year, to me, only an hour; yet her acts were as fixed, her character as immutable, as if they had been petrified under the weight of a millennium.

"I nerved myself for what I had to do. Suddenly, recklessly, I jumped on the traveler, set it for seventy years ahead, and shot forth into time.

"I saw Pearl once more. I hardly recognized her in the monster who sat on the dais in her cell. Her body was shriveled. Her head had grown huge. Her nose had subsided. Her mouth was a nasty, crooked slit. She sat in thick dust; and there was an inch of it where there had once been brown hair, and more on every little upper surface.

"She had a musty smell!

"She had reverted to type. She had overcome the differentness of her start and was already far down the nauseating road which over-brained humanity has yet to go.

"As I stood looking at her, her eyelids trembled a little, and I felt she knew I was there. It was horrible; but worse was to come. The mouth, too, moved; it twisted; opened; and out of it came an awful creak.

"Tell me that you love me.'

"I fled back to my time!"

## IX

Frick's long narrative had come to a close, but its end effect was of such sudden horror that Miles and I could not move from the edges of our chairs. In the silence Frick's voice still seemed to go on, exuberant, laughing, bitter, flexing with changing moods. The man himself sat slumped back in his chair, head low, drained of energy.

We sat this way long minutes, each with his thoughts, and each one's thoughts fixing terribly on the thing we knew Frick was going to do and which we would not ask him

not to do. Frick raised his head and spoke, and I quivered at the implication of his words.

"The last time she had food for only five years," he said.

Out of the depths of me came a voice, answering:

"It will be an act of mercy."

"For you," Frick said. "I shall do it because she is the loathsome last."

He got up; fixed us in turn with bitter eyes.

"You will come?" he asked.

We did not answer. He must have read our assent in our eyes. He smiled sardonically.

He went over to the door he had pointed out, unlocked it with a key from his pocket, pulled its heavy weight open, entered, switched on a light. I got up and followed, trembling, Miles after me.

"I had the traveler walled up," Frick said. "I have never used it since."

I saw the machine. It was as he had described it. It hung in nothingness two feet off the floor! For a moment I lacked the courage to step on, and Frick pushed me up roughly. He was beginning to show the excitement which was to gather such momentum.

Miles stepped up promptly, and then Frick himself was up, hands on the controls. "Don't move!" he cried—and then the room was dim goldenness, then nothing at all, and I felt permeated with fathomless silence.

Suddenly there was the goldenness again, and just as suddenly it left. We were in a small dark room. It was night.

I wondered if she knew we were coming.

We went to her silently, prowlers in infinity, our carpet the dust of ages. A turn, a door—and there was field land asleep under the pale wash of a gibbous moon. A walk, a turn—and there were the thirty-six sepulchers of the degenerate dead. One, not quite dead.

I was as in a dream.

Through the tall grass we struck, stealthily, Frick in the van like a swift-stalking animal. Straight through the we-



grass he led us, though it clung to our legs as if to restrain us from our single purpose. Straight in among those silent sepulchers we went. Nature was nodding; her earth stretched out everywhere oblivious; and the ages to come, they did not care. Nor cared the mummied tenants of each tomb around us. Not now, with their heads resting on their ribs. Only Frick did, very much. He was a young humanity's agent because of an old one's degradation. Splendidly, he was judge and executioner.

He slowed down before the sepulcher where was one who was yet alive. He paused there; and I prayed. An intake of breath, and he pulled open the door and entered. Dreadfully, Miles, then I, edged in after.

The door swung closed.

The tomb was a well of ink. Unseen dust rose to finger my throat. There was a musty smell! I held my breath, but my heart pounded on furiously. Ever so faintly through the pressing silence I heard the pounding of two others.

Could it be possible that a fourth heart was weakly beating there?

Faint sounds of movement came from my left. An arm brushed my side, groping. I heard a smothered gasp; I think it was from Miles. Soon I had to have air, and breathed, in catches. I waited, straining, my eyes toward where, ahead, there might have been a deeper blackness through the incessant gloom.

Silence. Was Frick gathering courage? I could *feel* him peering beside me there, afraid of what he had to see.

I knew a moment when the suspense became intolerable, and in that moment it was all over. There was a movement, a scratch, a match sputtered into light; for one eternal second I looked through a dim haze of dust on a mummied monstrosity whose eyelids moved!—and then darkness swept over us again, and there was a sharp crack, as of a broken stick, and I was running wildly with Death itself at my heels through that graveyard in a race to the building where lay our traveler.

In minutes we were back in our own time; in a few more Frick had blown up the traveler and I was out of the laboratory making for the Sound, sharp on my mind, as I went, the never-to-be-forgotten picture of Miles as he had raced behind me blurting, "She blinked! Oh, she blinked!" and that other, striding godlike in the rear, a little out of his head at the moment, who waved his arms over that fulfilled cemetery and thundered:

*"Sic transit gloria mundi!"*

## THE COMEDY OF ERAS

### *A Pete Manx Story*

By KELVIN KENT

PETE MANX was hurt. There he stood, resplendent in a bright green suit, specially tailored to fit his squat form, with a maroon shirt and a salmon-pink necktie that was positively blinding. Not Solomon in all his glory had ever been arrayed thus. A little admiration—even a casual comment—would have bucked Pete up tremendously. But, instead, he was being ignored while Doctor Mayhem and Professor Aker were arguing excitedly.

“I repeat—Bacon!” Mayhem said firmly, and set down a test-tube in its rack with more force than was strictly necessary. His small, scrawny figure trembled with indignation.

So that was it. They were talking about chow. Well, Pete could give them a few pointers on that. He had once run a hamburger stand at Ocean Park between jobs as barker and concessionaire.

“Ever try a cheeseburger, Doc?” he put in. “I can——”

“Shakespeare!” bellowed Professor Aker. The shout shook rheostats and power cables as the scientist slammed one fat fist into another. He clutched at his pince-nez as they fell to dangle by a black ribbon against his bulky paunch. “Every principle of psychology tends to prove that William Shakespeare wrote the plays.”

Mayhem sneered. “I admit the sonnets,” he observed, “but you have the colossal nerve to contend—in my own laboratory—that Francis Bacon did not write *Romeo and Macbeth* and——”

“Hey!” said Pete. “You’re both wrong. MGM wrote *Romeo and Juliet*—or maybe it was Paramount, I forget. I saw it at the Capital.”

Aker turned to confront this new antagonist.

"Pete," he murmured, "this may be a shock to you, but *Romeo* was first written during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, in England. And where in the sacred name of Einstein did you get that fantastic garment you're wearing?"

"You like it?" Pete preened himself. "Pipe the shoes. Two-tone. Yellow and red. Latest thing out. Boy, do I wow 'em down along Broadway."

Aker moaned slightly, but said nothing.

"That ain't what I dropped in for, though," Mr. Manx beamed. "I just wanted to say adois. I'm taking a vacation."

Professor Aker, still mumbling about Shakespeare, paid little attention as Pete went on.

"I'm kinda strapped just now, but I figure I can pick up some dough in Florida. Start a concession or something. I need a change of air, anyhow——"

"Bacon!" said Doctor Mayhem. "If I could prove it——"

"Whup!" said Professor Aker, his jaw sagging into his chins. "Mayhem! You can!"

The eyes of the two men met, exchanged understanding glances. Then, slowly, their gaze swiveled to Pete, who suddenly began to sweat.

"No!" he burst out. "I ain't going to do it."

"What?" There was an ominous note in Aker's silky tone.

"I dunno, but whatever it is——"

"Look," said Mayhem ingratiatingly, "you said you needed a vacation and were short of dough. How'd you like to make a thousand dollars and get a free vacation at the same time?"

"Where to?" Pete demanded suspiciously.

"Er—England."

"I been to England. In that screwy time machine of yours. One time I went back to Robin Hood's time, and once to King Arthur's administration. I—hey! You don't mean?"

"Ah, yes." Mayhem smiled. "It won't hurt a bit, Pete. You know that. Just a little trip into time to prove that Bacon wrote the plays attributed to Shakespeare."

"No." Mr. Manx sounded stubborn. "Look—you send me

back to Rome and I get thrown to the lions. In Egypt I get put on a chain gang. Last time I was in England they tried to burn me at the stake. Nineteen-forty suits me. All I have to worry about is the census and my income tax."

"But those were uncivilized times," Aker put in his oar. "Elizabethian England was a cultured period. They had bowling, football—and when you met anybody, you didn't have to shake hands. You could kiss them. Erasmus and Cavendish mention that particularly."

"Nuts," Pete observed, but there was a twinkle in his eyes. "Dames is poison. Bowling, huh?"

"Yes. And—dice, card parties—Sir Christopher Hatton once gave a party and put a thousand pounds at the disposal of his guests."

"Five grand, huh? Well——"

"All you have to do is just drop into England, find out who wrote the Shakespearean plays, and then return. That's one question only you can settle for us. For many years scholars have debated whether or not Shakespeare himself wrote all the plays credited to his name. Some savants claim that the famous Francis Bacon wrote Shakespeare's plays. You won't have to stay long to get the real lowdown."

Mayhem thrust a wad of greenbacks into Pete's hand and led the slightly hypnotized man to a seat that resembled an electric chair, what with wires and gadgets strewn all over it. "Sit down," the professor said silkily. "That's it. Now—" He turned to make adjustments on a switchboard.

"But I ain't sure—" Pete was counting the money.

"Time has no objective reality," said Mayhem, flipping a control lever. "We may consider it as a closed circle revolving about a Central Time Consciousness. We live on the rim of the wheel. All we need do is send the ego toward the hub of that circle, and then back out to the other side. There it emerges in a different time-sector, inhabiting the body of some contemporary organism. I send your consciousness back into time——"

"Now wait," said Pete, pocketing the dough. "I got an idea I'm being high-pressured into—*urp!*"

*Woosh!*

Manx, after a momentary stiffness, relaxed in the chair. He was not breathing. He looked very much like a corpse.

"Good," said Mayhem, rubbing his hands. "I'll bring him back in a few hours, and then he'll tell you that Bacon wrote the plays, not Shakespeare. You'll see."

Aker was lighting a cigar.

"A few hours? I hate to mention this, Mayhem, but you've just burned out that condenser. I told you weeks ago to get it replaced. It'll take days or longer to have a duplicate made."

"What?" Mayhem rushed over to examine the apparatus. "You're right! Good Lord, I'd forgotten. Why didn't you say something before?"

Aker smiled unpleasantly.

"As our friend Mr. Manx would remark, I hesitate to stick my neck out." He shrugged. "Doesn't matter. How do you expect Pete to find out anything in a few hours? It'll take days—and now there's no chance of your getting soft-hearted and bringing him back before he has a chance to learn the truth."

"But—but—" Mayhem sputtered. "He may get in trouble!"

"He always does," the professor admitted. "But he always gets out of it!"

The world stopped whirling about Pete Manx. He drew a deep breath, opened his eyes, and looked around. He was staring at a corpse.

It was very old, and very dead. It hung in a sloppy-looking fashion from a gallows, against which a ladder had been placed, and a starved cur was crouching nearby, licking its chops. Pete said "*Ulp*" in a shocked voice and turned hastily away.

He was only a few feet from a stone bridge, so covered with houses that it resembled a continued street. On this was built a tower, on the top of which several human heads were stuck on spikes. The general effect was neat but not gaudy.

Several people were standing beside Pete, examining the corpse on the gallows. They were dressed, apparently, for a masquerade. The women wore voluminous garments and hoods, and the men were clad in ruffs, knee-breeches and leather jerkins. Pete, examining his own figure, found that he was clad similarly, though in somewhat finer apparel.

"Cultured period, huh?" Manx inquired bitterly of thin air. "It looks like it. First thing happens I run into a stiff!"

"By'r lakin, he does look stiff," said a swarthy ragamuffin who was contemplatively picking his teeth. "Poor Enas. Well, he'll cut no more purse-strings."

"Oh," Pete responded blankly. "Petty larceny. And they hang you for that?"

"He got off easy," said the other. "He might have been drawn and quartered."

Pete considered. This was a murderously active time-sector, it appeared, but at least he wouldn't have to stay long. What had Doctor Mayhem promised? A few hours . . . well, that didn't leave much time to do his job. He'd have to get busy.

"I'm looking for a ham named Shakespeare," he said to the dark man. "Know anything about him?"

"Mayhap. Who are you?"

Pete felt in his pockets. No card-case. He didn't even know what he looked like, whose body he was inhabiting in Elizabethian England. Well—

"Manx," he said. "Pete Manx."

"You're dressed like a noble, but—you mean Master Will, no harm?"

"Nope. I just want some inside dope."

The other pondered, and finally gave Pete instructions.

"The Globe Theatre is the place. Or he may be at the Mermaid Tavern. Follow this street—"

It wasn't difficult to find the Globe Theatre, even though it resembled an inn more than anything else. But Master Will wasn't there. Pete was told to try the Mermaid Tavern.

"He'll be swilling ale with Ben and Kit," said the informant, a tall man with haggard eyes. "God knows *I* can't do any-

thing with him. We need a third act and he keeps yelling that he's in a slump. Preserve me from writers and temperament!" He threw up his hands and left.

Pete found the Tavern, without further adventure. It looked like a beer-joint on Hallowe'en. Men in bizarre costumes were sitting at the oaken tables, banging their drinking cups and shouting a song in loud chorus.

*"Sleep, I say, fond fancy,  
And leave my thoughts molesting——"*

Pete grunted and stood staring around until a fat man in a white apron came bustling up.

"How may I serve you, my lord?"

"I'm looking for a guy named Shakespeare."

"Master Will? He'll be along presently. He ran out when one of his creditors came in. Why do you wish to see him?"

Pete made a placating gesture.

"It's okay. Everything's on the up and up. I'm just one of the boys."

The inn-keeper still looked suspicious, but gestured toward a table.

"There sit Kit Marlowe and Ben Jonson, two of his closest friends. Oh, Ben! Here's a man to see Will."

A burly gentleman in stained garments pushed a blonde off his knee and turned to stare at Pete. He hiccuped slightly, drank ale, and nodded.

"Sit with us, stranger. Who are you?"

Pete told them.

"Manx? Then you're no gentleman."

"Oh, yeah? Listen, wise guy, my old man used to be a Tammany alderman and——"

"Nay, nay," said Ben Jonson. "I meant not to offend you. We strolling players and playwrights aren't lords, you know."

Pete was pacified. He made a broad gesture.

"I get it. I'm in the same racket myself. Ran a bingo joint in Ocean Park till the D. A. clamped down."



The other man, Kit Marlowe, frowned, his lean face twisting surprisingly.

"Yet you're dressed as a noble. How——"

Manx searched his capacious memory and brought up a gem to help explain himself.

"A rose by any other monicker smells the same," he misquoted.

Marlowe and Jonson exchanged surprised glances.

"You know our Will's plays! Come, we must drink to that. He'll be glad to see you when he returns."

Ale was supplied—heady, strong stuff, which Pete gulped thirstily.

"Okay," he said. "Have one on me. Make it a boilermaker, Doc," he instructed the inn-keeper, who merely gaped.

Pete had to explain what a boilermaker was. Jonson and Marlowe were delighted with the new concoction.

"'Tis a wondrous combination, Pete," Ben chuckled. "I like it!"

Manx, luckily, found gold in a purse at his belt, and paid the bill. For not the first time he wondered whose body he was inhabiting. There was, of course, no clue.

Time passed and liquor flowed. Occasionally a group would burst into song. Each time Pete writhed.

"That's corny," Manx finally said in disgust. "Wish there was an electric phonograph here."

A minstrel in green tights wandered by the table. He exhibited a lute and plucked at its strings, bursting into a dreary song about a lady who looked like a dove.

"Corny," said Pete. "Come on. Give. Shake it, hep-cat."

The minstrel turned purple.

"I suppose you could do better!"

"Sure," Manx agreed, with slightly intoxicated assurance. "Gimme that zither."

"I used to handle a banjo in a medicine show," he told his companions. "Let's see, now. . . ."

He launched into song. He was, it appeared, heading for the last round-up. The room grew still.

"Odd," said Ben, when the solo was finished. "Methinks 'tis odd enough. But——"

"Okay." Pete grunted. "I'll give you some jive."

Manx's rendition of the "Yodelin' Jive" was greeted with a storm of applause. Men banged cups on their tables and yelled for more. A sad looking chap with a high, bald forehead wandered in and looked around vaguely.

"Here's Will!" Ben yelled. "Will! Over here!"

Master Shakespeare dragged himself to the table.

"I'm going mad," he announced, peering around in a dazed fashion. "Commercialism will ruin art yet. How in God's name can I write my novel when they keep yelling for those awful plays?"

"You and your novel," Ben boomed with affectionate contempt. "Money's the thing, my lad. Forget about art and stick to your plays. They're making pounds and guineas——"

"If the Queen would only condescend to view a performance, my fortune would be made. But I'm stuck for a third act on that thrice-accursed *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Bah."

Pete looked hazily at Will. "It's been done," he remarked. "Warner Brothers made it a couple of years ago. Boy, did it smell. Mickey Rooney was good, though."

Shakespeare downed a stoup of ale in one swallow.

"What d'you mean, it's been done! I haven't finished writing it."

"All I know is what I saw. Guy with a donkey's head. Bottom, his name was—that was Jimmy Cagney."

"A donkey's head for Bottom!" Shakespeare leaned forward, his eyes glittering. "What an idea! It's ridiculous——"

"It's great!" Ben Jonson boomed. "The audience would go wild. They love that stuff."

"It's—eh? Perchance you're right." Will looked at Pete again. "Tell me more of this, friend."

Manx obliged. His memory was rather hazy, but it improved as he drank on. He detailed the plot of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

"Wonderful!" Shakespeare was beaming. "Those added scenes will make my play! I'll write it up just like that."

Marlowe shook his head.

"It's plagiarism, Will. They're still talking about your *Othello*."

Will considered.

"Where was this play produced? America, you say? Well! Some little kingdom in Europe—it doesn't matter. Nobody'll know the difference."

"I got a million of 'em," Pete said generously. "But what makes a good play is blood. Lots of it. Say, I remember a Karloff picture—or was it *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*?—where a guy kept changing from a hero to a heel. He——"

Manx rambled on, while Shakespeare listened. Presently the great playwright began to murmur something about Ariel and Caliban.

"Say, you guys should have seen Bette Davis in *Elizabeth and Essex*," Manx went on.

There was a dead silence. Pete looked around.

"What's the matter? Did I say something?"

"Quiet," Marlowe hissed. "There may be spies here. 'Tis dangerous to hint at such matters—even treasonable."

"Oh," said Pete, remembering. "I get it. Then Bette and Errol really are that way about each other."

The silence grew strained. Manx broke it by reaching for the lute.

"You birds never heard Cab Calloway," he announced. "Brothers, prepare for something. I'm going to dish out some boogie-woogie."

"It was daooon in Chinatown. . . ." Pete caroled. His fingers flashed over the strings. This, he decided, was fun. "Come on, Pete," he whispered to himself. "Give! Get hot!—*and there was Minnie*—join in, boys!"

"*Minnie the Moocher!*"

"*Kicking the gong around!*"

Other lutes appeared and followed the tune Pete set. One

by one voices were raised, with Ben Jonson's bull-like bass leading all the rest.

"Some were high——"

"And some were mighty low!"

The inn-keeper stood against the wall with his mouth wide open, staring at this madhouse. Dignity was lost. The contagion of swing swept the Mermaid Tavern.

Pete tossed the lute away and sprang up, indulging in some fancy rug-cutting. Ben Jonson joined him, and then Shakespeare. Several girls appeared, and, with feminine instinct of rhythm, quickly joined the jive.

"Madmen!" gasped the inn-keeper. "They are possessed."

"Hi-de-hi—" shrilled Will Shakespeare.

"Ho-de-ho—" boomed Ben Jonson.

"And there was Minnie!" That was Kit Marlowe, the renowned Elizabethan dramatist and poet.

"Kicking the gong around!"

That was the Mermaid Tavern!

"Hold!"

An icy voice cut in on the merriment. Slowly silence descended. Pete felt Jonson's huge hand grip his shoulder.

"Friends of yours?" Ben asked.

Two men—nobles by their apparel—were pushing forward. One was fairly young, with a weak, foppish face. The other was about fifty or more and resembled a rather vicious gopher.

"Hah!" said the gopher. "There you are!"

"Zooks!" the other gasped. "You gave us a merry chase. Why you spend your time in these low haunts I don't know. The Queen wants to see you. It's important."

"The Queen!" Ben Jonson stared at Pete. "You *are* a noble, then."

"I ain't," Manx snapped, annoyed at the interruption. "Go 'way. I'm busy."

"But, cousin——"

"Nuts."

Will Shakespeare came forward unsteadily and examined the two new arrivals.

"To be or not to be," he announced. "That is the question. Who are you—uh——"

"Mugs," Pete supplied.

"Thanks," Will beamed. "Who are you mugs?"

"I am Robert Cecil," said the young man. "And this is Lord Burghley."

"I'm your uncle, in case you're too befuddled to remember," Burghley snapped, glaring at Pete, who blandly picked up a lute from a nearby table.

"Scram, pickle-puss," he murmured. "I'm busy." And he began to sing about Minnie the Moocher. With a booming snort of disgust Lord Burghley fled.

Robert Cecil lingered.

"You must see the Queen," he urged. "Edward Coke is trying to ruin you, and not even Essex can help you unless——"

His voice was drowned in a thundering chorus.

"Hi-de-hi! Ho-de-ho! And there was Minnie——"

"Kicking the gong around," caroled Pete Manx and Will Shakespeare, their arms about each other's necks, while the inn-keeper of the Mermaid Tavern stared in shocked horror at the unprecedented sight of Kit Marlowe and Ben Jonson indulging in a display of rug-cutting that had never been seen in Elizabethan England.

Well, he had really achieved his aim, Manx told himself. Shakespeare had written his own plays; that was obvious. But, somehow, the expected return to 1940 and the Doc's laboratory did not come. For some reason this delay did not worry the happy-go-lucky Manx. He was having a swell time.

He visited the Globe Theatre and suggested certain changes—seats, for example, in the balcony and the pit. His purse still bulged with gold, and he roomed in the Mermaid Tavern, spending his nights carousing with Will, Ben, and Kit. The inn shook with shag. It shuddered with swing and jerked with jive. The word spread.

Gentlemen flocked to the Tavern. First came the gay blades, and then the older men. They lost their dignity and joined

in the chorus of Minnie the Moocher. Pete bent his energies to constructing an orchestra, and finally succeeded. The boys gave for all they were worth.

The Globe Theatre was altered in several respects. Boys wandered about between acts selling sweets and certain small boxes which, they contended, contained valuable prizes. *Midsummer Night's Dream* was produced and went over with a bang. Meanwhile, Shakespeare persisted in pumping Pete for anecdotes he was quite willing to supply.

"So this guy's moll waits till he's asleep and pours hot lead in his ear, see?"

"*Hamlet!* The very thing!" Shakespeare enthused.

"But the old gag's still the best," Manx told the playwright. "Boy meets girl—boy loses girl—boy gets girl."

"Ah," said Will Shakespeare, "that's an idea. My Verona plot needs further development. I'm stuck for a twist."

"What's it about?"

"Oh, I don't really know, yet. A man named Montague is at odds with one named Capulet."

"That reminds me of something," Manx pondered. "I got it. A picture I saw a while ago. . . . Look, why not give Capulet a daughter and Montague a son, and let the sprouts fall in love? Call the boy Romeo and the girl Juliet."

"'Tis an idea," Will Shakespeare nodded. "Tell me more. Though I wish I had time to write my novel. . . ."

He fell silent as Pete recounted the plot of Romeo and Juliet.

The idea struck fire. Master Will fell to work, scribbling busily with his quill. And, presently, the new play was put into rehearsal.

"That balcony scene's swell," Manx applauded, but Will shook his head gloomily.

"I think I'd better cut that out. It lacks fire."

The play opened and was a tremendous success. On the fourth night of the run trouble started. A handsome, well-dressed noble in a short beard cornered Pete.

"Good heavens, where have you been? I've been looking for you everywhere?"

"Oh, hello," Manx said vaguely. "I've been staying here at the Mermaid."

"They told me I'd find you here. Elizabeth's foaming at the mouth. Coke's trying to get that job of Attorney-General away from you——"

"Coke?" Pete remembered that Lord Burghley or Robert Cecil had mentioned the name some time before, during his first night at the Mermaid.

"Yes, yes, yes, Coke. Edward Coke, the lawyer. Your deadliest enemy. Listen to me. I may be able to calm Elizabeth, but I'm not sure. Coke's told her where you've been hiding—with a gang of strolling players. I did my best for you. Said Will Shakespeare was the greatest dramatist in England. But she's—well, you know how Elizabeth is."

"Yeah," Pete nodded. "I know how she is. Or do I?"

"I've done what I could. The Queen's going to attend a performance two nights from now, at the Globe Theatre, in disguise. She said if Shakespeare is really as good as I said, she'll forgive you. But if he's a flop you'll be beheaded. And I'll be in trouble myself."

"Wow," Manx groaned. "What a dame. I still don't get it. Just what——"

"In two nights, the Queen will be in the audience. Tell these scoundrelly players of yours to do their utmost. Everything depends on Elizabeth's liking the play. If she does, you'll get the job of Attorney-General instead of Coke."

A page rushed in and handed the visitor a paper. The short beard wiggled.

"I must go. Good luck. I'll be with Elizabeth at the performance."

He fled, but Pete detained the page. Apparently he was supposed to know the bearded man, who certainly knew him. He asked the boy.

"The Earl of Essex," said the page, bowing low as he departed. Pete staggered to a table and called for a boilermaker.

"Essex! Elizabeth and—ouch! These things always happen to me! I still don't know who I am—but I'm a pal of Essex, if that means anything."

"A pal of Essex?" boomed Ben Jonson as he entered the tavern and lumbered forward. "Who? Never mind. I've news for you, Pete. Will's troupe has been arrested."

"What?" Manx spilled his drink. "Arrested? But——"

"Vagrancy's the charge," Ben said, smiling wryly. "The whole troupe's in gaol. They'll be released in a week, I hear. Some lawyer named Coke arranged it."

"Coke! Edward Coke? Wait a minute." Pete sat silently considering. He was beginning to understand. The Queen would attend a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in two nights. But there'd be nobody to act out the play. Coke's stratagem would mean——

"Why, the double-crossing mouthpiece," Manx exploded. "I'll put the bee on him. Where's Will? We gotta get hold of the understudies."

"They're in gaol too," Ben explained.

"But we gotta put on the play in two nights! We—we——"

"We can't. Coke's got guards at the Globe and threatens to arrest any players on the stage for vagrancy."

Shakespeare wandered in, shaking his head.

"Hello, Pete. Hello, Ben. This business may give me time to write my novel, but I don't know. I wax despondent."

"You wax—eh?" Pete's jaw dropped. "Say! I've got an idea. You say Coke won't let any actors on the stage, Ben? And the players are all in the calaboose?"

"Right."

"Okay." Mr. Manx nodded slowly. "If I can get in to see the boys, I may be able to fix it yet. But it'll mean work. Listen!" He bent forward over the table and began to talk rapidly.

Half an hour later several skilled artisans stood around Pete, watching him sketch on the table-top.

"The diaphragm goes here. Maybe parchment will do for that, or vellum. The needle arm's connected to the center of the diaphragm, and it sort of bends down—like that. There's



the needle. The wax rolls—you do have wax in this time, don't you?"

"Of course," said one of the artisans. "But I don't understand——"

"You don't have to. Just do as I tell you. You talk into this horn and your voice hits the diaphragm and jiggles it. That jiggles the needle, which keeps sliding over the wax rolls. They're turning, you see, and——"

Kit Marlowe dashed in.

"Here's the pass from Essex," he gasped. "It'll get you into the gaol and out again."

"Swell. Now I want a rush job, boys, and I'll check every step with you." His eyes twinkled mischievously. . . .

It was almost curtain time. Manx peeped through the curtain at the audience.

"She ain't come yet," he said, "I guess. Wait a minute. There's Essex—and a frail with him. She's got a mask on."

Ben Jonson looked.

"That's the Queen, all right. Shall we get started?"

A burly man in uniform tapped Pete on the shoulder.

"We have our orders. If any player sets foot on this stage——"

"Yeah. We know. But Ben and Kit and Will and I ain't players. Come on, Will. Make your speech."

Master Shakespeare, however, had stage-fright. He was hiding in the wings, and Manx hastily took his place. As he marched on, he was horridly conscious of hundreds of eyes focused at him. Essex looked worried. The Queen's face was impassive.

"Uh—ladies and gentlemen," Pete gulped. "You're going to witness something entirely new and different. You got a habit of putting on plays here without scenery. Well, we're going one step further. We're putting on *Romeo and Juliet* tonight with plenty of scenery—but without actors!"

There was a dead silence as Manx fled. He rushed off the stage, ducked behind a screen set in the center, and gestured wildly at Kit Marlowe, who obediently lifted the curtain. The

audience saw a back-drop painted to represent a street—supposedly in Verona, but, since Pete had sketched the scene, it was a bit puzzling to see an elevated railway near a palace that bore a suspicious resemblance to the Empire State Building. A voice said:

*“Two households, both alike in dignity—”*

The guards stood in the wings, staring. Neither Pete nor the others was talking. The voice, seemingly, emerged from a horn connected to a box over which Manx hovered, vigorously turning a crank. Manx had made the waxen records for his simple phonograph in the gaol.

The Prologue ended. Sampson and Gregory, of the house of Capulet, appeared invisibly on the stage.

*“Gregory, o’ my word, we’ll not carry coals.”*

*“No, for then we should be colliers.”*

Will Shakespeare had quietly fainted against a back-drop. Kit Marlowe was staring out at the audience and shaking his head despairingly. Only Ben was happy. He was slightly tipsy.

“What a time we had last night,” he gurgled. “After you went to bed, Pete. We played your—what is it—phonograph in the tavern, and even made a recording. What fun!”

“Sh-h!” Manx hissed. “The next record, quick!”

The guards were worried. Obviously they couldn’t arrest players if there weren’t any, but the performance was going on regardless. Yet the audience was cold.

Shakespeare woke up and passed out again. Kit was dripping with perspiration. Pete felt sick. This wasn’t going over. Maybe it was too novel. And if the Queen didn’t like it—what had Essex said? Beheading? Or maybe burning at the stake. Pete shut his eyes and shuddered. It was just a toss-up between a stake and a chop.

The audience grew deadly. People began to leave. Kit had his hands over his eyes. Will awoke, listened a moment, gasped, “That damned balcony scene!” and passed out once more.

It was act two, scene two—Capulet's orchard. The famous balcony scene. Romeo entered invisibly.

His deep voice came out of the phonograph horn.

"He jests at scars that never felt a wound. But soft! What light through yonder window breaks. . . ." The record ended. Pete automatically reached for the next, which should have been extended ready in Ben's hand. But Jonson was having trouble. He was fumbling desperately amid the cylinders.

"They're mixed up," he gurgled. "Quick! Ad lib!"

With a groan of horror Pete snatched the script from his pocket and searched for the place. Already hisses were coming from the audience on the other side of the screen. A moment more—

Pete found the place, but the letters blurred before his eyes. The old English script was difficult for him to read. He tried to imitate Romeo's voice, bending low over the phonograph so the guards would not notice that he was speaking.

"It—it is the east, and Juliet is the sun. Arise—f-f-fair sun, and—what the hell is this!—and—and blackout the moon, who is—who's got the pip . . . that thou art—art—art a honey more fair than she. . . ."

"Oh, my God!" Will Shakespeare gurgled, and collapsed once more. "What a profession! I'm going out and dig ditches for a living!"

The audience was in an uproar. Kit Marlowe was running around in circles. Ben Jonson was hopelessly fumbling with the wax records. Pete plunged on frantically.

"Two of the fairest stars . . . what if her lamps were there . . . her glims in heaven . . . oh, that I were a glove upon her hand, that I might—might—what is this, anyhow? . . . that I might get a handout!"

"Ay me!" Ben Jonson squeaked in Juliet's voice.

"She speaks!" Pete babbled hysterically. "Oh, speak again—"

"Got it!" Ben said jubilantly, slipping a record on the phonograph.

"Oh, speak, bright angel—"

Ben was busy, and the needle scratched across the wax. The phonograph's horn blared out sound. The bright angel spoke again:

"It was *down* in *Chinatown*—the cokeys lay around—some were *high* and some were mighty *loooow!*"

"*Mighty low!*" boomed the chorus of the Mermaid Tavern.

"There were millions on the floor——"

"Oh-oh," Ben said. "Wrong record. That's the one we made last night in the tavern."

"And *theeeah* was Minnie—*Minnie the Moocher!*—kicking the gong around!"

"Take it off!" Pete babbled. "Oh, we're sunk now! We——"

"Hold!" Kit Marlowe called from the wings. "Pete, they like it! They're going wild."

A chorus of shouts rose from the audience. The contagion of the jive swept out. Some of the onlookers had visited the Mermaid Tavern lately, and they began to jitterbug in the aisles. In a moment the Globe Theatre swung into action!

"If you don't know Minnie——"

"If you don't know Minnie!" roared the audience.

"Yahooo!" That was Ben Jonson, capering into view on the stage and setting the pace. "Swing it, boys! Give!"

"*There was Minnie!*"

Even the guards joined in, unable to resist. And Queen Elizabeth rose daintily to her feet, assisted by Essex, and—*swung!*

"There was Minnie——"

"MINNIE THE MOOCHER!"

"Kicking the gong around!"

By the time the record ended, the audience had collapsed in their seats. But Pete's quick brain had already made a plan. He continued *Romeo*—with certain additions. Between each act he played Minnie the Moocher.

Essex found him after the show.

"It's wonderful," the Earl babbled. "You'll be the next Attorney-General! The Queen's delighted. It's——"

"Aw, it's nothing," Pete said modestly. "Just a little idea of mine, that's all. Hey, Ben?"

"I hear you talking," remarked Ben Johnson. "Hi-de——"  
*Woosh!*

Doctor Mayhem had at last repaired his time machine.

Pete opened his eyes in the laboratory. He beamed happily at Professor Aker and the Doc.

"Hi," he greeted. "Had a swell time. Wish you'd been along."

"What happened?" Aker demanded. "Shakespeare wrote the plays, didn't he?"

"Bacon!" Mayhem snapped. "Tell us just what happened, Pete."

"Okay," said Manx, gratefully lighting a cigarette. "Bacon had nothing to do with the set-up. Shakespeare wrote his own stuff. Listen. . . ." He launched into his tale, ignoring Mayhem's look of disappointment.

"So that's the whole thing," he finished. "Sorry, Doc, but you lose."

Aker was grinning.

"Next time don't argue with a psychologist," he said maliciously. "If——"

"Just a minute." Mayhem had an eyebrow cocked up. "You gave Will Shakespeare a lot of ideas, didn't you, Pete?"

"Oh, sure. He liked most of 'em. Wrote 'em up——"

"Never mind that. You gave Shakespeare ideas!" Mayhem turned to Aker.

"Professor," he told him, "I think you missed a few points. The man whose body Pete inhabited in the sixteenth century was a close friend of Essex. He was a cousin to Robert Cecil and a nephew of Lord Burghley. And his deadliest enemy was Edward Coke, the lawyer."

"So what?" Pete asked. "I never did find out who I was."

Mayhem was chuckling. "Ask Aker. He knows. That's right, Pete—you were a pal of Essex and an enemy of Coke. Your uncle was Lord Burghley. And—ha!—d'you know who Lord Burghley's nephew was?"

"No," Manx said blankly. "Who was he?"

"Sir Francis Bacon!" Mayhem howled, and bent double with laughter. "So Shakespeare wrote the plays! Wow! But Pete Manx gave Shakespeare the ideas—and it was Bacon's body you were inhabiting in Elizabethan times! Yaaaah!" the Doctor observed, with a lamentable lack of dignity, to the departing back of Professor Aker. "Wise guy, huh? Come on, Pete. I'm going to buy you a drink."

"Okay, Doc," Manx smiled, rising. "I guess I earned it. That's what I call bringing home the Bacon!"

## A PROBLEM FOR BIOGRAPHERS

*By* MINDRET LORD

SOMETIMES a life changes suddenly and completely and for no discoverable reason—this I believe. A man who has been a respectable small town banker goes to the South Seas and becomes a great painter; or a house painter becomes a dictator; or perhaps it is a miserable Hollywood extra who catches the public's fancy and rockets to stardom overnight. Biographers insist that there is no mystery in such matters, and they base their whole art, or science, upon their ability to track down footprints in the sands of time. But my Great Aunt Lucinda left no prints that I could ever find, and that has made me doubt whether biographers are always right in assuming that the early incidents of a career form a trail that leads inevitably to the known conclusion.

I know, and Terristown knows, where Aunt Lucinda ended, but I defy anybody to trace the course to her sudden triumph. If her life had any direction whatever, it was pointed toward obscurity, and for her to have reached the position she attained was no more reasonable than the notion that one might reach the moon by digging a hole in the earth. She was like a flowering plant—a petunia, perhaps. One day it is an ugly, sprawling, rough-skinned weed, and the next it may be loaded with beautiful, double-ruffled blossoms. But the thing that happened to Aunt Lucinda was stranger than that. Her appearance never changed at all. She was rather pretty in an unimportant, dull sort of way, but she certainly was not beautiful, and I do not imagine that any of her hundreds of ardent admirers thought so. Whatever it was she had, it was more moving than beauty, more profound than learning, more stimulating than wit, and more durable than the fading attractions of sex. Aunt Lucinda was twenty-five

when the curious phenomenon began, and it lasted, undiminished, for fifty years—to the day of her death. Back in Terristown the men still say, "There was a woman!" And the women still say, "There was a witch!"

Aunt Lucinda married Prof. Hatterly when she was nineteen and he was thirty-six. At that time he was lecturing on Greek history and philosophy at Terris Teachers' College, making I suppose about a thousand a year, and working like a galley slave. For Aunt Lucinda it was almost certainly a marriage of convenience; she was the second of five sisters all of whom were handsomer than she, in a family that was undistinguished by wealth or position. Her prospects were meagre and she must have resigned herself to marrying Hatterly without the misery of feeling that she might have done better. There is a photograph that was taken shortly after their marriage; in it she looks stiff, awkward—and uninteresting. Examine it through a magnifying glass and nothing will be found to indicate that six years later she would become irresistibly attractive to every man who met her. The face is mildly weak—but not weak enough to be vicious; the eyes are large, but not voluptuous; the nose is short, but not impertinent; the mouth is just a mouth. It is a portrait of an average young woman in average circumstances.

When they had been married five years, Hatterly joined a scientific expedition to the Greek Islands, and left Aunt Lucinda to stay at home, where she mended and washed clothes and canned fruit during the eight months he was gone. When he returned, it was to a slightly better position at a raise in salary of three hundred dollars per annum. On her birthday he gave her a bottle of eau de cologne that he had bought in Marseilles, and an antique ring that he had found somewhere in Corfu. The ring was heavy, deeply corroded and too large for Aunt Lucinda's fingers, but to please her husband she strung it on a cheap silver chain she had, and hung it around her neck. She is wearing the ring and chain in every photograph (and there were literally thousands) that was taken of her from this point forward, and it may be doubted if she



ever removed it from her neck, except for bathing, till the time of her last illness. Obviously, poor Aunt Lucinda had no great taste in dress.

It is not known exactly how the half century of masculine idolatry began for Aunt Lucinda, but one thing is certain—up to this time, Hatterly had probably been as kind and considerate as the average harassed college professor, but he had assuredly not acquired any local reputation for being desperately in love with his wife. Then as now, in Terristown, love as a madness, love as a passion, was frowned upon, whether it preceded or followed the marriage ceremony. If a professor and his wife were reasonably polite to each other, this was considered to be love, although habitual, mutual rudeness was not necessarily taken as proof of lack of adequate affection. However, the opposite extreme would surely have been looked upon with suspicion—it would have upset the social balance and might have brought chaos to the well-ordered life of the community—as in fact it did.

From the beginning (and by that I mean from Aunt Lucinda's twenty-fifth birthday) Hatterly's adject devotion would seem to have been selfless and completely without jealousy. There is a letter that was written by Aunt Lucinda to my grandmother sometime during the week following my Aunt's birthday. In it she expresses considerable surprise at the curious turn events have taken.

"I must confess," she writes in her childishly round script, "that when my husband entered the house that evening, together with several of his bachelor colleagues, I did him the injustice of being afraid for a moment that he had been drinking. His face was flushed, he seemed excited and quite unlike his usual coldly dignified self. When he actually kissed me right before the other gentlemen, I blushed and stammered something and rushed out to the kitchen where I had been icing the cake for my birthday. This was the first time in our married life that Dr. Hatterly (she always referred to him thus) had ever brought home an unexpected guest. Also, it was the first time that he had allowed himself to act with-

out perfect decorum. The experience was most confusing, and due to the fact that there was not nearly enough food in the house for such a large party . . .”

The story of that first remarkable dinner continues through what was apparently a delightful evening for everybody but Aunt Lucinda, who was too flabbergasted to enjoy it. The guests did not leave until nearly midnight—the latest she had stayed up since her marriage. And Aunt Lucinda’s surprises did not end with the departure of the last reluctant bachelor. “Dr. Hatterly quite amazed me,” she wrote, which I suppose may be taken to mean almost anything.

Dr. Hatterly went right on being amazing, and so did his friends, and his friends’ friends. In Terristown, a kind of cult grew up around Lucinda Hatterly. The house was always full of appreciative and admiring gentlemen (and fewer ladies). Aunt Lucinda’s sayings were echoed throughout the college and the town itself. Wives were constantly irritated at being told what Lucinda Hatterly wore, how she looked, what she served at her ever-increasing table. They could see nothing in the woman—neither good nor evil. That was what made them feel so impotent in their rage, so helpless to combat a power that was invisible to them. Aunt Lucinda was not a bad woman; her morals were beyond reproach; her goodness of heart was undeniable; in her there was no guile, whatever. The women of Terristown asked, “What *is* it you see in that frump?” There is no record that any man answered that question. But the women who lived in Terristown during the period when Aunt Lucinda flourished are still referred to as The Lost Generation.

Gradually, Aunt Lucinda must have come to admit to herself the fact of her unflinching charm, but this did not make her vain nor smug. She remained much as one might imagine a sentient magnet: secure in her knowledge of her power to draw even the steeliest fragment, but unimpressed by the phenomenon.

One of the steeliest fragments in Terristown was Dr. Dunkee, President of the college. Shortly after he met Aunt

Lucinda, Hatterly was made head of the philosophy department at a considerable raise in salary, and during the remainder of his life, he rose with gratifying speed to a position of eminence in the community. With the sympathetic advice and financial assistance of Mr. Malthrew, the Terristown banker, Hatterly piled up a tidy fortune; the dignitaries of his church (who were frequent guests in the Hatterly home) loaded him with honors and responsibilities; and at the end he was the omnipotent ruler of the local chapter of his lodge.

Hatterly died at sixty of a cold that turned into pneumonia and carried him off in less than twenty-four hours. Aunt Lucinda was forty-three, and since she had never had any children, she was alone in the world. Or at least she would have been, if there had been no men in the town.

It is certain that Aunt Lucinda's loss was a deep and lasting sorrow to her, and during the thirty-two years of life that remained to her, she never once considered a second marriage. But if gaiety was not in her nature, neither was continued melancholy; presently she put aside her mourning and threw open the doors of hospitality.

I was taken to call on Aunt Lucinda when I was five or six years old and she was over seventy. I remember a frail old lady in a black silk dress who wore a heavy ring on a silver chain around her throat. I distinctly recall my impression that she was the most fascinating woman I had ever seen, and I made myself a nuisance by insisting upon sitting on her lap. I have been told that for several months thereafter, I continued to make myself a nuisance by announcing that I wanted to go to live with Aunt Lucinda.

One other thing I remember about that visit: the men. There were men everywhere. There were men to help her in and out of chairs, to pick up a fallen handkerchief, to pass coffee cups. There were always three or four or five men to listen when she spoke a word, to follow her about the room with their eyes or to laugh when Aunt Lucinda smiled. Perhaps there were a few other women there, but they are not in my memory.

Aunt Lucinda died when I was about eleven. At that time I was much too interested in the baseball we played in the vacant lot next door to be affected by the news. The death of an old aunt in another town was not of such stirring importance as the question of whether I was going to be allowed to pitch.

Here ends the story of Aunt Lucinda. I had thought of writing her biography some time, but the apparent impossibility of reconciling the drabness of her early life with the later triumph makes the project doubtful. The reader would not believe it—and how could he be expected to? We believe in cause and effect, and unless it could be demonstrated that in the first third of Aunt Lucinda's career were planted the seeds that blossomed so suddenly and so amazingly, the history would seem incredible. But I have been unable to discover any particular in which she greatly differed from the other women of her time. Although it is probably true that she ended with a deeper understanding of men in general than most women acquire, that must have been the result of her mysterious power of attraction, rather than the cause of it. So I am forced to give up the problem of Aunt Lucinda. It simply does not make sense.

At Aunt Lucinda's direction, her estate was distributed among her numerous relatives; the ring which Dr. Hatterly had brought her from Greece came to me. Mother put it away in her trinket box where it lay for over ten years. Once, I believe, Mother wore it to a big masquerade party that is still famous in the annals of our family, although little is actually *said* about it. However, from what I have been able to put together, it would seem that on this occasion Mother, who was the most retiring and proper of ladies, became the queen of the night. By acclamation, (of the men, I assume) her costume was declared the most beautiful, her dancing the most delightful—and so on. Whatever prizes there were, she won. Towards morning it was observed that Mother could not dance with more than one gentleman at a time, and fighting broke out among the various claimants for the honor.

Father brought her home in tears. Strangely, whenever the subject was mentioned, later it was Father who introduced it. He always said that he never saw Mother, or any other woman, so lovely as she was that night.

The ring came back into a brief prominence at a time when I was making rather a fool of myself—though of course I did not know it, then. It seems, (I should say, "It was," but, "It seems," makes it sound as if I had not been quite such an idiot as I must have been), it seems that immediately after my graduation from college, I fell desperately in love with a young lady who wore the shortest nose and the highest heels that I had ever seen. She was a member of the chorus of a musical show to which I was taken by an acquaintance who happened to know one of the girls. When we went backstage, I met Betty, but I believe I did not actually fall in love with her until sometime later in the evening.

From the beginning it was evident that I had no place in Betty's plan of economy. It was galling to feel that a mere matter of a few hundred thousand dollars separated me from all in the world that I held dear, but it never occurred to me to criticize Betty for her reluctance to marry me on my prospects. She would let me take her out after the show when she had nothing more promising to do; she would accept my flowers with thanks—but she would not even pretend to take me seriously.

The end of the one-sided romance came in a way that seemed to me very tragic. One night while I was waiting for Betty just inside the stage door, several of the girls came down the iron steps and started to pass me without speaking, though I had met them very casually, I believe. Suddenly they stopped and began to talk to me as if we were all intimate friends. It was a pleasant though somewhat surprising moment and it did not grow less interesting as more and more young ladies joined our group. When Betty finally arrived, she had to elbow her way through the crowd.

At this stage of our relationship, I had practically given up hope of impressing Betty with my value as a husband or as

anything else, and therefore, from the moment we entered the taxi, I could hardly believe the sudden change in her attitude. Her capitulation was immediate and complete. She was mine—I was hers—we were each others' forever and ever. It was miraculous. When I got my breath I proposed and was instantly accepted. Then I took the ring I was wearing and slipped it onto her finger, saying, "I'll get you a real one, but this will have to do for this evening."

She switched on the light and looked at it curiously.

"It belonged to an old aunt of mine," I explained. "I found it when I was looking for some shirt studs tonight. I think it's an antique—and for all I know it's quite valuable."

Betty gazed at me thoughtfully. (She was more beautiful than ever—the most beautiful creature I had ever seen!) Finally she said, "Well—tomorrow is another day. . . ."

I did not know what she meant but I soon found out. "Tomorrow" began on the instant we entered the night club.

The thing that happened there was just as unexpected and unreasonable as the ecstatic interlude in the traffic had been and I think that even Betty, herself, was amazed by her success. In her most wishful dreams she could not have possibly imagined creating such a sensation. Men from the farthest corners of the room left their parties to visit us, or rather Betty. At times there were as many as ten men sitting and standing and leaning around her. I doubt if she had ever met most of them, but that made no difference—she was having the time of her life. For awhile I tried to wedge a word or a glance in edgewise, but I was ignored as completely as if I had been invisible. It was a bitter, humiliating thing, and when I could stand it no longer, I crept away. As I went out, I glanced back and saw Betty dancing in the arms of a gray haired, red faced man who had told us he was Georgie Gumhoe. Apparently the name meant something to her.

The next morning my ring was returned to me with a telegram that read:

SORRY. I GUESS IT JUST WASN'T TO BE. WISH ME LUCK.

MRS. GEORGE GUMHOE

Perhaps I should add that the marriage was annulled within a month. The action brought by Gumhoe on the grounds that he had been coerced. In any case, Betty was free when I saw her next; she was dancing in another show, and I went expecting to suffer the familiar tortures of scorned love. Figuratively, I kept my finger on my pulse while she was on the stage. But nothing happened. My heart beat normally; in fact, my eyes wandered. When the curtain fell, I thought of going back to speak to her but somehow I did not go. The thing was done.

I am rather sorry, now, that I gave the ring away, but at the time I got it back from Betty I was so broken hearted that I thought I never wanted to see it again, so I presented it with a melodramatic satisfaction to our colored laundress. . . . And there, again, is a career that biographers are not going to explain with ease. Who could have foreseen what would happen to her?





PART III

“HORRORS”



### NOTE TO PART III

ONE of the best "horror" stories ever told is Mark Twain's example, "Give Me My Golden Arm!" in "How To Tell a Ghost Story," but for its full effect it must be recited aloud. The story is generally known and it is in Mark Twain; so there is no reason to describe it here. It almost perfectly represents the methods and effects of horror stories as distinguished from weird stories or merely gruesome stories.

The Golden Arm is told in a simple dialect, which is not absolutely necessary; but the language of the horror story should be simple and unpretentious. Garish or noticeably deliberated idiom destroys the credibility of the events. The circumstances are naturalistic. To this substantial background the tale attaches certain macabre materials and when a psychic and spiritual discomfort has been built as high as possible it shouts "BOO!", so to speak, at the top of its voice.

The ghost story *per se* is not necessarily a horror story because a great many or nearly all of them can be read without any psychic discomfort. The final desideratum of the horror story is that this feeling should be translated to the hair on the back of the neck—that is, physically experienced. This feat is accomplished about once in a literary coon's age, so that it is not strange that in the following collection only one has this effect on me. I shall not name it; but I think the reader will discover it.

Poe wrote no more than three and possibly only two of these, for his style was generally too brilliant, as a pianist would say; its measured and ornamented manner warned the soul that though the narrative was diverting it was not *true*. "M. Valdemar," written with unusual simplicity for Poe, and "The Black Cat" had the properties and effects described and some people find the same effects in "Eleanore" though I have never been able to read that dental climax without a grin.

Poe did two or three good weird tales like "The Fall of the House of Usher" and "The Masque of the Red Death" but there is no horror in either one; they are too much bedizened both in language and setting to get the proper reaction.

A great many people wrote weird tales of great merit without ever turning out a horror story. They are found in the Old Testament, Homer, Shakespeare, Schiller, Gautier, Gogol, and it would probably be possible to discover several in every language, including the ancient ones. The Witch of Endor principle is used two or three times every year—a medium appalled by the occurrence of a veritable manifestation—but neither in these stories nor the Bible does the tale give one the slightest shiver of uneasiness. There isn't the least scare in any ghost who prances through Shakespeare's plays.

Ghost stories, weird stories and horror stories are three differently feathered birds. There are stories, of course, that qualify for two or all three of the classes. The horror story is almost invariably weird, though that is not true in the Bierce story previously cited. The ghost and weird stories are seldom horrible, so seldom that in combing six or seven hundred magazines I was able to find only this small number of stories which are excellent as weirds, and, sometimes with a little charity, qualify as horribles.

## II

The author of the first story, "In the Vault," deserves a special note for several reasons. H. P. Lovecraft died some months ago, after having created one of the strangest cults in fantastic literature. He wrote its entire content and generously permitted his colleagues in the fantastic fraternity—for the men in it take their work with a seriousness that is frequently justified and are personal friends as well as literary acquaintances—to use it as they pleased. They are still using it and it seems probable that they will continue to use it for years to come.

The history of Yoggoth would be an amusing literary study and an interesting and possibly valuable work in the psychol-

ogy of a writing mind devoted to the sheerest free fantasy, which nevertheless demanded an orderly and consistent system in a world that—God be praised—never was. It had specified gods or demon-gods and it even had an imaginary literature. For many years now writers in the various magazines of fantasy have been going to the imaginary ghoulish village of Arkham—patrons of Yankee vacation spots will not find this so funny—to borrow from the library of Miskatonic University such awful literature of the inconceivably awful hells of sub-space as “the frightful *Book of Eibon*,” “the *Unaussprelichen Kulten*” of “*von Junzt*,” and “the forbidden *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab, *Abdul Alhazred*.”

Once these writers delve into these books there is hell to pay in their own work thereafter, and that strong statement is putting it very mildly indeed. They read—and then they write, about Shub-Niggurath and his cheering section of five hundred unspeakable abominations, all howling, like football fans, “Iá! Iá! Shub-Niggurath! Hold that line!” Excuse me, that last phrase is not in the text.

There is a pit in the earth full of “shugguths,” which are something like enormous octopi about five days dead in a hot July summer, but still alive and capable of incredible obscene cruelties if one annoys them. This is only the earth-colonizing expedition of even worse horrors slid about halfway out of the Sixth Dimension into the orbit of some planet in a nebula too far away for telescopes but not too far to communicate with Earth and occasionally gobble an antipasto of overcurious scientists in a most revolting way.

The Lovecraft inferno seems to have made contact with our regular Christian Hell, because the shugguths occasionally yell, “Iá! Iá! The Goat With a Thousand Young! We want a touchdown!” (That’s the second time an unauthorized phrase has crept in.) The Goat With a Thousand Young, of course, was what the Early Christians made out of Pan, and it was very convenient to tell the idolatrous that the most appealing goat in their mythology was the Devil. (Typo:

Please leave that "D" up. I have troubles enough already. P. S.)

Enough of this nonsense—the "Necronomicon" would be a best seller among fantasy addicts if Miskatonic would put out an authorized version. The fancies caught on; Lovecraft added details in his various stories but never wavered from the old ones, and almost any weird tale editor reading a script from any of twenty writers, will glance at a reference to Arkham or Yoggoth or the "Book of Eibon" or the "Unaussprechlichen Kulten" and pass it without further notice, as being completely intelligible to his audience.

That is an achievement of some sort. It is difficult to put a name to it beyond that; but it is certainly an achievement.

This cosmology derives to some extent from what might be called the Later-Georgian-English-Weird-School, Blackwood, Machen, Linklater, et al.; but Lovecraft's tricks were reminiscent of Poe at his most precious, and Howard Phillips Lovecraft's real talent was for horror stories. The difficulty in writing a good horror in Poe's precious manner has already been suggested and it was for the most part insuperable in Lovecraft's case, though he was an enormously prolific writer and the minor part makes a very creditable accomplishment.

This wreath, then, into which I am sorry some poison ivy has crept, to Mr. Lovecraft!

"In the Vault" suffers very little from words like "poignantly" for "sharply," and "retardation" where "dragging" would have been much better, and so on.

\* \* \*

Mr. Lovecraft erred because of Poe. I may as well notice one other instance of literary over-admiration before climbing cautiously down from this precarious pulpit. Clark Ashton Smith is another fantasy writer, a very popular one, who frequently has excellent and original ideas and then casts them into a precious style that does not fit them. Only, his idol is not Poe but Lord Dunsany. Smith's story of the magician who be-

comes an item of a cosmic manuscript is excellent, but there are too many Byzantine words.

Dr. David H. Keller, another of the "greats" in this field, suffers from a curiously contrary circumstance—I do not say "fault." He writes with great directness and vigor, but in the freely imaginative field, his manner is unsuited to his somewhat pedestrian fancies. At the moment that I write this he is being honored at a Book Dinner in New York "for a distinguished new novel by a distinguished new novelist." The Doctor has found his mark; a fantastic thesis, yes, but with a more consistently "human" application. He could do "horror" if he tried, but he has always been good-natured and complicated. Medical training and medical matter-of-factness, one supposes.

This is by way of notice and apology for the omission of two of the most popular "weird" writers.

### III

August Derleth might have a special note, too. He is literary co-executor for Lovecraft and very much an executor of literature for himself. There is no question about preciosity in his style—it is clean and straight and simple; if it reminded one of anything but the style of a forthright and experienced writer with a story to get told as directly as possible, he might be referred to the Brawny School of Morgan Bassett and Jack London, with inflections of Conrad. He is no one to say, "Conflagration Devastates Canine Edifice" when he can say, "Fire Burns Kennel." He might even say, "Hot Dog."

\* \* \*

I may overestimate the neatly written "School For the Un-speakable" because of my experience at teaching in American public schools and a college. I may have been over-subjective in following the adventures of a strange youngster, a forlorn soul at best, in disagreeable circumstances.

"The Graveyard Rats" is much the best of the bogey-man

stories that have appeared in the magazines at hand. Enclosed and smothering darkness is a hereditary terror, and this seems to realize it, just as the John Flanders story realizes the old nightmare of pursuit. Mr. Flanders, incidentally, is really named Jean Ray; he took his pseudonym from his native land. May it live!

"Song of the Slaves" as well as "School For the Unspeakable," is by Manly Wade Wellman. What has been said for the best of Mr. Derleth's writing can also be said for the best of Mr. Wellman's; it is fluent and quiet as the good narrator's style should be, working more to well-tooled structure and effect than to dangerous lyric tours-de-force.

A contrary judgment can be put down for Seabury Quinn. He is, this anthologist may remark gratefully in payment for the use of his story, the worst fictional opportunist in the business. He cheats, he steals—always from himself—; he imitates—always himself—; he will get a happy ending on a story if he has to call in every Irish policeman, holy Father, yogi, clairvoyant, prizefighter, Sureté detective and naked blonde in the longitude of the horribly vampire-beset precincts of the accursed Harrisonville, N. J., presumably an aristocratic suburb of New York.

Nevertheless, no anthology of current periodical horrors would be complete without a small sample of the best known supernatural detective in weird fictions. After all, in more conventional whodunnit fiction, there was the great Sherlock Holmes, quite as incredible as the small Jules de Grandin.

"The House Where Time Stood Still" is one of Seabury Quinn's best stories and one of his worst. It is one of the ugliest and most ingenious; and on the other hand it demonstrates to an exaggerated degree his deplorable determination to have everything turn out right up to, and unhappily beyond, the point of using definitely farcical devices.

Harrisonville, N. J., with its country clubs and millionaire families and honest Irish policemen—but with a new Diabolist cult, or murderer from the Far East, or exotic vampire, or Voodoo avenger, cropping up on the first of every magazine



month must be a worse bet for local real estate salesmen than Lovecraft's Arkham, which has the advantages of Muskatonic U. The Harrisonville people go to Yale where the authorities seem to be strangely ignorant of the real significance of two small red punctures on the neck, and calmly attribute them to Princeton football players.



## IN THE VAULT

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

*A shuddery graveyard tale by the author of  
"The Rats in the Walls"*

THERE is nothing more absurd, as I view it, than that conventional association of the homely and the wholesome which seems to pervade the psychology of the multitude. Mention a bucolic Yankee setting, a bungling and thick-fibered village undertaker, and a careless mishap in a tomb, and no average reader can be brought to expect more than a hearty albeit grotesque phase of comedy. God knows, though, that the prosy tale which George Birch's death permits me to tell has in its aspects beside which some of our darkest tragedies are light.

Birch acquired a limitation and changed his business in 1881, yet never discussed the case when he could avoid it. Neither did his old physician, Doctor Davis, who died years ago. It was generally stated that the affliction and shock were results of an unlucky slip whereby Birch had locked himself for nine hours in the receiving-tomb of Peck Valley Cemetery, escaping only by crude and disastrous mechanical means; but while this much was undoubtedly true, there were other and blacker things which the man used to whisper to me in his drunken delirium toward the last. He confided in me because I was his doctor, and because he probably felt the need of confiding in some one else after Davis died. He was a bachelor, wholly without relatives.

Birch, before 1881, had been the village undertaker of Peck Valley, and was a very calloused and primitive specimen even as such specimens go. The practises I heard attributed to him would be unbelievable today, at least in a city; and even Peck Valley would have shuddered a bit had it known the easy

ethics of its mortuary artist in such matters as the ownership of costly "laying-out" apparel invisible beneath the casket's lid, and the degrees of dignity to be maintained in posing and adapting the unseen members of lifeless tenants to containers not always calculated with sublimest accuracy. Most distinctly Birch was lax, insensitive, and professionally undesirable; yet I still think he was not an evil man. He was merely crass of fiber and function—thoughtless, careless, and liquorish, as his easily avoidable accident proves, and without that modicum of imagination which holds the average citizen within certain limits fixed by taste.

Just where to begin Birch's story I can hardly decide, since I am no practised teller of tales. I suppose one should start in the cold December of 1880, when the ground froze and the cemetery delvers found they could dig no more graves till spring. Fortunately the village was small and the death rate low, so that it was possible to give all of Birch's inanimate charges a temporary haven in the single antiquated receiving-tomb. The undertaker grew doubly lethargic in the bitter weather, and seemed to outdo even himself in carelessness. Never did he knock together flimsier and ungainlier caskets, nor disregard more flagrantly the needs of the rusty lock on the tomb door which he slammed open and shut with such nonchalant abandon.

At last the spring thaw came, and graves were laboriously prepared for the nine silent harvests of the grim reaper which waited in the tomb. Birch, though dreading the bother of removal and interment, began his task of transference one disagreeable April morning, but ceased before noon because of a heavy rain that seemed to irritate his horse, after having laid but one body to its permanent rest. That was Darius Peck, the nonagenarian, whose grave was not far from the tomb. Birch decided that he would begin the next day with little old Matthew Fenner, whose grave was also near by; but actually postponed the matter for three days, not getting to work until Good Friday, the fifteenth. Being without superstition, he did not heed the day at all; though ever afterward he refused to

do anything of importance on that fateful sixth day of the week. Certainly, the events of that evening greatly changed George Birch.

On the afternoon of Friday, April fifteenth, then, Birch set out for the tomb with horse and wagon to transfer the body of Matthew Fenner. That he was not perfectly sober, he subsequently admitted; though he had not then taken to the wholesale drinking by which he later tried to forget certain things. He was just dizzy and careless enough to annoy his sensitive horse, which as he drew it viciously up at the tomb neighed and pawed and tossed its head, much as on that former occasion when the rain had seemingly vexed it. The day was clear, but a high wind had sprung up; and Birch was glad to get to shelter, as he unlocked the iron door and entered the side-hill vault. Another might not have relished the damp, odorous chamber with the eight carelessly placed coffins; but Birch in those days was insensitive, and was concerned only in getting the right coffin for the right grave. He had not forgotten the criticism aroused when Hannah Bixby's relatives, wishing to transport her body to the cemetery in the city whither they had moved, found the casket of Judge Capwell beneath her headstone.

The light was dim, but Birch's sight was good, and he did not get Asaph Sawyer's coffin by mistake, although it was very similar. He had, indeed, made that coffin for Matthew Fenner; but had cast it aside at last as too awkward and flimsy, in a fit of curious sentimentality aroused by recalling how kindly and generous the little old man had been to him during his bankruptcy five years before. He gave old Matt the very best his skill could produce, but was thrifty enough to save the rejected specimen, and to use it when Asaph Sawyer died of a malignant fever. Sawyer was not a lovable man, and many stories were told of his almost inhuman vindictiveness and tenacious memory for wrongs real or fancied. To him Birch had felt no compunction in assigning the carelessly made coffin, which he now pushed out of the way in his quest for the Fenner casket.

It was just as he had recognized old Matt's coffin that the door slammed to in the wind, leaving him in a dusk even deeper than before. The narrow transom admitted only the feeblest rays, and the overhead ventilation funnel virtually none at all; so that he was reduced to a profane fumbling as he made his halting way among the long boxes toward the latch. In this funereal twilight he rattled the rusty handles, pushed at the iron panels, and wondered why the massive portal had grown so suddenly recalcitrant. In this twilight, too, he began to realize the truth and to shout loudly as if his horse outside could do more than neigh an unsympathetic reply. For the long-neglected latch was obviously broken, leaving the careless undertaker trapped in the vault, a victim of his own oversight.

The thing must have happened at about three-thirty in the afternoon. Birch, being by temperament phlegmatic and practical, did not shout long; but proceeded to grope about for some tools which he recalled seeing in a corner of the tomb. It is doubtful whether he was touched at all by the horror and exquisite weirdness of his position, but the bald fact of imprisonment so far from the daily paths of men was enough to exasperate him thoroughly. His day's work was sadly interrupted, and unless chance presently brought some rambler hither, he might have to remain all night or longer. The pile of tools soon reached, and a hammer and chisel selected, Birch returned over the coffins to the door. The air had begun to be exceedingly unwholesome, but to this detail he paid no attention as he toiled, half by feeling, at the heavy and corroded metal of the latch. He would have given much for a lantern or bit of candle; but, lacking these, bungled semi-sightlessly as best he might.

When he perceived that the latch was hopelessly unyielding, at least to such meager tools and under such tenebrous conditions as these, Birch glanced about for other possible points of escape. The vault had been dug from a side-hill, so that the narrow ventilation funnel in the top ran through several feet of earth, making this direction utterly useless to consider. Over the door, however, the high, slit-like transom in the brick fa-

cade gave promise of possible enlargement to a diligent worker; hence upon this his eyes long rested as he racked his brains for means to reach it. There was nothing like a ladder in the tomb, and the coffin niches on the sides and rear, which Birch seldom took the trouble to use, afforded no ascent to the space above the door. Only the coffins themselves remained as potential stepping-stones, and as he considered these he speculated on the best mode of arranging them. Three coffin-heights, he reckoned, would permit him to reach the transom; but he could do better with four. The boxes were fairly even, and could be piled up like blocks; so he began to compute how he might most stably use the eight to rear a scalable platform four deep. As he planned, he could not but wish that the units of his contemplated staircase had been more securely made. Whether he had imagination enough to wish they were empty, is strongly to be doubted.

Finally he decided to lay a base of three parallel with the wall, to place upon this two layers of two each, and upon these a single box to serve as the platform. This arrangement could be ascended with a minimum of awkwardness, and would furnish the desired height. Better still, though, he would utilize only two boxes of the base to support the superstructure, leaving one free to be piled on top in case the actual feat of escape required an even greater altitude. And so the prisoner toiled in the twilight, heaving the unresponsive remnants of mortality with little ceremony as his miniature Tower of Babel rose course by course. Several of the coffins began to split under the stress of handling, and he planned to save the stoutly built casket of little Matthew Fenner for the top, in order that his feet might have as certain a surface as possible. In the semi-gloom he trusted mostly to touch to select the right one, and indeed came upon it almost by accident, since it tumbled into his hands as if through some odd volition after he had unwittingly placed it beside another on the third layer.

The tower at length finished, and his aching arms rested by a pause during which he sat on the bottom step of his grim device, Birch cautiously ascended with his tools and stood

abreast of the narrow transom. The borders of the space were entirely of brick, and there seemed little doubt but that he could shortly chisel away enough to allow his body to pass. As his hammer blows began to fall, the horse outside whinnied in a tone which may have been encouraging and may have been mocking. In either case, it would have been appropriate, for the unexpected tenacity of the easy-looking brickwork was surely a sardonic commentary on the vanity of mortal hopes, and the source of a task whose performance deserved every possible stimulus.

Dusk fell and found Birch still toiling. He worked largely by feeling now, since newly-gathered clouds hid the moon; and though progress was still slow, he felt heartened at the extent of his encroachments on the top and bottom of the aperture. He could, he was sure, get out by midnight; though it is characteristic of him that this thought was untinged with eery implications. Undisturbed by oppressive reflections on the time, the place, and the company beneath his feet, he philosophically chipped away the stony brick-work, cursing when a fragment hit him in the face, and laughing when one struck the increasingly excited horse that pawed near the cypress tree. In time the hole grew so large that he ventured to try his body in it now and then, shifting about so that the coffins beneath him rocked and creaked. He would not, he found, have to pile another on his platform to make the proper height, for the hole was on exactly the right level to use as soon as its size would permit.

It must have been midnight at least when Birch decided he could get through the transom. Tired and perspiring despite many rests, he descended to the floor and sat a while on the bottom box to gather strength for the final wriggle and leap to the ground outside. The hungry horse was neighing repeatedly and almost uncannily, and he vaguely wished it would stop. He was curiously unrelaxed over his impending escape, and almost dreaded the exertion, for his form had the indolent stoutness of early middle age.



As he remounted the splitting coffins he felt his weight very poignantly; especially when, upon reaching the topmost one, he heard that aggravated crackle which bespeaks the wholesale rending of wood. He had, it seems, planned in vain when choosing the stoutest coffin for the platform; for no sooner was his full bulk again upon it than the rotting lid gave way, jouncing him two feet down on a surface which even he did not care to imagine. Maddened by the sound, or by the stench which billowed forth even to the open air, the waiting horse gave a scream that was too frantic for a neigh, and plunged madly off through the night, the wagon rattling crazily behind it.

Birch, in his ghastly situation, was now too low for an easy scramble out of the enlarged transom, but gathered his energies for a determined try. Clutching the edges of the aperture, he sought to pull himself up, when he noticed a queer retardation in the form of an apparent drag on both his ankles. In another moment he knew fear for the first time that night; for struggle as he would, he could not shake clear of the unknown grasp which held his feet in relentless captivity. Horrible pains, as of savage wounds, shot through his calves; and in his mind was a vortex of fright mixed with an unquenchable materialism that suggested splinters, loose nails, or some other attribute of a breaking wooden box. Perhaps he screamed. At any rate, he kicked and squirmed frantically and automatically whilst his consciousness was almost eclipsed in a half-swoon.

Instinct guided him in his wriggle through the transom, and in the crawl which followed his jarring thud on the damp ground. He could not walk, it appeared, and the emerging moon must have witnessed a horrible sight as he dragged his bleeding ankles toward the cemetery lodge, his fingers clawing the black mold in brainless haste, and his body responding with that maddening slowness from which one suffers when chased by the phantoms of nightmare. There was evidently, however, no pursuer; for he was alone and alive when Arm-

ington, the lodge-keeper, responded to his feeble clawing at the door.

Armington helped Birch to the outside of a spare bed and sent his little son Edwin for Doctor Davis. The afflicted man was fully conscious, but would say nothing of any consequence, merely muttering such things as "Oh, my ankles!", "Let go!", or ". . . shut in the tomb." Then the doctor came with his medicine-case and asked crisp questions, and removed the patient's outer clothing, shoes and socks. The wounds—for both ankles were frightfully lacerated about the Achilles tendons—seemed to puzzle the old physician greatly, and finally almost to frighten him. His questioning grew more than medically tense, and his hands shook as he dressed the mangled members, binding them as if he wished to get the wounds out of sight as quickly as possible.

For an impersonal doctor, Davis's ominous and awestruck cross-examination became very strange indeed as he sought to drain from the weakened undertaker every last detail of his horrible experience. He was oddly anxious to know if Birch were sure—absolutely sure—of the identity of that top coffin of the pile, how he had chosen it, how he had been certain of it as the Fenner coffin in the dark, and how he had distinguished it from the inferior duplicate coffin of vicious Asaph Sawyer. Would the firm Fenner casket have caved in so readily? Davis, an old-time village practitioner, had of course seen both at the respective funerals, as indeed he had attended both Fenner and Sawyer in their last illnesses. He had even wondered, at Sawyer's funeral, how the vindictive farmer had managed to lie straight in a box so closely akin to that of the diminutive Fenner.

After a full two hours Doctor Davis left, urging Birch to insist at all times that his wounds were due entirely to loose nails and splintering wood. What else, he added, could ever in any case be proved or believed? But it would be well to say as little as could be said, and to let no other doctor treat the wounds. Birch heeded this advice all the rest of his life until he told me his story, and when I saw the scars—ancient and

whitened as they then were—I agreed that he was wise in so doing. He always remained lame, for the great tendons had been severed; but I think the greatest lameness was in his soul. His thinking processes, once so phlegmatic and logical, had become ineffaceably scarred, and it was pitiful to note his reaction to certain chance allusions such as “Friday,” “tomb,” “coffin,” and words of less obvious concatenation. His frightened horse had gone home, but his frightened wits never quite did that. He changed his business, but something always preyed upon him. It may have been just fear, and it may have been fear mixed with a queer belated sort of remorse for bygone crudities. His drinking, of course, only aggravated what he sought to alleviate.

When Doctor Davis left Birch that night, he had taken a lantern and gone to the old receiving-tomb. The moon was shining on the scattered brick fragments and marred façade, and the latch of the great door yielded readily to a touch from the outside. Steeled by old ordeals in dissecting-rooms, the doctor entered and looked about, stifling the nausea of mind and body that everything in sight and smell induced. He cried aloud once, and a little later gave a gasp that was more terrible than a cry. Then he fled back to the lodge and broke all the rules of his calling by rousing and shaking his patient, and hurling at him a succession of shuddering whispers that seared into the bewildered ears like the hissing of vitriol.

“It was Asaph’s coffin, Birch, just as I thought! I knew his teeth, with the front ones missing on the upper jaw—never, for God’s sake, show those wounds! The body was pretty badly gone, but if ever I saw vindictiveness on any face—or former face! . . . You know what a fiend he was for revenge—how he ruined old Raymond thirty years after their boundary suit, and how he stepped on the puppy that snapped at him a year ago last August. . . . He was the devil incarnate, Birch, and I believe his eye-for-an-eye fury could beat time and death! God, his rage—I’d hate to have it aimed at me!

“Why did you do it, Birch? He was a scoundrel, and I don’t blame you for giving him a cast-aside coffin, but you

always did go too damned far! Well enough to skimp on the thing in some way, but you knew what a little man old Fenner was.

"I'll never get the picture out of my head as long as I live. You kicked hard, for Asaph's coffin was on the floor. His head was broken in, and everything was tumbled about. I've seen sights before, but there was one thing too much here. An eye for an eye! Great heavens, Birch, but you got what you deserved! The skull turned my stomach, but the other was worse—*those ankles cut neatly off to fit Matt Fenner's cast-aside coffin!*"

## SCHOOL FOR THE UNSPEAKABLE

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

*Into what frightful horror did young Setwick blunder  
that night?*

BART SETWICK dropped off the train at Carrington and stood for a moment on the station platform, an honest-faced, well-knit lad in tweeds. This little town and its famous school would be his home for the next eight months; but which way to the school? The sun had set, and he could barely see the shop signs across Carrington's modest main street. He hesitated, and a soft voice spoke at his very elbow:

"Are you for the school?"

Startled, Bart Setwick wheeled. In the gray twilight stood another youth, smiling thinly and waiting as if for an answer. The stranger was all of nineteen years old—that meant maturity to young Setwick, who was fifteen—and his pale face had shrewd lines to it. His tall, shambling body was clad in high-necked jersey and unfashionably tight trousers. Bart Setwick skimmed him with the quick, appraising eye of young America.

"I just got here," he replied. "My name's Setwick."

"Mine's Hoag." Out came a slender hand. Setwick took it and found it froggy-cold, with a suggestion of steel-wire muscles. "Glad to meet you. I came down on the chance someone would drop off the train. Let me give you a lift to the school."

Hoag turned away, felinely light for all his ungainliness, and led his new acquaintance around the corner of the little wooden railway station. Behind the structure, half hidden in its shadow, stood a shabby buggy with a lean bay horse in the shafts.

"Get in," invited Hoag, but Bart Setwick paused for a moment. His generation was not used to such vehicles. Hoag

chuckled and said, "Oh, this is only a school wrinkle. We run to funny customs. Get in."

Setwick obeyed. "How about my trunk?"

"Leave it." The taller youth swung himself in beside Setwick and took the reins. "You'll not need it tonight."

He snapped his tongue and the bay horse stirred, drew them around and off down a bush-lined side road. Its hoofbeats were oddly muffled.

They turned a corner, another, and came into open country. The lights of Carrington, newly kindled against the night, hung behind like a constellation settled down to Earth. Setwick felt a hint of chill that did not seem to fit the September evening.

"How far is the school from town?" he asked.

"Four or five miles," Hoag replied in his hushed voice. "That was deliberate on the part of the founders—they wanted to make it hard for the students to get to town for larks. It forced us to dig up our own amusements." The pale face creased in a faint smile, as if this were a pleasantry. "There's just a few of the right sort on hand tonight. By the way, what did you get sent out for?"

Setwick frowned his mystification. "Why, to go to school. Dad sent me."

"But what for? Don't you know that this is a high-class prison prep? Half of us are lunkheads that need poking along, the other half are fellows who got in scandals somewhere else. Like me." Again Hoag smiled.

Setwick began to dislike his companion. They rolled a mile or so in silence before Hoag again asked a question:

"Do you go to church, Setwick?"

The new boy was afraid to appear priggish, and made a careless show with, "Not very often."

"Can you recite anything from the Bible?" Hoag's soft voice took on an anxious tinge.

"Not that I know of."

"Good," was the almost hearty response. "As I was saying,

there's only a few of us at the school tonight—only three, to be exact. And we don't like Bible-quoters."

Setwick laughed, trying to appear sage and cynical. "Isn't Satan reputed to quote the Bible to his own——"

"What do you know about Satan?" interrupted Hoag. He turned full on Setwick, studying him with intent, dark eyes. Then, as if answering his own question: "Little enough, I'll bet. Would you like to know about him?"

"Sure I would," replied Setwick, wondering what the joke would be.

"I'll teach you after a while," Hoag promised cryptically, and silence fell again.

Half a moon was well up as they came in sight of a dark jumble of buildings.

"Here we are," announced Hoag, and then, throwing back his head, he emitted a wild, wordless howl that made Setwick almost jump out of the buggy. "That's to let the others know we're coming," he explained. "Listen!"

Back came a seeming echo of the howl, shrill, faint and eery. The horse wavered in its muffled trot, and Hoag clucked it back into step. They turned in at a driveway well grown up in weeds, and two minutes more brought them up to the rear of the closest building. It was dim gray in the wash of moonbeams, with blank inky rectangles for windows. Nowhere was there a light, but as the buggy came to a halt Setwick saw a young head pop out of a window on the lower floor.

"Here already, Hoag?" came a high, reedy voice.

"Yes," answered the youth at the reins, "and I've brought a new man with me."

Thrilling a bit to hear himself called a man, Setwick alighted.

"His name's Setwick," went on Hoag. "Meet Andoff, Setwick. A great friend of mine."

Andoff flourished a hand in greeting and scrambled out over the window-sill. He was chubby and squat and even paler

than Hoag, with a low forehead beneath lank, wet-looking hair, and black eyes set wide apart in a fat, stupid-looking face. His shabby jacket was too tight for him, and beneath worn knickers his legs and feet were bare. He might have been an overgrown thirteen or an undeveloped eighteen.

"Felcher ought to be along in half a second," he volunteered.

"Entertain Setwick while I put up the buggy," Hoag directed him.

Andoff nodded, and Hoag gathered the lines in his hands, but paused for a final word.

"No funny business yet, Andoff," he cautioned seriously. "Setwick, don't let this lard-bladder rag you or tell you wild stories until I come back."

Andoff laughed shrilly. "No, no wild stories," he promised. "You'll do the talking, Hoag."

The buggy trundled away, and Andoff swung his fat, grinning face to the new arrival.

"Here comes Felcher," he announced. "Felcher, meet Setwick."

Another boy had bobbed up, it seemed, from nowhere. Setwick had not seen him come around the corner of the building, or slip out of a door or window. He was probably as old as Hoag, or older, but so small as to be almost a dwarf, and frail to boot. His most notable characteristic was his hairiness. A great mop covered his head, bushed over his neck and ears, and hung unkemptly to his bright, deepset eyes. His lips and cheeks were spread with a rank down, and a curly thatch peeped through the unbuttoned collar of his soiled white shirt. The hand he offered Setwick was almost simian in its shagginess and in the hardness of its palm. Too, it was cold and damp. Setwick remembered the same thing of Hoag's hand-clasp.

"We're the only ones here so far," Felcher remarked. His voice, surprizingly deep and strong for so small a creature, rang like a great bell.

"Isn't even the head-master here?" inquired Setwick, and at that the other two began to laugh uproariously, Andoff's fife-



squeal rendering an obbligato to Felcher's bell-boom. Hoag, returning, asked what the fun was.

"Setwick asks," groaned Felcher, "why the head-master isn't here to welcome him."

More fife-laughter and bell-laughter.

"I doubt if Setwick would think the answer was funny," Hoag commented, and then chuckled softly himself.

Setwick, who had been well brought up, began to grow nettled.

"Tell me about it," he urged, in what he hoped was a bleak tone, "and I'll join your chorus of mirth."

Felcher and Andoff gazed at him with eyes strangely eager and yearning. Then they faced Hoag.

"Let's tell him," they both said at once, but Hoag shook his head.

"Not yet. One thing at a time. Let's have the song first."

They began to sing. The first verse of their offering was obscene, with no pretense of humor to redeem it. Setwick had never been squeamish, but he found himself definitely repelled. The second verse seemed less objectionable, but it hardly made sense:

All they tried to teach here  
Now goes untaught.  
Ready, steady, each here,  
Knowledge we sought.  
What they called disaster  
Killed us not, O master!  
Rule us, we beseech here,  
Eye, hand and thought.

It was something like a hymn, Setwick decided; but before what altar would such hymns be sung? Hoag must have read that question in his mind.

"You mentioned Satan in the buggy on the way out," he recalled, his knowing face hanging like a mask in the half-dimness close to Setwick. "Well, that was a Satanist song."

"It was? Who made it?"

"I did," Hoag informed him. "How do you like it?"

Setwick made no answer. He tried to sense mockery in Hoag's voice, but could not find it. "What," he asked finally, "does all this Satanist singing have to do with the head-master?"

"A lot," came back Felcher deeply, and "A lot," squealed Andoff.

Hoag gazed from one of his friends to the others, and for the first time he smiled broadly. It gave him a toothy look.

"I believe," he ventured quietly but weightily, "that we might as well let Setwick in on the secret of our little circle."

Here it would begin, the new boy decided—the school hazing of which he had heard and read so much. He had anticipated such things with something of excitement, even eagerness, but now he wanted none of them. He did not like his three companions, and he did not like the way they approached whatever it was they intended to do. He moved backward a pace or two, as if to retreat.

Swift as darting birds, Hoag and Andoff closed in at either elbow. Their chill hands clutched him and suddenly he felt light-headed and sick. Things that had been clear in the moonlight went hazy and distorted.

"Come on and sit down, Setwick," invited Hoag, as though from a great distance. His voice did not grow loud or harsh, but it embodied real menace. "Sit on that window-sill. Or would you like us to carry you?"

At the moment Setwick wanted only to be free of their touch, and so he walked unresistingly to the sill and scrambled up on it. Behind him was the blackness of an unknown chamber, and at his knees gathered the three who seemed so eager to tell him their private joke.

"The head-master was a proper churchgoer," began Hoag, as though he were the spokesman for the group. "He didn't have any use for devils or devil-worship. Went on record against them when he addressed us in chapel. That was what started us."

"Right," nodded Andoff, turning up his fat, larval face. "Anything he outlawed, we wanted to do. Isn't that logic?"

"Logic and reason," wound up Felcher. His hairy right hand twiddled on the sill near Setwick's thigh. In the moonlight it looked like a big, nervous spider.

Hoag resumed. "I don't know of any prohibition of his it was easier or more fun to break."

Setwick found that his mouth had gone dry. His tongue could barely moisten his lips. "You mean," he said, "that you began to worship devils?"

Hoag nodded happily, like a teacher at an apt pupil. "One vacation I got a book on the cult. The three of us studied it, then began ceremonies. We learned the charms and spells, forward and backward——"

"They're twice as good backward," put in Felcher, and Andoff giggled.

"Have you any idea, Setwick," Hoag almost cooed, "what it was that appeared in our study the first time we burned wine and sulfur, with the proper words spoken over them?"

Setwick did not want to know. He clenched his teeth. "If you're trying to scare me," he managed to growl out, "it certainly isn't going to work."

All three laughed once more, and began to chatter out their protestations of good faith.

"I swear that we're telling the truth, Setwick," Hoag assured him. "Do you want to hear it, or don't you?"

Setwick had very little choice in the matter, and he realized it. "Oh, go ahead," he capitulated, wondering how it would do to crawl backward from the sill into the darkness of the room.

Hoag leaned toward him, with the air as of one confiding. "The head-master caught us. Caught us red-handed."

"Book open, fire burning," chanted Felcher.

"He had something very fine to say about the vengeance of heaven," Hoag went on. "We got to laughing at him. He worked up a frenzy. Finally he tried to take heaven's vengeance into his own hands—tried to visit it on us, in a very primitive way. But it didn't work."

Andoff was laughing immoderately, his fat arms across his bent belly.

"He thought it worked," he supplemented between high gurgles, "but it didn't."

"Nobody could kill us," Felcher added. "Not after the oaths we'd taken, and the promises that had been made us."

"What promises?" demanded Setwick, who was struggling hard not to believe. "Who made you any promises?"

"Those we worshiped," Felcher told him. If he was simulating earnestness, it was a supreme bit of acting. Setwick, realizing this, was more daunted than he cared to show.

"When did all these things happen?" was his next question.

"When?" echoed Hoag. "Oh, years and years ago."

"Years and years ago," repeated Andoff.

"Long before you were born," Felcher assured him.

They were standing close together, their backs to the moon that shone in Setwick's face. He could not see their expressions clearly. But their three voices—Hoag's soft, Felcher's deep and vibrant, Andoff's high and squeaky—were absolutely serious.

"I know what you're arguing within yourself," Hoag announced somewhat smugly. "How can we, who talk about those many past years, seem so young? That calls for an explanation, I'll admit." He paused, as if choosing words. "Time—for us—stands still. It came to a halt on that very night, Setwick; the night our head-master tried to put an end to our worship."

"And to us," smirked the gross-bodied Andoff, with his usual air of self-congratulation at capping one of Hoag's statements.

"The worship goes on," pronounced Felcher, in the same chanting manner that he had affected once before. "The worship goes on, and we go on, too."

"Which brings us to the point," Hoag came in briskly. "Do you want to throw in with us, Setwick?—make the fourth of this lively little party?"

"No, I don't," snapped Setwick vehemently.

They fell silent, and gave back a little—a trio of bizarre silhouettes against the pale moon-glow. Setwick could see the flash of their staring eyes among the shadows of their faces. He knew that he was afraid, but hid his fear. Pluckily he dropped from the sill to the ground. Dew from the grass splattered his sock-clad ankles between oxfords and trouser-cuffs.

“I guess it’s my turn to talk,” he told them levelly. “I’ll make it short. I don’t like you, nor anything you’ve said. And I’m getting out of here.”

“We won’t let you,” said Hoag, hushed but emphatic.

“We won’t let you,” murmured Andoff and Felcher together, as though they had rehearsed it a thousand times.

Setwick clenched his fists. His father had taught him to box. He took a quick, smooth stride toward Hoag and hit him hard in the face. Next moment all three had flung themselves upon him. They did not seem to strike or grapple or tug, but he went down under their assault. The shoulders of his tweed coat wallowed in sand, and he smelled crushed weeds. Hoag, on top of him, pinioned his arms with a knee on each biceps. Felcher and Andoff were stooping close.

Glaring up in helpless rage, Setwick knew once and for all that this was no schoolboy prank. Never did practical jokers gather around their victim with such staring, green-gleaming eyes, such drawn jowls, such quivering lips.

Hoag bared white fangs. His pointed tongue quested once over them.

“Knife!” he muttered, and Felcher fumbled in a pocket, then passed him something that sparkled in the moonlight.

Hoag’s lean hand reached for it, then whipped back. Hoag had lifted his eyes to something beyond the huddle. He choked and whimpered inarticulately, sprang up from Setwick’s laboring chest, and fell back in awkward haste. The others followed his shocked stare, then as suddenly cowered and retreated in turn.

“It’s the master!” wailed Andoff.

“Yes,” roared a gruff new voice. “Your old head-master—and I’ve come back to master *you!*”

Rising upon one elbow, the prostrate Setwick saw what they had seen—a tall, thick-bodied figure in a long dark coat, topped with a square, distorted face and a tousel of white locks. Its eyes glittered with their own pale, hard light. As it advanced slowly and heavily it emitted a snigger of murderous joy. Even at first glance Setwick was aware that it cast no shadow.

“I am in time,” mouthed the newcomer. “You were going to kill this poor boy.”

Hoag had recovered and made a stand. “Kill him?” he quavered, seeming to fawn before the threatening presence. “No. We’d have given him life——”

“You call it life?” trumpeted the long-coated one. “You’d have sucked out his blood to teem your own dead veins, damned him to your filthy condition. But I’m here to prevent you!”

A finger pointed, huge and knuckly, and then came a torrent of language. To the nerve-stunned Setwick it sounded like a bit from the New Testament, or perhaps from the Book of Common Prayer. All at once he remembered Hoag’s avowed dislike for such quotations.

His three erstwhile assailants reeled as if before a high wind that chilled or scorched. “No, no! Don’t!” they begged wretchedly.

The square old face gaped open and spewed merciless laughter. The knuckly finger traced a cross in the air, and the trio wailed in chorus as though the sign had been drawn upon their flesh with a tongue of flame.

Hoag dropped to his knees. “Don’t!” he sobbed.

“I have power,” mocked their tormenter. “During years shut up I won it, and now I’ll use it.” Again a triumphant burst of mirth. “I know you’re damned and can’t be killed, but you can be tortured! I’ll make you crawl like worms before I’m done with you!”

Setwick gained his shaky feet. The long coat and the blocky head leaned toward him.

"Run, you!" dinned a rough roar in his ears. "Get out of here—and thank God for the chance!"

Setwick ran, staggering. He blundered through the weeds of the driveway, gained the road beyond. In the distance gleamed the lights of Carrington. As he turned his face toward them and quickened his pace he began to weep, chokingly, hysterically, exhaustingly.

He did not stop running until he reached the platform in front of the station. A clock across the street struck ten, in a deep voice not unlike Felchers. Setwick breathed deeply, fished out his handkerchief and mopped his face. His hand was quivering like a grass stalk in a breeze.

"Beg pardon!" came a cheery hail. "You must be Setwick."

As once before on this same platform, he whirled around with startled speed. Within touch of him stood a broad-shouldered man of thirty or so, with horn-rimmed spectacles. He wore a neat Norfolk jacket and flannels. A short briar pipe was clamped in a good-humored mouth.

"I'm Collins, one of the masters at the school," he introduced himself. "If you're Setwick, you've had us worried. We expected you on that seven o'clock train, you know. I dropped down to see if I couldn't trace you."

Setwick found a little of his lost wind. "But I've—been to the school," he mumbled protestingly. His hand, still trembling, gestured vaguely along the way he had come.

Collins threw back his head and laughed, then apologized.

"Sorry," he said. "It's no joke if you really had all that walk for nothing. Why, that old place is deserted—used to be a catch-all for incorrigible rich boys. They closed it about fifty years ago, when the head-master went mad and killed three of his pupils. As a matter of coincidence, the master himself died just this afternoon, in the state hospital for the insane."





## THE HOUSE WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

By SEABURY QUINN

*An utterly strange tale is this, of a brilliant surgeon gone mad, and the weird mansion where he performed his fantastic experiments on living human beings—a tale of Jules de Grandin*

THE February wind was holding carnival outside, wrenching at the window fastenings, whooping round the corners of the house, roaring bawdy chansons down the chimney flues. But we were comfortable enough, with the study curtains drawn, the lamps aglow and two fresh oak logs upon the andirons taking up the blazing torch their dying predecessors flung them. Pleased with himself until his smugness irritated me, Jules de Grandin smiled down at the toe of his slim patent-leather pump, took a fresh sip of whisky-soda, and returned to the argument.

“But no, my friend,” he told me, “medicine the art is necessarily at odds with medicine the science. As followers of Æsculapius and practitioners of the healing art we are concerned with individual cases, in alleviating suffering in the patient we attend. We regard him as a person, a complete and all-important entity. Our chief concern for the time being is to bring about his full recovery, or if that is not possible, to spare him pain as far as in our power lies, *n'est-ce-pas?*”

“Of course,” I rejoined. “That’s the function of the doctor——”

“*Mais non*. Your term is poorly chosen. That is the function of the physician, the healer, the practitioner of medicine as an art. The doctor, the learned savant, the experimenting scientist, has a larger field. He is unconcerned with man the individual, the *subspecies aeternitatis*. Him he cannot see for

bones and cells and tissues where micro-organisms breed and multiply to be a menace to the species as a whole. He deals with large, great bodies like——”

“Sir Haddingway Ingraham an’ Sergeant Costello, if ye plaze, sors,” interrupted Nora McGinnis from the study entrance.

“Yes, *parbleu*, exactly like them!” de Grandin burst out laughing as the two six-footers hesitated at the doorway, unable to come through together, undecided which should take precedence.

“Regard, observe them, if you please, Friend Trowbridge!” he ordered as he looked at the big visitors. “*Quel type, mais quel type; morbleu, c’est incroyable!*”

To say that the big Briton and the even bigger Celt were of a common type seemed little less than fantastic. Ingraham—Sir Haddingway Ingraham Jamison Ingraham, known to all his friends familiarly as Hiji, as was typically an Englishman of the Empire Builder sort as could be found in literature or on the stage. So big that he was almost gigantic, his face was long and narrow, high-cheeked, almost saddle-leather tanned, with little splayed-out lines of sun-wrinkles about the outer corners of his eyes. His hair was iron-gray, center-parted, smooth as only brilliantine and careful brushing could make it, and by contrast his small military mustache was as black as the straight brows that framed his deep-set penetrating hazel eyes. His dinner clothes were cut and draped with such perfection that they might as well have borne the label Saville Row in letters half a foot in height; and in his martial bearing, his age and his complexion, you could read the record of his service to his king and country as if campaign ribbons had adorned his jacket: the Aisne, Neuve Chapelle, the second Marne, and after that the jungle or the veldt of British Africa, or maybe India. He was English as roast beef or Yorkshire pudding, but not the kind of Briton who could be at home in London or the Isles, or anywhere within a thousand miles of Nelson’s monument, save for fleeting visits.

Costello was a perfect contrast. Fair as the other was dark, he still retained his ruddy countenance and smooth, fresh Irish skin, although his once-red hair was almost white. If Hiji was six feet in height the sergeant topped him by a full two inches; if the Englishman weighed fourteen stone the Celt outweighed him by a good ten pounds; if Ingraham's lean, brown, well-manicured hand could strike a blow to floor an ox, Costello's big, smooth-knuckled fist could stun a charging buffalo. His clothes were good material, but lacked elegance of cut and were plainly worn more for protective than for decorative purposes. Smooth-shaved, round-cheeked, he might have been an actor or a politician or, if his collar were reversed, a very wordly, very knowing, very Godly bishop, or a parish priest with long experience of the fallibility of human nature and the infinite compassion of the Lord.

Thus their dissidence. Amazingly, there was a subtle similarity. Each moved with positively tigerish grace that spoke of controlled power and almost limitless reserves of strength, and in the eyes of each there was that quality of seeing and appraising and recording everything they looked at, and of looking at everything within their range of vision without appearing to take note of anything. As usual, de Grandin was correct.

Each bore resemblance to the other, each was the perfect type of the born man-hunter, brave, shrewd, resourceful and implacable.

"But it is good to see you, *mes amis!*" de Grandin told them as he gave a hand to each and waved them to a seat beside the fire. "On such a night your company is like a breath of spring too long delayed. Me, I am delighted!"

"Revoltin' little hypocrite, ain't he?" Hiji turned to Costello, who nodded gloomy acquiescence.

"*Comment?* A hypocrite—I?" Amazement and quick-gathering wrath puckered the small Frenchman's face as if he tasted something unendurably sour. "How do you say——"

"Quite," Hiji cut in heavily. "Hypocrite's the word, and nothin' less. Pretendin' to be glad to see us, and not offerin'

us a drink! On such a night, too. Disgustin' is the word for it."

"*Mea culpa, mea maxima culpa!*" wailed de Grandin. "Oh, I am humiliated, I am desolated, I am——"

"Never mind expressions of embarrassment, you little devil. Pour that whisky; don't be sparin' o' your elbow!"

In a moment Scotch and soda bubbled in the glasses. Ice tinkled in Costello's. "None in mine, you blighted little thim-blerigger; d'ye want to take up space reserved for whisky?" Hiji forbade when de Grandin would have dropped an ice-cube in his glass.

Refreshed, we faced each other in that silence of comradery which only men who have shared common perils know.

"And now, what brings you out on such a night?" de Grandin asked. "Smile and grin and play the innocent as you will, I am not to be imposed upon. I know you for the sybarites you are. Neither of you would thrust his great nose out of doors tonight unless compulsion forced him. Speak, thou great ungainly ones, thou hulking oafs, thou species of a pair of elephants. I wait your babbling confidences, but I do not wait with patience. Not I. My patience is as small as my thirst is great—and may I never see tomorrow's sunrise if I see it sober!"

Hiji drained his glass and held it out to be refilled. "It's about young Southerby," he answered gloomily. "The poisonous little scorpion's managed to get himself lost. He's disappeared; vanished."

"Ah? One is desolated at the news." De Grandin leant back in his chair and grinned at Ingraham and Costello. "I am completely ravaged at intelligence of this one's disappearance, for since I have abandoned criminal investigation in all its phases, I can look upon the case objectively, and see how seriously it affects you. May I prescribe an anodyne?" he motioned toward the syphon and decanter.

"Drop it, you little imp o' Satan!" Ingraham replied gruffly. "This is serious business. Yesterday we had a matter of the greatest importance—and secrecy—to be transmitted to the

embassy in Washington. There wasn't a king's messenger available, and we did not dare trust the papers to the post; so when young Southerby—dratted little idiot!—stepped in and told the Chief he'd do his Boy Scout's good deed by runnin' the dispatches down to Washington, they took him on. He's been knocking round the consulate a year and more, gettin' into everybody's hair, and the Chief thought it would be a holiday for the staff to get him out from under foot awhile. The little blighter does know how to drive a car, I'll say that for him; and he's made the trip to Washington so often that he knows the road as well as he knows Broadway. Twelve hours ought to do the trip and leave him time for meals to spare, but the little hellion seems to have rolled right off the earth. There ain't a trace o' hide or hair of him——”

“But surely, you need not concern yourself with it,” de Grandin interrupted. “This is a matter for the police; the good Costello or the state constabulary, or the Federal agents.”

“And the newspapers and the wireless, not to mention the cinema,” broke in Hiji with a frown. “Costello's not here officially. As my friend he's volunteered to help me out. As a policeman he knows nothin' of the case. You'll appreciate my position when I tell you that these papers were so confidential that they're not supposed to exist at all, and we simply can't report Southerby's disappearance to the police, nor let it leak out that he's missin' or was carryin' anything to Washington. All the same, we've got to find those precious papers. The Chief made a bad blunder entrustin' 'em to such a scatterbrain, and if we don't get 'em back his head is goin' to fall. Maybe his won't be the only one——”

“You are involved, my friend?” De Grandin's small eyes widened with concern.

“In a way, yes. I should have knocked the little blighter silly the minute that he volunteered, or at least have told the Chief he wasn't to be trusted. As it was, I rather urged him to accept the offer.”

“Then what do we wait for? Let us don our outdoor clothes and go to seek this missing young man. You he may elude,

but I am Jules de Grandin; though he hide in the lowest workings of a mine, or scale the sky in a balloon——”

“Easy on, son,” Hiji thrust a hand out to the little Frenchman. “There’s nothin’ much that we can do tonight.”

“I’ve already done some gum-shoe wor’rk, sor,” Costello volunteered. “We’ve traced ’im through th’ Holland Tunnels an’ through Newark an’ th’ Amboys and New Brunswick. Th’ trail runs out just th’ other side o’ Cranberry. It wuz four o’clock when he left New York, an’ a storm blew up about five, so he musta slowed down, for it wuz close to eight when he passed Cranberry, headed for Phillydelphia, an’ ”—he spread his hands—“there th’ trail ends, sor, like as if he’s vanished into thin air, as th’ felly says.”

De Grandin lit a cigarette and leant back in his chair, drumming soundlessly on the table where his glass stood, narrowing his eyes against the smoke as he stared fixedly at the farther wall.

“There was mingled rain and snow—sleet—on all the roads last night,” he murmured. “The traffic is not heavy in the early evening, for pleasure cars have reached their destinations and the nightly motorcade of freight trucks does not start till sometime near eleven. He would have had a lonely, slippery, dangerous road to travel, this one. Has inquiry been made for wrecks?”

“That it has, sor. He couldn’t ’a’ had a blowout widout our knowin’ of it. His car wuz a Renault sports model, about as inconspicuous as a ellyphunt on a Jersey road, an’ that should make it a cinch to locate ’im. That’s what’s drivin’ me nuts, too. If a young felly in a big red car can evaporate—howly Mither, I wonder now, could that have any bearin’—” He broke off suddenly, his blue eyes opened wide, a look almost of shocked amazement on his face.

“A very pleasant pastime that, my friend,” de Grandin put in acidly as the big detective remained silent. “Will you not confide your cause for wonder to us? We might wish to wonder, also.”

"Eh? O' course, sor." Costello shook his shoulders with a motion reminiscent of a dog emerging from the water. "I wuz just wonderin'——"

"We gathered as much——"

"If sumpin else that's happened, recently, could have a bearin' on this case. Th' Missin' Persons Bureau has had look-outs posted several times widin th' past three months fer persons last seen just th' other side o' Cranberry—on th' Phillydelphia side, that is. O' course, you know how so many o' these disappearances is. Mostly they disappear because they wants to. But these wuz not th' sort o' cases ye'd think that of. A truck driver wuz th' first, a fine young felly wid a wife an' two kids; then a coupla college boys, an' a young gur-rl from New York named Perinchief. Th' divil a one of 'em had a reason for vamoosin', but they all did. Just got in their cars an' drove along th' road till they almost reached Cranberry, then—bingo! no one ever heard o' one of 'em again. It don't seem natural-like. Th' state police an' th' Middlesex authorities has searched for 'em, but th' devil a trace has been turned up. Nayther they nor their cars have been seen or heard from. D'ye think that mebbe there is sumpin more than coincidence here?"

"It may not be probable, but it is highly possible," de Grandin nodded. "As you say, when people disappear, it is often by their own volition, and that several persons should be missed in a short period may quite easily be coincidental. But when several people disappear in a particular locality, that is something else again."

"Is there not something we can do tonight?" he turned to Ingraham.

"No," the Englishman replied, "I don't believe there is. It's blacker than the inside of a cow out there, and we can't afford to attract attention lookin' for the little blighter with flash-lights. Suppose we do a move tomorrow before dawn and see what we can pick up in the neighborhood where Southerby was last reported."

Dawn, a raw, cold February dawn well nigh as colorless and uninviting as a spoiled oyster, was seeping through the lowering storm clouds as we drove across the bridge at Perth Amboy and headed south toward Cranberry. Hiji and Costello occupied the rear seat; de Grandin rode beside me, chin buried in his greatcoat collar, hands thrust deep in his pockets.

"See here," I asked him as an idea struck me, "d'ye suppose this lad has skipped? You heard Hiji say how valuable the papers he was carrying are, and apparently he begged to be allowed to carry them. These youngsters in the consular and diplomatic service usually live beyond their means, and sometimes they do queer things if they're tempted by a large amount of cash."

"I wish I could believe that," he returned, cowering lower in his seat. "It would have saved me the discomfort of emerging from a warm bed into a chill morning. But I know *les anglais*, my friend. They are often stupid, generally dull; socially they are insufferable in many cases, but when it comes to loyalty Gibraltar is less firm. Your English gentleman would as soon consider eating breakfast without marmalade as selling out his honor or running from an enemy or doing anything original. Yes."

A little light, but no sunshine, had strengthened in the sky when we drew up beside the roadway a half-mile beyond Cranberry. "All right," Hiji called as he dismounted; "we might as well start here and comb the terrain. We have a fairly good line on our bird up to this point, and—hullo, there's a prospect!"

He nodded toward a corduroyed Italian, obviously a laborer, who was trudging slowly up the road walking to the left and facing traffic, as pedestrians who hope to survive have to do on country highways.

"*Com' esta?*" de Grandin called. "You live near here?"

The young man drew his chin up from his tightly buttoned reefer and flashed a smile at him. "*Si, signor,*" he returned courteously, and raised a finger to his cap. "I live just there, me."



With a mittened hand he waved vaguely toward a patch of bottom land whence rose a cumulus of early-morning smoke.

"And you work long hours, one surmises?"

Again the young man smiled. "*Si*, all day I worka; mornin', night, all time——"

"So you walk home in darkness?"

A smile and nod confirmed his surmise.

"Sometimes the motors cause you trouble, make you jump back from the road, *hein?*"

"Not moch," the young Italian grinned. "In mornin' when I come to work they not yet come. At night when I come back they all 'ave gone away. But sometimes I 'ave to jomp queek. Las' night I 'ave to jomp away from a beega rad car——"

"I think we are upon the scent, my friends!" de Grandin whispered. Aloud: "How was that? Could he not see you?"

The young man shrugged his shoulders. "I theenk 'e craz'," he answered. "Always I walka dees side a road, so I can see car come, but dees a one 'e come from other side, an' I almost bang me down. Come ver' fast, too, not look where he go. Down there"—again he waved a vague hand down the road—"e run into da woods. I theenk 'e get hurt, maybe, bot I not go see. I ver' tired, me, and want for to get 'ome."

De Grandin pursed his lips and rummaged in his pocket for a coin. "You say the young man left the road and ran into the woods? Did you see his car?"

"*Si, signor*. Heef I don't see heem I not be 'ere now. Eet was a beega rad car, like dose we see in old contry, not small like dose we see 'ere."

"And where did this one leave the road?"

"You see dose talla tree down by de 'ill op dere?"

"Perfectly."

"'Ee go off road about a honnerd meters farther on."

"Thank you, my peerless one," the Frenchman smiled, as he handed the young man a half-dollar. "You have been most helpful." To us: "I think that we are on the trail at last."

"But I can't think that Southerby would have stopped to

take a drink, much less get drunk," objected Ingraham, as we hastened toward the point the young Italian indicated. "He knew how devilishly important those things were——"

"Perhaps he was not drunk," the Frenchman cut in cryptically as we walked toward the little copse of evergreens which lay back from the road.

An earth cart-track, deeply rutted with the winter rains, ran through the unkempt field which fringed the road and wound into the heart of the small wood lot, stopping at the edge of a creek which ran clattering between abrupt banks of yellow clay.

"Be gob," Costello looked down at the swirling ochre water, "if yer little friend ran inter this, he shure got one good duckin', Hiji."

"*Eh bien*, someone has run into it, and not so long ago," de Grandin answered, pointing to a double row of tire tracks. "Observe them, if you will. They run right down the bank, and there is nothing showing that the car was stopped or that its occupant alighted."

"By jove, you're right, Frenchy," Ingraham admitted. "See here"—he indicated a pair of notches in the bank—"here's where he went down. Last night's storm has almost washed 'em away, but there the tracks are. The blighted little fool! Wonder how deep it is?"

"That is easily determined," de Grandin drew his knife and began hacking down a sapling growing at the water's edge. "Now"—he probed experimentally—"one may surmise that—*morbleu!*"

"What is it?" we exclaimed in chorus.

"The depth, my friends. See, I have thrust this stick six feet beneath the surface, but I have not yet felt bottom. Let us see how it is here." He poked his staff into the stream some ten feet beyond his original soundings and began to switch it tentatively back and forth. "Ah, here the bottom is, I think—*non*, it is a log or —*mon Dieu*, attend me, *mes amis!*"

We clustered around him as he probed the turbulent yellow water. Slowly he angled with his pole, swishing it back and

forth, now with, now against the rushing current, then twirled it between his hands as if to entangle something in the protruding stubs of the roughly hacked-off boughs.

"*Ha!*" he heaved quickly upward, and as the stick came clear we saw some dark, sodden object clinging to its tip, rising sluggishly to the surface for a moment, then breaking free and sinking slowly back again.

"You saw it?" he demanded.

"Yes," I answered, and despite myself I felt my breath come quicker. "It looked like a coat or something."

"Indubitably it was something," he agreed. "But what?"

"An old overcoat?" I hazarded, leaning over his shoulder to watch.

"Or undercoat," he replied, panting with exertion as he fished and fished again for the elusive object. "Me, I think it was an—ah, here it is!" With a quick tug he brought up a large oblong length of checkered cloth and dragged it out upon the bank.

"Look at him, my Hiji," he commanded. "Do you recognize him?"

"I think I do," the Englishman responded gravely. "It's the tartan of the clan MacFergis. Southerby had some Scottish blood and claimed alliance with the clan. He used that tartan for a motor rug——"

"*Exactement.* Nor is that all, my friend. The minute I began exploring with this stick I knew it was not bottom that I touched. I could feel the outlines of some object, and feel something roll and give beneath my pressure every now and then. I am certain that a motor car lies hidden in this stream. What else is there we cannot surely say, but——"

"Why not make sure, sor?" Costello broke in. "We've found th' car, an' if young Mистер Southerby is drowned there's nothin' to be hid. Why not git a tow-line an' drag whatever's in there out?"

"Your advice is excellent," de Grandin nodded. "Do you stay here and watch the spot, my sergeant. Hiji and I will go out to the road and see if we can hail a passing truck to drag

whatever lies beneath that water out. Trowbridge, my friend, will you be kind enough to go to yonder house"—he pointed to a big building set among a knot of pines that crowned a hill which swept up from the road—"and ask them if they have a car and tow-line we may borrow?"

The storm which had been threatening for hours burst with berserk fury as I plodded up the unkempt, winding road that scaled the hill on which the old house stood enshrouded in a knot of black-boughed pine trees writhing in the wind. The nearer I drew to the place the less inviting it appeared. At the turning of the driveway from which almost all the gravel had been washed long since, a giant evergreen bent wrestling with the gale, its great arms creaking, groaning, shaken but invincible against the storm. Rain lashed against the walls of weathered brick; heavy shutters swung and banged and crashed, wrenched loose from their turn-buckles by the fury of the wind; the blast tore at the vines that masked the house-front till they writhed and shuddered as in torment; even the shadowy glimmer of dim light glowing through the transom set above the door seemed less an invitation than a portent, as if warning me that something dark and stealthy moved behind the panels. I pulled my hat down farther on my brow and pushed the collar of my greatcoat higher up around my ears.

"Someone's up and stirring," I told myself aloud as I glanced up at the feeble glow above the door. "They can't very well refuse to help us." Thus for the bolstering of my morale. Actually, I was almost shaking with a sort of evil prescience, and wanted more than anything to turn and run until I reached the roadway where my friends were waiting.

"Come, man, don't be a blithering fool!" I bade myself, and seized the rusty iron knocker stapled to the weather-blasted door.

There was something reassuring in the shock of iron upon iron. Here was reality; just a commonplace old farmhouse, run down and ruinous, but natural and earthy. I struck the knocker twice more, making it sound sharply through the

moaning wind and hissing rain, waited for a moment, then struck again.

What sort of response I'd expected I had no accurate idea. From the ruinous appearance of the place I had surmised it had been used as a multiple dwelling, housing several families of day-laborers, perhaps a little colony of squatters washed up by the rising tide of unemployment which engulfed our centers of industry. Perhaps a family of discouraged farmer folk used a portion of it and closed off the rest. Had a Negro or Italian answered my impatient knock I should not have been startled, but when the door swung open and a tall man in semi-military uniform looked at me with polite inquiry I was fairly breathless with surprise. A liveried chauffeur opening the door of the old ruin seemed somehow as utterly incongruous as a Zulu chieftain donning dinner-clothes for tribal ceremonies.

His expression of inquiry deepened as I told my errand. It was not until I had exhausted five minutes in futile repetitions that I realized he understood no word I spoke.

"See here," I finally exclaimed, "if you don't understand English, is there anybody here who does? I'm in a hurry, and——"

"In-gliss?" he repeated, shaking his head doubtfully. "No In-gliss 'ere."

"No," I responded tartly, "and I don't suppose you've any Eskimos or Sioux here, either. I don't want an Englishman. I have one already, and a Frenchman and an Irishman, to boot. What I want is someone who can help me haul a motor car out of the brook. Understand? Motor car—sunk—brook—pull out!" I went through an elaborate pantomime of raising a submerged vehicle from the muddy little stream.

His sallow, rat-like countenance lit up with a sudden gleam as I completed my dumb-show, and he motioned me to enter.

The door had seemed so old and weather-weakened that I'd feared my knocking might shake loose a panel, but it swung behind me with a solid bang, and the clicking of the lock that

sounded as the portal closed struck a highly modern and efficient note.

Barely over the threshold, I came to a full stop. Something faintly irritating, like a swarm of small black ants, seemed crawling up my neck and on my scalp. Instinct, untrammelled and unverballed, was giving warning: "Here is peril!" But reason scoffed at instinct: "What peril can there be in an old farmhouse burdened with decrepitude, almost on the verge of falling in upon itself?"

But as I stared about me I realized the look of desolation and decay was but a shell of camouflage about a wholly different condition. New the place might not have been, but its interior repair was perfect. The air was heavy, scented like the atmosphere that permeates cathedrals after celebration of the Mass—the sharp and sweet, yet heavy, scent of incense borne from censers, swung by priests.

The floor was brightly waxed and polished, the walls encrusted with a terra-cotta colored lacquer and, as church walls are embossed with stations of the Cross, were pitted with two rows of little niches framed in polished black wood. Before each framed recess there burned a little lamp, something like a sanctus light, which shed a wavering fulgent spot upon the image nested in the cavity. Each statuette was wrought in gleaming white stone, and though each differed from the others, all had one thing in common: they were uncompleted. Scarcely human, yet not exactly bestial, were the beings portrayed. Here a creature which seemed part ape, part man, was struggling with strained muscles to emerge from the rough ashlar from which the sculptor had but partly hewn it; there a female figure, perfect as to head and throat, seemed melting at the shoulders into a vague amorphousness as misshapen and unsymmetrical as the bloated body of an octopus shorn of tentacles, and hid her grief- and horror-stricken face behind an arm clipped off at the elbow. Here was a head as bald of crown as any shaven-pated mediæval monk, but with a face obscured by long and matted hair, waving wildly as a harpy's tresses whipped by tempest-winds. Beyond it was a niche in

which a scarcely-started group of statuary rested. Vague and almost formless as a wisp of shifting cloud, it still showed outlines of a pair of figures, obviously masculine and feminine, as far as faces were concerned, but with bodies bulbous as the barrel of a squid, staring at each other with a look of surprised consternation, of terror mixed with loathing, as if each saw in the other a mirroring of his deformity, and abhorred his vis-à-vis as a reminder of his hideousness.

"Nightmare sculpture, hewn from dreams of madness . . ." the quotation flashed across my mind as I followed the tall man in livery down the hallway.

My guide rapped at a door set at the rear of the corridor, waited for a moment, then stood aside to let me enter. Facing me across a flat-topped desk sat a small, stoop-shouldered man, reading from a large book through a pair of Crookes'-lens spectacles.

"Doctor," my conductor introduced in perfect English, "this gentleman came knocking at our door a few moments ago, going through some most extraordinary antics and mumbling something about a motor car sunk in our brook."

I looked from one of them to the other in utter, stupefied amazement, but my astonishment increased tenfold at the seated man's reply. "Stravinsky," he said sternly, looking at me through the purplish-black of his thick glasses, "how dare you leave your quarters without my permission? Go upstairs with Mishkin at once."

"I beg your pardon," I stammered, "my name's not Stravinsky. I'm Doctor Samuel Trowbridge of Harrisonville, and some friends of mine and I need help in raising a sunken motor car from the brook that runs between the highway and your place. If you'll be kind enough to tell your chauffeur to——"

"That will do," he broke in sharply. "We've heard all that before. Go to your room at once, or I shall have to order you into a strait-waistcoat again."

"See here," I began in a rage, "I don't know what this nonsense means, but if you think for one moment——"

My protest died half uttered. A pair of sinewy hands seized me by the elbows, drawing my arms sharply to my sides, a wide strap of woven webbing was thrown about my body like a lasso, pinioning both elbows, drawn tightly through a buckle and snapped into position. I was securely bound and helpless as ever a captive was.

"Confound you!" I cried. "Take this devilish harness off me! What d'ye mean——"

Something smooth and soft and smothering, like a piece of wadded silk, was thrust against my face, shutting out the light, covering mouth and nose; a sickly-sweet, pungent odor assailed my nostrils, the floor seemed suddenly to heave and billow like a sea lashed by the wind, and I felt my knees give way beneath me slowly.

"Feeling better, now, Stravinsky," the suave, low voice of the round-shouldered man woke me from a troubled sleep.

I sat up, staring round me stupidly. I lay upon a narrow iron cot of the sort used in the free wards of hospitals, uncovered except for a thin cotton blanket. The bed stood in a little cubby-hole not more than six feet square, and was the only article of furniture in the apartment. A small window, heavily barred, let in a little light and a great quantity of cold air together with occasional splatterings of rain. Directly facing me was a stout wooden door made without panels but fitted with a barred wicket through which my captor looked at me with a rather gentle, pitying smile. Close behind him, grinning with what seemed to be sadistic malice, was the liveried man who'd let me in.

"You'll be sorry for this!" I threatened, leaping from the cot. "I don't know who you are, but you'll know who *I* am before you're done with me——"

"Oh, yes, I know perfectly who you are," he corrected in a gentle, soothing voice. "You are Abraham Stravinsky, sixty-five years old, once in business as a cotton converter but adjudged a lunatic by the orphans' court three weeks ago and placed in my care by your relatives. Poor fellow"—he turned



sorrowfully to his companion—"he still thinks he's a physician, Mishkin. Sad case, isn't it?"

He regarded me again, and I thought I saw a glimmer of amusement in his solicitous expression as he asked: "Wouldn't you like some breakfast? You've been sleeping here since we had to use harsh measures day before yesterday. You must be hungry, now. A little toast, some eggs, a cup of coffee——"

"I'm not hungry," I cut in, "and you know I'm not Stravinsky. Let me out of here at once, or——"

"Now, isn't that too bad?" he asked, again addressing his companion. "He doesn't want his breakfast. Never mind, he will, in time." To me:

"The treatment we pursue in cases such as yours is an unique one, Stravinsky. It inhibits the administration of food, or even water, for considerable periods of time. Indeed, I often find it necessary to withhold nourishment indefinitely. Sometimes the patient succumbs under treatment, to be sure; but then his insanity is cured, and we can't have everything, can we? After all, Stravinsky, the mission of the sanitarium is to cure the disease from which the patient suffers, isn't it, Stravinsky?"

"Make yourself comfortable, Stravinsky. Your trouble will be over in a little while. If it were only food you are required to forgo your period of waiting might be longer, but prohibition of water shortens it materially—Stravinsky."

The constant repetition of the name he'd forced upon me was like caustic rubbed in a raw wound. "Damn you," I screamed, as I dashed myself against the door, "my name's not Stravinsky, and you know it! You know it—you *know it!*"

"Dear, dear, Stravinsky," he reproved, smiling gently at my futile rage. "You mustn't overtax yourself. You can't last long if you permit yourself to fly into such frenzies. Of course, your name's Stravinsky. Isn't it, Mishkin?" He turned for confirmation to the other.

"Of course," his partner echoed. "Shall we look in on the others?"

They turned away, chuckling delightedly, and I heard their

footsteps clatter down the bare floor toward the other end of the corridor on which my room faced.

In a few minutes I heard voices raised in heated argument, seemingly from a room almost directly underneath my cell. Then a door slammed and there came the sound of dully, rhythmically repeated blows, as if a strap were being struck across a bed's footboard. Finally, a wail, hopeless and agonized as if wrung from tortured flesh against the protest of an undefeated spirit: "Yes, yes, anything—*anything!*"

The commotion ceased abruptly, and in a little while I heard the clack of boot heels as they went upon their rounds.

The hours passed like eons clipped from hell's eternity. There was absolutely no way to amuse myself, for the room—cell would be a better term for it—contained no furniture except the bed. The window, unglazed, small and high-set, faced an L of the house; so there was neither sky nor scenery to be looked at, and the February wind drove gusts of gelid rain into the place until I cowered in the corner to escape its chilling wetness as though it were a live, malignant thing. I had been stripped to shirt and trousers, even shoes and stockings taken from me, and in a little while my teeth were chattering with cold. The anesthetic they had used to render me unconscious still stung the mucous membranes of my mouth and nose, and my tongue was roughened by a searing thirst. I wrenched a metal button from my trousers, thrust it in my mouth and sucked at it, gaining some slight measure of relief, and so, huddled in the sleazy blanket, shivering with cold and almost mad with thirst, I huddled on the bed for hour after endless hour, till I finally fell into a doze.

How long I crouched there trembling I have no idea, nor could I guess how long I'd slept when a hand fell on my shoulder and a light flashed blindingly into my face.

"Get up!" I recognized the voice as coming from the man called Mishkin, and as I struggled to a sitting posture, still blinking from the powerful flashlight's glare, I felt a broad web strap, similar to the one with which I had at first been

pinioned, dropped deftly on my arms and drawn taut with a jerk.

"Come," my jailer seized the loose end of my bond and half dragged, half led me from my cell, down the stairs and through a lower hall until we paused before a door which had been lacquered brilliant red. He thrust the panels back with one hand, seized me by the shoulder with the other, and shoved me through the opening so violently that, bound as I was, I almost sprawled upon my face.

The apartment into which I stumbled was in strong contrast to the cell in which I'd lain. It was a large room, dimly lighted and luxurious. The walls were gumwood, unvarnished but rubbed down with oil until their surface gleamed like satin. The floor of polished yellow pine was scattered with bright Cossack rugs, barbarian with primary colors. A sofa and deep easy-chairs were done in brick-red crushed leather. A log fire blazed and hissed beneath the gumwood over-mantel and the blood-orange of its light washed out across the varnished floor and ebbed and flowed like rising and receding wavelets on the dark-red walls. A parchment-shaded lamp was on the table at the center of the room, making it a sort of island in the shadows, and by its light I looked into the face of the presiding genius of this house of mystery.

He had taken off his dark-lensed glasses, and I saw his eyes full on me. As I met their level, changeless stare I felt as if the last attachments of my viscera had broken. Everything inside me had come loose, and I was weak to sickness with swift-flooding, nameless terror.

In a lifetime's practise as physician one sees many kinds of eyes, eyes of health and eyes diseased, the heaven-lighted eyes of the young mother with her first-born at her breast, the vacant eye of fever, the stricken eye of one with sure foreknowledge of impending death upon him, the criminal's eye, the idiot's lack-luster eye, the blazing eye of madness. But never had I seen a pair of eyes like these in a human face. Beast's eyes they were, unwinking, topaz, gleaming, the kind of eye you see in a house cat's round, smug face, or staring at you

speculatively through the bars that barricade the carnivores' dens at the zoo. As I looked, fascinated, in these bestial eyes set so incongruously in a human countenance, I felt—I knew—that there was nothing this man would not do if he were minded to it. There was nothing in those yellow, ebony-pupiled eyes to which one could appeal; no plea addressed to pity, decency or morals would affect the owner of these eyes; he was as callous to such things as is the cat that plays so cunningly and gently with a ball one moment, and pounces on a hapless bird or mouse so savagely the next. Feline ferocity, and feline fickleness, looked at me from those round, bright, yellow eyes.

"Forgive the lack of light, please, Doctor Trowbridge," he begged in his soft, almost purring voice. "The fact is I am sensitive to it, highly photophobic. That has its compensations, though," he added with a smile. "I am also noctiloptic and have a supernormal acuity of vision in darkness, like a cat—or a tiger."

As he spoke he snapped the switch of the desk lamp, plunging the apartment into shadow relieved only by the variable fire-glow. Abruptly as a pair of miniature motor lights switched on, the twin disks of his eyes glowed at me through the dimness with a shining phosphorescent gleam of green.

"That is why I wear the Crookes'-lensed glasses in the daytime," he added with an almost soundless laugh. "You won't mind if we continue in the darkness for a little while." The vivid glow of his eyes seemed to brighten as he spoke, and I felt fresh chills of horror ripple up my spine.

Silence fell, and lengthened. Somewhere in the darkness at my back a clock ticked slowly, measuring off the seconds, minutes. . . . I caught myself remembering a passage from Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*:

*"O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!*

The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,

. . . and Faustus must be damn'd!"

The shadowed room seemed full to overflowing with manifested, personalized evil as the magician's cell had been that night so long ago in Wurtemberg when Mephistopheles appeared to drag his screaming soul to everlasting torment. Had the floor opened at my feet and the red reflection of the infernal pit shone on us, I do not think I should have been surprised.

I almost screamed when he spoke. "Do you remember—have you heard of—Friedrich Friedrichsohn, Doctor Trowbridge?"

The name evoked no memories. "No," I answered.

"You lie. Everyone—even you half-trained American physicians—knows of the great Friedrichsohn!"

His taunt stung a mnemonic chord. Dimly, but with increasing clarity, recollection came. Friedrich Friedrichsohn, brilliant anatomist, authority on organic evolution . . . colonel-surgeon in the army which Franz Josef sent to meet its doom on the Piave . . . shell-shocked . . . invalided home to take charge of a hospital at Innsbruck—now memory came in a swift gush. The doctors in Vienna didn't talk about it, only whispered rumors went the rounds of schools and clinics, but the fragmentary stories told about the work they'd found him at, matching bits of shattered bodies, grafting amputated limbs from some to others' blood-fresh amputation-wounds, making monsters hideous as Hindoo idols or the dreadful thing that Frankenstein concocted out of sweepings from dissecting-rooms. . . . "He died in an insane asylum at Korneusburg," I replied.

"Wrong! Wrong as your diagnoses are in most instances, *mein lieber Doktor*. I am Friedrich Friedrichsohn, and I am very far from dead. They had many things to think of when the empire fell to pieces, and they forgot me. I did not find it difficult to leave the prison where they'd penned me like a beast, nor have I found it difficult to impose on your credulous authorities. I am duly licensed by your state board as a doctor. A few forged documents were all I needed to secure my permit. I am also the proprietor of a duly licensed sani-

tarium for the treatment of the insane. I have even taken a few patients. Abraham Stravinsky, suffering from dementia præcox is—was—one of them. He died shortly after you arrived, but his family have not yet been notified. They will be in due course, and you—but let us save that for a later time.

“The work in which I was engaged when I was interrupted was most fascinating, Doctor. Until you try it you cannot imagine how many utterly delightful and surprising combinations can be made from the comparatively few parts offered by the human body. I have continued my researches here, and while some of my experiments have unfortunately failed, I have succeeded almost past my expectations in some others. I should like to show you them before—I’m sure you’ll find them interesting, Doctor.”

“You’re mad!” I gasped, struggling at the strap that bound my arms.

I could feel him smiling at me through the dark. “So I have been told. I’m not mad, really, but the general belief in my insanity has its compensations. For example, if through some deplorable occurrence now unforeseen I should be interrupted at my work here, your ignorant police might not feel I was justified in all I’ve done. The fact that certain subjects have unfortunately expired in the process of being remodeled by me might be considered ground for prosecuting me for murder. That is where the entirely erroneous belief that I am mad would have advantages. Restrained I might be, but in a hospital, not a tomb. I have never found it difficult to escape from hospitals. After a few months’ rest I should escape again if I were ever apprehended. Is not that an advantage? How many so-called sane men have *carte blanche* to do exactly as they please, to kill as many people as they choose, and in such manner as seems most amusing, knowing all the while they are immune to the electric chair or the gallows? I am literally above the law, *mein lieber kollege*.

“Mishkin,” he ordered the attendant who stood at my elbow,

"go tell Pedro we should like some music while we make our tour of inspection.

"Mishkin was confined with me at Korneusburg," he explained, as the clatter of the other's boot heels died away beyond the door. "When I left there I brought him with me. They said he was a homicidal maniac, but I have cured his mania—as much as I desired. He is a faithful servant and quite an efficient helper, Doctor Trowbridge. In other circumstances I might find it difficult to handle him, but his work with me provides sufficient outlets for his—shall we call it eccentricity? Between experiments he is as tractable as a well-trained beast. Of course, he has to be reminded that the whip is always handy—but that is the technique of good beast-training, *nicht wahr?*"

"Ah, our accompaniment has commenced. Shall we go?"

Seizing the end of my tether, he assisted me to rise, held the door for me, and led me out into the hall.

Somewhere upstairs a violin was playing softly, *Di Provenza il Mar*, from *Traviata*. Its plaintive notes were fairly liquid with nostalgic longing:

From land and wave of dear Provence  
 What hath caused thy heart to roam?  
 From the love that met thee there,  
 From thy father and thy home? . . .

"He plays well, *nicht wahr?*" Friedrichsohn's soft voice whispered. "Music must have been instinctive with him, otherwise he would not remember—but I forgot, you do not know about him, do you?" In the darkness of the corridor his glowing eyes burned into mine.

"Do you remember Viki Boehm, *Herr Doktor?*"

"The Viennese coloratura? Yes. She and her husband Pedro Attavanta were lost when the *Oro Castle* burned——"

His almost silent laughter stopped me. "Lost, *lieber kollege*, but not as you suppose. They are both here beneath this roof, guests of their loving *landsmann*. Oh, they are both well, I assure you; you need have no fears on that score. All my skill

and science are completely at their service, night and day. I would not have one of them die for anything!"

We had halted at a narrow lacquered door with a small design like a coronet stenciled on it. In the dim light of a small lamp set high against the wall I saw his face, studious, arrogant, unsmiling. Then a frigid grimace, the mere parody of a smile, congealed upon his lips.

"When I was at the university before the war"—his voice had the hard brittleness of an icicle—"I did Viki Boehm the honor to fall in love with her. I, the foremost scientist of my time, greater in my day than Darwin and Galileo in theirs, offered her my hand and name; she might have shared some measure of my fame. But she refused. Can you imagine it? She rebuffed my condescension! When I told her of the things I had accomplished, using animals for subjects, and of what I knew I could do later when the war put human subjects in my hands, she shrank from me in horror. She had no scientific vision. She was so naïve she thought the only office of the doctor was to treat the sick and heal the injured. She could not vision the long vistas of pure science, learning and experimenting for their own sakes. For all her winsomeness and beauty she was nothing but a woman. *Pfui!*" He spat the exclamation of contempt at me. Then:

"Ah, but she was beautiful! As lovely as the sunrise after rain, sweet as springtime in the Tyrol, fragile as a——"

"I have seen her," I cut in. "I heard her sing."

"So? You shall see her once again, *Herr Doktor*. You shall look at her and hear her voice. You recall her fragile loveliness, the contours of her arms, her slender waist, her perfect bosom—see!"

He snatched the handle of the door and wrenched it open. Behind the first door was a second, formed of upright bars like those of a jail cell, and behind that was a little cubicle not more than six feet square. A light flashed on as he shoved back the door, and by its glow I saw the place was lined with mirrors, looking-glasses on the walls and ceiling, bright-lacquered composition on the floor; so that from every angle



shone reflections, multiplied in endless vistas, of the monstrous thing that squatted in the center of the cell.

In general outline it was like one of those child's toys called a humpty-dumpty, a weighted pear-shaped figure which no matter how it may be laid springs upright automatically. It was some three feet high and more than that in girth, wrinkled, edematous, knobbed and bloated like a toad, with a hide like that of a rhinoceros. If it had feet or legs they were invisible; near its upper end two arm-like stubs extended, but they bore no resemblance to human pectoral limbs. Of human contours it had no trace; rather, it was like a toad enlarged five hundred times, denuded of its rear limbs and—fitted with a human face!

Above the pachydermous mass of shapelessness there poised a visage, a human countenance, a woman's features, finely chiseled, delicate, exquisite in every line and contour with a loveliness so ethereal and unearthly that she seemed more like a fairy being than a woman made of flesh and blood and bone. The cheeks were delicately petal-like, the lips were full and sensitive, the eyes deep blue, the long, fair hair which swept down in a cloven tide of brightness rippled with a charming natural wave. Matched by a body of ethereal charm the face would have been lovely as a poet's dream; attached to that huge tumorous mass of bloated horror it was a thousand times more shocking than if it too had been deformed past resemblance to humanity.

The creature seemed incapable of voluntary locomotion, but it was faced toward us, and as we looked at it, it threw its lovely head back with a sort of slow contortion such as might be made by a half-frozen snake. There was neither horror nor hatred, not even reproach, in the deep-blue eyes that looked at Friedrichsohn. There was instead, it seemed to me, a look of awful resignation, of sorrow which had burned itself to ashes and now could burn no more, of patience which endures past all endurance and now waits calmly for whatever is to be, knowing that the worst is past and nothing which can come can match that which is already accomplished.

"Her case was relatively simple," I heard Friedrichsohn whisper. "Mishkin and I were cruising in a motorboat offshore when the *Oro Castle* burned. We picked her and her husband up, gave them a little drink which rendered them unconscious and brought them here. She gave us very little trouble. First we immobilized her by amputating both legs at the hip; then, in order to make sure that she would not destroy herself or mar her beauty, I took off both arms midway between shoulder and elbow. That left a lovely torso and an even lovelier face to work with.

"You're wondering about her beautifully swollen trunk? Nothing could be simpler, *herr kollege*. Artificially induced elephantiasis resulted in enormous hypertrophy of the derma and subcutaneous tissue, and we infected and reinfected her until we had succeeded in producing the highly interesting result you observe. It was a little difficult to prevent the hypertrophy spreading to her neck and face, but I am not the greatest doctor in the world for nothing. She suffers nothing now, for the progress of her condition has brought a permanent insensitiveness, but there were several times during the progress of our work when we had to keep her drugged. Elephantiasis begins as an erysipelatus inflammation, you know, and the accompanying lymphangitis and fever are uncomfortable.

"Internally she's quite healthy, and Mishkin makes her face up every day with loving care—too loving, sometimes. I caught him kissing her one day and beat him for an hour with the knout.

"That put a chill upon her ardor. I do not let him feed her. That is my own delightful duty. She bit me once—the lovely little vixen!—but that was long ago. Now she's as tame and gentle as a kitten.

"Ingenious, having her room lined with mirrors, isn't it? No matter which way she may look—up, down or sidewise—she cannot fail to contemplate herself, and compare her present state of loveliness with what she once possessed.

"Viki!" he rattled the bars of her cage. "Sing for our guest, Viki!"

She regarded him a moment with incurious, thoughtful eyes, but there was no recognition in her glance, no sign that she had heard his command.

"Viki!" Again he spoke sharply. "Will you sing, or must we get the branding-iron out?"

I saw a spasm of quick pain and apprehension flash across her face, and: "That is always effective," he told me, with another soft laugh. "You see, we altered Pedro Attavanti, too. Not very much. We only blinded him and moved his scalp down to his face—a very simple little grafting operation—but he went mad while we were working on him. Unfortunately, we were short of anesthetics, and non-Aryans lack the fortitude of the superior races. Once a day we let him have his violin, and he seems quite happy while he plays. When Viki is intractable we have an excellent use for him. She can't bear to see him suffer; so when we bring him to her door and let her watch us burn him with hot irons she does whatever we ask her.

"Shall we get the irons, Viki," he turned to the monstrous woman-headed thing in the cell, "or will you sing?"

The hideous creature threw its lovely head back, breathing deeply. I could see the wattled skin beneath the throat swell like a puffing toad as it filled its lungs with breath; then, clear and sweet and true as ever Viki Boehm had sung upon the concert stage, I heard her voice raised in the final aria of *Faust*:

"Holy angels, in heaven blest,  
My spirit longs with thee to rest . . ."

Surely, the ecstatic melody of that prison scene was never more appropriately sung than by that toad-thing with a lovely woman's head.

The song still mounted poignantly with an almost piercing clarity as Friedrichsohn slammed the door and with a jerk that almost pulled me off my feet dragged me down the hall.

"You'll be interested in my heart experiment, *Herr Doktor*,"

he assured me. "This is a more ambitious scheme, a far more complicated——"

I jerked against the harness that confined me. "Stop it!" I demanded. "I don't want to see your fiend's work, you sadistic devil. Why don't you kill me and have done with——"

"Kill you?" The mild, surprised reproach in his voice was almost pathetic. "Why, Doctor Trowbridge, I would not kill anyone, intentionally. Sometimes my patients die, unfortunately, but, believe me, I feel worse about it than they do. It's terribly annoying, really, to carry an experiment almost to completion, then have your work entirely nullified by the patient's inconsiderate death. I assure you it upsets me dreadfully. A little while ago I had almost finished grafting arms and legs and half the pelt from a gorilla to an almost perfect human specimen, a truck driver whose capture caused me no end of trouble, and would you believe it, the inconsiderate fellow died and robbed me of a major triumph. That sort of thing is very disconcerting. Shall we proceed?"

"No, damn you!" I blazed back. "I'll see myself in hell before——"

"Surely, you're not serious, Doctor?" He dropped his hand upon my shoulder, feeling with quick-kneading fingers for the middle cervical ganglion. "You really mean you will not come with me?" With a finger hard and pitiless as a steel bolt he thrust downward on my spine, and everything went red before me in a sudden blaze of torment. It was as if my head and neck and throat were an enormous exposed nerve on which he bore with fiendish pressure. I felt myself reel drunkenly, heard myself groan piteously.

"You will come with me now, won't you, *lieber kollege*?" he asked as he released the pressure momentarily, then bore down on my spine again until it seemed to me my heart had quite stopped beating, then started up again with a cold, nauseating lurch. I could see his eyes blaze at me through the dark, feel his fingers fumbling at my skull-base.

"Don't—don't!" I panted, sick with pain. "I'll——"

"*Ist gut.* Of course you will. I knew that you would not

be stubborn. As I was saying, this next experiment I propose making is more ambitious than any I have tried before. It involves the psyche quite as much as the body. Tell me, Doctor, is it your opinion that the physical attraction we call love springs more from contemplation of the loved one's face or figure?"

He tapped me on the shoulder with a rigid forefinger, and I shrank from the contact as from a heated iron. Sick revulsion flooded through me. What atrocity was hatching in the diseased mind of this completely irresponsible mad genius?

"Why—I—what do you mean?" I stammered stupidly. My head and neck still pained me so that I could hardly think.

"Precisely what I say, *mein lieber kollege*," he snapped back acidly. "Every day we see cases which make us wonder. Men love and marry women with faces which might put Medusa to shame, but with bodies which might make a Venus jealous. Or, by contrast, they fall in love with pretty faces set on bodies which lack every element of beauty, or which may even be deformed. Women marry men with similar attributes. Can you explain these vagaries?"

"Of course not," I returned. "Human beings aren't mere animals. Physical attraction plays its part, naturally, but intellectual affinity, the soul——"

"The psyche, if you please, *mein kollege*. Let us not be mediæval in our terminology."

"All right, the psyche, then. We see beneath the surface, find spiritual qualities that attract us, and base our love on them. A love with nothing but the outward-seeming of the body for foundation is unworthy of the name. It couldn't last——"

"Fool!" he half laughed and half snarled. "You believe in idealistic love—in the love that casteth out fear and endureth all things?"

"Absolutely——"

"So do those two down there——"

He had halted at a turning of the hallway; as he spoke he pressed a lever, sliding back a silent panel in the floor. Imme-

diately beneath us was a small room, comfortably furnished and well lighted. On a couch before the open fire a boy and girl were seated, hand in hand, fear written on their faces.

He was a lad of twenty-two or so, slightly made, with sleek, fair hair and a ruddy, fresh complexion. I did not need to hear him speak to know that he was English, or that I had the answer to the disappearance of the British consul's messenger.

The girl was younger by a year or so, and dark as her companion was blond.

Their costumes and positions were reminiscent of domestic bliss as portrayed in the more elaborate motion pictures; he wore a suit of violet pajamas beneath a lounging-robe of purple silk brocade, and a pair of purple kid house-boots. She was clothed in an elaborate hostess coat of Persian pattern, all-enveloping from throat to insteps, but so tight from neck to hips that it hid her lissome form no more than the apple's skin conceals the fruit's contours. From hips to hem it flared out like a ballerina's skirt. Laced to her feet with narrow strips of braided scarlet leather were brightly gilded sandals with cork soles at least four inches thick, and the nails of her exquisitely formed hands and feet were lacquered brilliant red to match the sandal straps.

"No," she was saying as Friedrichsohn slid back the panel, "it isn't hopeless, dear. They're sure to find us sometime—why, you were a king's messenger; the consulate will turn the country inside out—"

His bitter laugh broke in. "No chance! I've stultified myself, blasted my name past all redemption. They'll let me rot, and never turn a hand—"

"Neville! What do you mean?"

He put his elbows on his knees and hid his face in his cupped hands. "I should have let 'em kill me first," he sobbed, "but—oh, my dear, you can't imagine how they hurt me! First they beat me with a strap, and when that didn't break my spirit the little man with the black glasses did something to my neck—I don't know what—that made me feel as if I had

a dentist's drill in every tooth at once. I couldn't stand the dreadful pain, and—and so I signed it, Lord forgive me!"

"Signed what, dearest?"

"A letter to the consul tellin' him I'd sold the papers that he'd trusted with me to the Germans, and that I'd hooked it with the money. I shouldn't have found it hard to die, dear, but the pain—the awful pain——"

"Of course, my dear, my poor, sweet dear"—she took his head against her bosom and rocked it back and forth as if he were a fretful child and she his mother—"I understand. Rita understands, dear, and so will they when we get out of here. No one's responsible for things he's done when he's been tortured. Think of the people who denied their faith when they were on the rack——"

"And of the ones who had the stuff to stick it!" he sobbed miserably.

"Honey, listen. I don't love you 'cause you're strong and masterful and heroic; I love you 'cause you're you." She stopped his wild self-accusation with a kiss. Then back again to her first theme:

"They're sure to find us, dear. This is Twentieth Century America. Two people can't just disappear and stay that way. The police, the G-men——"

"How long have we been here?" he interrupted.

"I—I don't quite know. Not being able to look out and see the sun, I can't form estimates of time. We don't know even when it's night and when it's day, do we? All I remember is that I was late in leaving Philadelphia and I was hurrying to avoid the evening traffic from New York when, just outside of Cranberry, something flew against my face and stung me. I thought at first that it was a mosquito, but that was silly. Even Jersey skeeters don't come around in February. The next thing I knew I was awfully dizzy and the car was rocking crazily from one side of the road to the other; then—here I was. I found myself in a soft bed, and my clothes were gone, but these sandals and this house-coat were laid out for me. There was a bathroom letting off my chamber,

and when I'd finished showering I found breakfast—or maybe it was luncheon or dinner—waiting for me on a tray beside the bed. They don't intend to starve us, sugar, that's a sure thing. Haven't you been well fed, too?"

"Yes, I have. My experience was about the same as yours, except that I've seen them, the tall, thin man who looks like a walkin' corpse, and the little pipsqueak with black glasses. But I didn't see 'em till today—or was it yesterday? I can't seem to remember."

The girl knit her smooth brows. "Neither can I. I've tried to keep count of the meals they've served, allowing three meals to a day, so I could form some estimate of the time I've been here, and I've tried so hard to lie in wait and catch the one who serves 'em; but somehow I always seem to fall asleep, no matter how I strive to keep awake, and—it's funny about sleeping, isn't it? When you wake up you can't say if you've just dozed for five minutes or slept around the clock——"

The boy sat forward suddenly, gripping both her hands in his. "That's it! I'm sure of it! No wonder time seems to stand in this place! They drug us—dope us someway, so that we go to sleep whenever they desire it. We don't know how long these drugged sleeps last. We may have been here weeks, months——"

"No, dear," she shook her head. "It isn't summer, yet. We haven't been here months."

"We may have been." Wild panic had him in its grip, his voice was rising, growing thin, hysterical. "How can you tell?"

"Silly!" She bent and kissed him. "Call it woman's intuition if you like, but I am sure we haven't been cooped up here for a month."

They sat in silence a few minutes, hand interlaced in hand; then:

"Rita?"

"Yes, dear?"



"When we get out—if we get out, and if I square myself with the Chief—will you marry me?"

"Try to keep me from it, Mister Southerby, and you'll find yourself right in the middle of the tidiest breach-of-promise suit you ever saw! D'ye think that you can compromise me like this, sit here with me, dressed as we are, and without a chaperone, then ride off gayly? You'll make an honest woman of me, young feller me lad, or——" Her mask of badinage fell away, leaving her young face as ravaged as a garden after a hail storm. "Oh, Neville, you do think they'll find us, don't you?"

It was his turn to comfort her. "Of course, of course, my darling!" he whispered. "They'll find us. They can't help but find us. Then——"

"Yes, honey, then"—she snuggled sleepily into his arms—"then we'll always be together, dear, close—so close that your dear face will be the first thing that I see when I awake, the last I see before I go to sleep. Oh, it will be heaven . . . heaven."

"I shall be interested to find out if it will. Time will tell, and I think time will side with me." Friedrichsohn pressed the spring that slipped the silent panel back in place, and rose, helping me up from my knees. "It will be an interesting experiment to observe, *nicht wahr, mein kollege?*"

"Wha—what d'ye mean?" I stammered, my voice almost beyond control. What dreadful plan had taken form behind that high, white brow? Would he subject this boy and girl to dreadful transformation? I had seen the remnant of the lovely Viki Boehm. Did he dare . . .

His soft, suave voice broke through my terrified imaginings. "Why, simply this, *mein lieber kollege*: They are ideal subjects for my test; better, even, than I had dared hope. I caught the girl by the simple device of waiting by the roadside with an airgun loaded with impregnated darts. The slightest puncture of the epidermis with one of my medicated missiles paralyzes the sensory-motor nerves instantly, and as she told

the young man, when she woke up she was in bed in one of my guest rooms.

"But my experiment requires Jill to have a Jack, Joan a Darby, Gretel a Hänsel, and so I set about to find a mate for her. Eventually this young man came along, and was similarly caught. I had arranged for everything. Their sleeping-quarters open on a common sitting-room, his to one side, hers upon the other. Each morning—or each night, they can't tell the difference—I permit them to awaken, open the automatic doors to their rooms, and let them visit with each other. When I think that they have made love long enough I—ah—turn the current off and put them back to sleep."

"How do you mean——"

"Have not you noticed a peculiar odor here?"

"Yes, I smelled the incense when I first came in——"

"*Jawohl*. That is it. I have perfected an anesthetic gas which, according to the strength of its concentration, can put one in a state of perfect anesthesia in a minute, a second, or immediately. It is almost odorless, and such slight odor as it has is completely masked by the incense. Periodically I put them to sleep, then let them re-awaken. That is why they cannot guess the intervals of time between their meetings, and—what is more important—when they begin to reason out too much, I see that they become unconscious quickly. I turned the anesthetic on when he began to guess too accurately concerning my technique a moment ago. By this time both of them are sleeping soundly, and Mishkin has taken them to bed. When I see fit, I shall allow them to awake and eat and take their conversation up where they left off, but I do not think they will. They are too preoccupied with each other to give much thought to me—just now, at least."

"How long have they been here?" I asked. "I heard her say that she came first——"

"What is time?" he laughed. "She does not know how long she's been my guest; neither does he, nor you, *Herr Doktor*. It may have been a night I let you sleep in Stravinsky's cell, or it may have been a week, or two——"

"That's nonsense," I cut in. "I should have been half starved if that were so. As it is, I'm not even feeling hungry——"

"How do you know we did not feed you with a nasal tube while you were sleeping?"

I had not thought of that. It upset my calculations utterly. Certainly in normal circumstances I should have been ravenous if I'd been there but four and twenty hours. A longer period without nourishment and I should have felt weak, yet I felt no hunger. . . .

"To return to our young lovers," Friedrichsohn reminded me. "They are better suited to my purpose; better, even, than I'd thought. When I captured him I could not know that they had known each other for some time, and were more than merely mildly interested in each other. Since they have been my guests, propinquity has made that interest blossom into full-blown love. Tomorrow, or the next day—or the next day after that—I think I shall begin to work on them."

"To—work—on—them?"

"*Jawohl, mein lieber kollege.* You saw the fascinating beauty treatment I gave Viki Boehm? *Ist gut.* I shall put them quietly to sleep and subject them to precisely similar ministrations. When they awake they'll find themselves in the dove-cote I have prepared for them. It is a charming, cozy little place where they can contemplate each other as the little lady said, where the face of each shall be the first thing that the other sees when he awakes, the last thing he beholds before he goes to sleep. It is larger than the chamber I assigned to Viki—more than twice as large—and one of them shall rest at one end of it while the other occupies the other, facing him. It has been lined with mirrors, too, so that they can see themselves and each other from both front and back. That is necessary, *Herr Doktor*, since they will not be able to turn around. Lacking legs, a person finds himself severely handicapped in moving, *lieber freund.*"

"But why should you do this to them?" I faltered, knowing

even as I asked the question that reason had no part in his wild plans.

"Can you ask that after our discussion of the merits of the face and form as stimulants of love? I am surprised and disappointed in you, *mein kollege*. It is to see if love—the love they pledge so tenderly to each other—can stand the sight of hideous deformity in the loved one. Their faces will be as they are now, only their forms will be altered. If they continue to express affection for each other I shall know the face is that which energizes love, but if—as I am sure they will—they turn from each other in loathing and abhorrence, I shall have proven that the form is more important. It will be a most diverting comedy to watch, *nicht wahr, Herr Doktor?*"

Horror drove my pulses to a hurrying rhythm. Something sharp, something penetrating as a cold and whetted knife-blade, seemed probing at my insides. I wanted to cry out against this outrage, to pray; but I could not. Heaven seemed unreal and infinitely far away with this phosphorescent-eyed monstrosity at my elbow, his pitiless, purring voice outlining plans which outdid hell in hellish ingenuity.

"You can't—you can't do this!" I gasped. "You wouldn't dare! You'll be found out!"

"That's what Viki Boehm said when I told her of the future I had planned for her," he broke in with a susurrating laugh. "But they didn't find me out. They never will, *Herr Doktor*. This is a madhouse—pardon me, a sanitarium—duly licensed by the state and impervious to private inquiry. People expect to hear cries and shrieks and insane laughter from such places. Passersby and neighbors are not even curious. My grounds are posted against trespassers; your law insures my privacy, and no one, not even the police, may enter here without a warrant. I have a crematory fully equipped and ready to be used instantly. If attempts are made to search the house I can destroy incriminating evidence—inanimate *and* animate—in a moment and without trouble. I shall prosecute my work uninterrupted, *lieber kollege*—and that reminds me, I have a proposal to make you."

He had reached the red-walled room again, and he pushed me suddenly, forcing me into a chair.

"There are times when I feel Mishkin is inadequate," he said, taking out a cigarette and setting it alight. "I have taught him much, but his lack of early training often makes him bungle things. I need a skilled assistant, one with surgical experience, capable of helping me in operations. I think you are admirably fitted for this work. Will you enlist with me——"

"I?" I gasped. "I'll see you damned first."

"Or will you fill Stravinsky's coffin?"

"Stravinsky's—coffin?"

"Exactly. You remember that I told you Abraham Stravinsky was a patient here and that he died the day you came? *Jawohl*. His family have not yet been notified of his death. His body is preserved and waiting shipment. Should you accept my offer I shall notify his relatives and send his corpse to them without delay. If you decline"—the green eyes seemed to brighten in the gloom as they peered at me—"I shall put him in the crematory, and you shall take his place in the coffin. He was a Hebrew of the orthodox persuasion, and as such will have a plain pine coffin, rather than a casket. I have several boxes like that ready, one of them for you, unless you choose to join me. You are also doubtless aware that the rules of his religion require burial of the dead within twenty-four hours of death. For that reason there is small fear that the coffin will be opened. But if it should be, his family will not know that it is you and not their kinsman whom they see. I shall say he died in an insane seizure, as a consequence of which he was quite battered in the face.

"You need not fear, *mein lieber kollege*: the body will be admirably battered—past all recognition. Mishkin will attend to all the details. He has a very dexterous talent with the ax, but——"

"But he will not exercise it, I damn think!" From behind me Jules de Grandin spoke in ordinary conversational tone, but I recognized the flatness of his voice. Cyclopean fury

boiled in him, I knew. Friedrichsohn might be insane, fierce and savage as a tiger; de Grandin was his match in fierceness, and his clear French brain was burdened with no trace of madness.

"*Kreuzsakrament!*" As de Grandin stepped before me Friedrichsohn launched himself across the table, leaping like a maddened leopard. "You——"

"It is I, indeed, thou very naughty fellow," de Grandin answered, and as the other clawed at him rose suddenly into the air, as if he were a bouncing ball, brought both feet up at once, and kicked his adversary underneath the chin, hurling him unconscious to the floor. "*Tiens*, a knowledge of *la savate* is very useful now and then," he murmured, as he turned and loosed the strap that bound my arms and transferred it to his fallen foeman. "So, my most unpleasant friend, you will do quite nicely thus," he said, then turned to me.

"*Embrasse moi!*" he commanded. "Oh, Trowbridge, *cher ami, brave camarade*, I had feared this stinking villain had done you an injury. *Alors*, I find you safe and sound, but"—he grinned as he inspected me—"you would look more better if you had more clothing on!"

"There's a chest behind you," I suggested. "Perhaps——"

He was already rummaging in the wardrobe, flinging out a miscellany of garments. "These would be those of Monsieur Southerby"—he tossed a well-cut tweed suit on the floor—"and these a little lady's"—a woolen traveling-suit with furred collar came to join the man's clothes. "And this—ah, here they are!" My own clothes came down from the hooks and he thrust them at me.

"Attire yourself, my friend," he ordered. "I have work elsewhere. If he shows signs of consciousness, knock him on the silly head. I shall return for him anon."

Hurrying footsteps clattered on the floor outside as I dragged on my clothes. A shout, the echo of a shot. . . .

I flung the door back, just in time to see de Grandin lower his pistol as Mishkin staggered toward the front door, raised both arms above his head and crashed sprawling to the floor.

"My excellent de Grandin!" Jules de Grandin told himself. "You never miss, you are incomparable. *Parbleu*, but I admire you——"

"Look, look!" I shouted. "The lamp——"

Clawing blindly in the agony of death, Mishkin's hand had knocked one of the red-globed oil lamps from its place before a statuary niche. The lacquer-coated, oil-soaked walls were tinder to the flame, and already fire was running up them like a curtain.

"In there," I cried. "Southerby and a young girl are locked up there somewhere, and——"

"Hi, Frenchy, where the devil are you?" Hiji's hail came from the transverse corridor. "Find Trowbridge yet? We've got Southerby and a——" He staggered out into the central hall with the still unconscious Southerby held in his arms as if he were a sleeping babe. Behind him came Costello with the girl, who was also sunk deep in anesthesia.

"Whew, it's gettin' hotter than Dutch love in here!" the Englishman exclaimed. "We'd best be hookin' it, eh, what?"

"Indubitably what, my friend," de Grandin answered. "One moment, if you please." He dashed into the red room, reappearing in a moment with arms filled with clothes. "These are their proper raiment," he called, draping the garments over Hiji's shoulder. "Take them to the garage and bid them dress themselves becomingly for public appearance. Me, I have another task to do. Assist me, if you will, Friend Trowbridge."

Back in the red-walled room he raised the fallen madman, signing me to help him. "The place will be a furnace in a moment," he panted, "and me, I am not even one of the so estimable young Hebrews who made mock of Nebuchadnezzar's fiery wrath. We must hasten if we do not wish to cook!"

He had not exaggerated. The oil-soaked walls and floors were all ablaze; lashing, crackling flames swept up the stairway as if it were a chimney flue.

"Good heavens!" I cried, suddenly remembering. "Up there—he's got two others locked in cells——"

Down from the upper story, clear and sweet and growing stronger, came a voice, the voice of Viki Boehm:

*"So stüben wir, um ungetrennt,  
Ewig einig ohne end . . ."*

"So should we die, no more to part,  
Ever in one endless joy . . ."

The mounting notes of a violin accompanied the words of Tristan and Isolde's plea for death which should unite them in the mystic world beyond life.

"*Mon Dieu! Concede misericors, Deus . . .*" De Grandin looked up at the fire-choked stairway. "There is no chance of reaching them——"

The crash of breaking timbers drowned his words, and a gust of flame and sparks burst from the stairwell as the draft was forced down by the falling floors. The song had died; only the roar of blazing, oil-soaked wood sounded as we bent our heads against the smoke and staggered toward the door. "It is their funeral pyre—*fidelium animae per misericordiam Dei, requiescat in pace!*" de Grandin panted. "*A-a-ah!*"

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Are you——"

"Bid Hiji or Costello come at once!" he groaned. "I—am—unable——"

"You're hurt?" I cried solicitously.

"*Vite, vite*—get one of them!" he choked.

I rushed through the front door and circled around the house toward the garage. "Hiji—Costello!" I shouted. "Come quickly, de Grandin's hurt——"

"*Pardonnez-moi, mon ami*, on the contrary I am in the best of health, and as pleased as I can be in all the circumstances." At my very heels de Grandin stood and grinned at me.

"You got clear? Good!" I exclaimed. Then: "Where's Friedrichsohn?"

There was no more expression in his small blue eyes than if they had been china eyes in a doll's face. "He was detained," he answered in a level voice. "He could not come."



Suddenly I felt an overmastering weakness. It seemed to me I had not eaten for a year; the cold bit at my bones as if it were a rabid wolf. "What day is it?" I asked.

"You are unpatriotic, my friend. It is the anniversary of the Great Emancipator's birth. Did not you know?"

"February twelfth? Why, that's today!"

"*Mon Dieu*, what did you think it was, tomorrow or yesterday?"

"But—I mean—we left Harrisonville on the morning of the twelfth, and I've been in that place at least——"

He glanced down at his wrist watch. "A little over two hours. If we hasten we shall be in time to lunch at Keyport. They have delicious lobster there."

"But—but——"

"Doctor Trowbridge, Doctor de Grandin, these are Miss Perinchief and Mr. Southerby," Hiji broke in as he and Costello came from the garage shepherding a most ecstatic-looking pair of youngsters.

"I've seen——" I began; then: "I'm very glad to meet you both." I acknowledged the introduction.

He made me tell him my adventures from the moment I had left him by the brook where Southerby's car was foundered, listening with tear-filled eyes as I described the loathsome things Friedrichsohn had made of Viki Boehm and her husband, weeping unashamedly when I recounted what I'd overheard while I looked through the trap-door into the room in which young Southerby and Rita Perinchief confessed their love. "And now, in heaven's name, what were you doing all that time?" I asked.

"When you failed to return we were puzzled. Costello wished to go to the farmhouse and inquire for you, but I would not permit it. One look at that place and I knew it had the smell of fish upon it. So I posted them out by the great tree at the turning of the driveway, where they could be in plain sight while I crept around the house and sought an opening. At the last I had to cut the lock away from the back door, and that took time. I do not doubt the Mishkin rascal

watched them from some point of vantage. *Bien*. While he was thus engaged Jules de Grandin was at work at the back door.

"At last I forced an entrance, tip-toed to the front door and unfastened it, signaling to them that all was well. I was waiting for them when I saw that *sale chameau* Friedrichsohn come down the stairs with you.

"'Can this be endured?' I ask me. 'Can anyone be permitted to lead my good Friend Trowbridge as if he were a dog upon a leash? *Mais non*, Jules de Grandin, you must see to this.' So I crept up to the room where he had taken you and listened at the keyhole. *Voilà tout*. The rest you know."

"No, I don't," I denied. "How did Hiji and Costello know where to look for Southerby and Rita?"

"*Tiens*, they did not know at all, my friend. They came in and looked about, and they espied the Mishkin rogue on guard before their prison door. He ran, and they broke down the door and brought the prisoners out. They should have shot him first. They have no judgment in such matters. *Eh bien*, I was there. It is perhaps as well. I have had no target practise for a long, long time——"

"Did they find the papers Southerby was carrying?"

"But yes. Friedrichsohn set no value on them. They were in the desk of the room where you first saw him. Hiji has them safely in his pocket."

"It seems incredible I was in there such a little while," I mused. "I could have sworn that I was there at least a week——"

"Ah, my friend, time passes slowly in a prison. What you thought was hours' space as you lay shivering in that cell was really only half an hour or so. Time does not pass at all, it stands entirely still while you are sleeping. They rendered you unconscious with their gas, and woke you in perhaps five minutes. Suggestion did the rest. You thought that you had slept around the clock-dial, and since you could not see the sun, you had no clue to what the hour really

was. Sleep and our own imaginings play strange tricks upon us, *n'est-ce-pas?*”

The broiled live lobster was, as he had promised, delicious. Luncheon done, de Grandin, Hiji and Costello marched toward the bar, with me bringing up the rear. Neville Southery and Rita Perinchief cuddled close together on a settle set before the fireplace in the lounge. As I passed the inglenook in which they snuggled side by side, I heard her: “Honey lamb, I think I know how Robinson Crusoe felt about his island when they’d rescued him. He kept remembering it all his life, and even though he’d undergone a lot of hardships there, he loved it. Somehow, I’ll always feel that way about the place that madman shut us up in. Just suppose they’d never found us . . . suppose we’d stayed there always, just the two of us, being with each other always, looking at each other . . . we might have been changed some by being cooped up, but——”

“*Morbleu*, my friend, you look as if you’d seen a most unpleasant ghost!” de Grandin told me as I joined them at the bar and reached unsteadily for a drink.

“I have,” I answered with a shudder. “A most unpleasant one.”



# THE MYSTERY OF THE LAST GUEST

By JOHN FLANDERS

*Out of the black night came a grisly horror—a tale of  
stark terror*

IN HIS checkered cap and elderly overcoat, John was no longer the imposing head waiter of the Ocean Queen Hotel. He had become, for the seven-month period during which the seaside resort was dead and deserted, the unpretentious hardware clerk in Mersey Street, Hull.

Mr. Buttercup, proprietor of the hotel, held out a cordial hand to him.

“See you again next summer, John, old fellow,” he said.

“God willing, yes,” said John as he gravely emptied the farewell glass of whisky which his employer had poured out for him.

The sullen groaning of the high tide filled the air. The fog was low and dense.

“The season’s good and over,” John declared.

“We’re the last folks here—the very last,” Mr. Buttercup added.

A dozen silhouettes bending under great formless burdens toiled up the slope which seemed to link the Chinese roof of the microscopic railway station to the dike, checker-boarded like a Dutch kitchen.

“There go the Stalkers leaving,” said John. “The lighthouse keeper told ’em there’d be snow today.”

“Snow!” sniffed Mr. Buttercup contemptuously. “What are you talking about? It’s October still!”

John studied the sky, oxidized by the salty fog. Flocks of aquatic birds were tracing gloomy figures against it.

“They’ve left the marshes,” he remarked. “It’s a bad sign when they do that.”

One great, strikingly white bird flew by in a great hurry. "Snow—snow!" it croaked.

"Do you hear that?" said John in jocosely triumph.

"But snow—it's too early for snow," Mr. Buttercup protested. Then he added philosophically: "But after all, what difference does it make to me? Tomorrow the vans come for the furniture I don't leave here, and by day after tomorrow I'll be in London."

Kind-hearted John felt the impulse to add something consoling which would make the solitude of his benefactor easier to bear, but he could think of nothing comforting.

"Well, after all, it'll soon be over," he ventured after casting about helplessly for a minute or two.

In the distance, they could hear a hammer pounding feverishly on wood.

"My word!" cried Mr. Buttercup in surprise. "Windgery must be getting out, too. You can hear them nailing up the shutters of his villa."

"Well, then, if *he's* going," said John, "that leaves you all by yourself. When the last train pulls out, the station-master goes down into the village."

Mr. Buttercup started. He would be the only living creature in the place.

"That's what I get for starting up in this little new resort," he grumbled, "instead of following the crowd to Margate or Folkestone."

"But you did quite a little business," John protested gently, patting the pocket in which his bill-fold was stowed away.

"Yes, that's so," Mr. Buttercup admitted.

A locomotive whistled, down beyond the horizon. The sound was slender as a slender thread.

"Train's coming," said John. "Well, good-bye, Mr. Buttercup."

"Oh, you have plenty of time yet. Come, have another whisky!"

"Just one glass more, then, Mr. Buttercup. At my age, a man doesn't run after trains any longer."

Mr. Buttercup was left entirely alone, in the gloomy, empty hall. The hammer across the way had long since grown silent.

Mr. Buttercup watched the water come up and dissolve the sand castles which the Stalker children had built in the morning, in a mood of lassitude and melancholy, on the deserted, wind-beaten beach.

"Fee—nee—Fee-nee—" grated a whirling jack-snipe, fleeing across a distant pond.

"Fee—neeshed—fee-neeshed!" corrected Mr. Buttercup, obeying an impulse to prove to the twelve rateen armchairs that he still had the courage to joke.

But neither the jack-snipe nor the twelve chairs reacted sympathetically to his brave pleasantry.

Then he caught sight of a man. The man was running with desperate rapidity toward the little station. The locomotive whistled, and his efforts grew more violent still. He struggled on like a crazy man. He moved like an unhappy jumping-jack.

Buttercup chortled with delight.

"Windgery is missing the train!" he informed himself. "Ha! ha! What a gorgeous joke!"

The sound of the telephone tore him away from his malicious amusement. It was somebody from the electric light plant, warning him that since the season was over, the current would be cut off in a few minutes.

"But *I'm* still here, I tell you!" protested Mr. Buttercup.

"So you expect to keep the season going all by yourself?" inquired the lightman sarcastically.

"It's none of your business what I expect to do!" declared Mr. Buttercup, losing his temper.

"And it's none of yours what we do here! Do you think we're going to keep this dynamo going to give you the juice for your pocket flashlight?"

"Pocket flashlight! Pocket flashlight!" sputtered Mr. Buttercup, who had dazzling chandeliers in his dining-hall.

"Yes, I said pocket flashlight, old lady!"

A third voice broke into the conversation. It was the station-master.

"Hello! Hello! The telephone service will be discontinued at once. We are closing the station office, and stopping telegraph service."

"And he says he's cutting off the electricity!" Mr. Buttercup wailed.

"It's all the same to me!" growled the man of the rail. "We never had night service here. We've got our own acetylene outfit, and I'm ready to cut loose right now."

By this time Mr. Buttercup was completely beside himself with righteous indignation, and he publicly compared both his interlocutors with certain necessary but unpleasant domestic utensils.

"Sir!" howled the station-master, "you're insulting a public official, you contemptible hot-water peddler, you!"

This vivid phrase excited the spirit of emulation of the electrician, who contributed some original metaphors drawn from his Sunday piscatorial experiences.

A copious dictionary of insults was rapidly accumulated from three sources. And the two professional gentlemen united their voices to invite Mr. Buttercup to free that maritime region of his presence, to transfer himself to London or Hades as he preferred, and offered him the alternative of an application of large boots to his neat white flannel trousers.

Mr. Buttercup took one of the two torsades of green stearin which adorned his piano, improvised a candle-stick of a lemonade-bottle, and sadly poured himself a glass of whisky.

A chaplet of pale mother-of-pearl hung from the last fingers of light which still glowed in the west. From scraps of dune and rags of fog the approaching darkness built a city of hypethral temples.

The flame of the green candle wavered here and there, and its tip pointed fearfully at the uncanny shadows which skulked in the corners of the hall.

All at once somebody pushed the door open and with a great sigh sank into one of the rateen armchairs.



Mr. Buttercup gazed at the newcomer incredulously.

He found it hard to convince himself that this was not merely another of the shadows which by this time were moving freely about the empty hall; but a second sigh, more piteous than the first, proved to him that the occupant of the armchair was a human being, a creature of flesh and blood.

The candle did not give light enough to see anything that was more than two steps away. Mr. Buttercup approached the visitor.

"Mr. Windgery!" he exclaimed, very much relieved. "This is a surprize, to be sure!" There was real emotion in his tone, instead of the obsequious correctness which usually characterized this model Boniface. "I thought I saw you going to the station."

"Missed—the train—" the poor fellow panted.

"You certainly tried your best to make it. I saw you running. Good gracious, you're completely winded, aren't you?"

"Lungs" —the man breathed— "very bad shape—lungs attacked—I—thought I had to leave—snow——"

"You're afraid of the snow, too? But it won't snow, I'll guarantee that!"

In lieu of verbal reply, Mr. Windgery lifted a meager, transparent hand toward the darkening windows, and the innkeeper saw little irregular flakes floating down through the gloom.

"Well now," he murmured, "I wouldn't have believed it. But what's the harm if it does snow?"

"Isn't—good—for my—lungs—" groaned the invalid.

"I'll take you back to your villa," said Mr. Buttercup. But the other shook his head.

"I don't want to go. Every room in the villa is empty or locked. I wish I might stay here—if you have a room and a little hot tea."

"Why of course you can!" said Mr. Buttercup hospitably. He had entirely recovered his air of professional business-getter. "Do you want some supper? There's still some cold

beef and a corner of meat pie, and some kippered fish, and all the cheese you can eat."

"Thank you. All I want is—some hot tea and two drops of old rum, if you can get it for me."

"Now I'll have company," said Mr. Buttercup, in an extremely good humor. "You see, I was left all alone here in this deserted place. Everybody had moved out—and you were the last. I shouldn't have had a soul to talk to this uncanny October night, with the sea bellowing outside and no living voice to hear but the screaming of the wild geese. It would have been a little lonely and trying for any Christian."

But his new companion was quite as morose as the night. Mr. Buttercup noticed with alarm that when he took his handkerchief away from his mouth, there were great red spots on it. In the meager light of the candle the spots looked black instead of red, as black as shoe-polish, but that did not make the situation any more agreeable.

Finally his guest moaned out a "Good-night" and went upstairs to the room which Mr. Buttercup had offered him, carrying the other green torsade. It wavered like a faint torch in the hands of a drunken helot.

Mr. Buttercup sat alone again, more alone than ever, beside his tiny flame, which had burned down to the neck of the bottle. The whisky tasted bitter to him, and he drank it in great gulps without any pleasure; now and then he cast a furious glance at one of the great wicker easy-chairs, in which his truant fancy had chosen to locate the comfortably sprawling station-master.

But that chair was as empty as all the others, as empty of everything but tortured shadows and the trembling reflection of the snow which shone pale in the darkness.

Mr. Buttercup awoke. His flesh was quivering and pricking with terror, but he had not the slightest idea what caused the feeling. The night was upholstered with snow and silence, and flooded with moonlight. He had fallen asleep grumbling at the tearing, penetrating cough of Mr. Windgery. Now he could hear it no longer.

"He has gone to sleep," he said to himself. But he was unable to explain the sensation of apprehension which made him shrink up into a ball in the warm cavern of the bed-clothes.

The evening before, with its phalanx of shadows, might naturally have seemed more hostile than this noiseless night with its splendid brightness; and yet Mr. Buttercup had not been particularly afraid of the shadows, whereas he was asking himself now, in a strange, thin little voice: "What can be the matter? What can be happening?"

Apparently nothing was happening. The moonlight made the silence more unmistakable. And that was all.

"What in the world can be wrong?" he said aloud again, in the strange, troubled falsetto.

And at that same moment, from the depths of the motionless night, the answer came. It came in the nature of a heavy sound, a sound that awoke no echo, the sound of leaden steps. Somebody was walking through the house, and the steps came one by one, dull, heavy, monotonous.

"Mr. Windgery! Mr. Windgery!" called Mr. Buttercup.

But the only answer was the regular thumping of the steps. They seemed to be coming out of the guest's room and calmly descending the stairs.

The innkeeper reached hurriedly for several garments at random and pulled them on as they happened to come. He was still struggling with a mysterious feeling of terror, which bore down on him like the dark waves of the ocean. He made a foolish effort to joke with himself:

"Well, I can't complain any longer that I haven't company. First I get Mr. Windgery, and now it seems that I have another guest too."

He leaned over the railing and peered down into the stairway well, but he could see nobody, although the stairs were distinctly visible in a fine white light. Yet he could hear the feet going down the lowest steps.

"Ah!" stammered Mr. Buttercup. "I say, sir—listen, sir—won't you let me see you, please?"

But his voice was finer than the tiniest thread, and he could scarcely push it out beyond his trembling lips.

He made no attempt to call Mr. Windgery any longer. He pulled himself together and started down the stairs.

He could hear the steps crossing the great hall; then, although Mr. Buttercup heard no sound of opening doors or keys turning in locks, they descended the steps into the cellar.

When the innkeeper thought the matter over later, he wondered that it had never occurred to him to provide himself with a weapon.

The sound of the steps died away, and in the silence Mr. Buttercup's courage came back a little and he went down the stairs more confidently. But he went down with such careful precautions that he reminded himself of a robber in his own house. The door of Mr. Windgery's room was not locked, in spite of the warning **BOLT YOUR DOOR AT NIGHT** which was displayed prominently in three places, and his host was able to open it without making the slightest noise.

The moonlight told Mr. Buttercup at once what the dramatic and terrible thing had been that had happened in that room.

Mr. Windgery lay on the bed, his head buried deep in the pillow and his blackened mouth wide open in an inaudible cry, a cry which seemed never to end, while his wide, staring eyes reflected the blue light from the window.

"Dead!" stammered Mr. Buttercup. "Dead! Good God, what a business!"

Two seconds later he was fleeing madly up the stairs. The steps had suddenly crossed the hall again and were coming up from below.

Mr. Buttercup climbed up and up, driven by abject terror.

He had reached the attic floor, where the employees of the hotel had been lodged. He stumbled over a disorderly mass of debris left by his discontented minions when they were no longer under his supervision. He could hear the steps below,

passing from room to room, as if somebody were making a careful tour of inspection.

"It's in Number 12," the innkeeper murmured to himself. "Now it has gone into 18—into 22—good heavens, now it's in my room!"

His heart stopped beating at the thought that the Unknown was going about in the night, moving among the familiar, personal objects which he had left but a moment before; so that it seemed to him that a part of his being adhered still to the contents of the room.

In the last attic room, which two or three of his maids had occupied, he saw standing against the partition a holy-water vase of plaster and a scrap of consecrated boxwood twigs. With a sudden grotesque inspiration, he piled up several small articles in the door, one on top of the other, and crowned the whole with the little basin, which was still moist, and with the withered little branch.

"He'll have to come this way," he mumbled to himself, "and then——"

Mr. Buttercup would have been put to it to explain what impression he had of the personality of this "he".

But he was allowed very little time for reflection and reasoning. The steps had begun to fall heavily on the uncarpeted stairs which led up to the garret rooms.

The sound was more lugubrious and more coldly ferocious than ever. It seemed as if the whole structure were moaning with fear.

"I must go higher yet!" the poor fugitive groaned.

He climbed another flight and stood in the empty, sonorous space under the rafters. He could go no farther. Was this to be the scene of his last agony?

Suddenly, in the darkness, his hand touched a slender metal ladder. He remembered that there was a cupola above, although he had never made any use of it. He struggled panting up the ladder. The trap-door above his head gave way a little, but refused to turn on its hinges stiffened by rust and dirt. The corridor of the attic floor below him echoed

to the relentless steps, and they came right past his childish barricade, without an instant's hesitation.

"Even that doesn't stop him!" whispered the innkeeper. And with a desperate push that bruised his head and his hands, he drove the reluctant door wide open and saw above him the boundless blue night, cushioned with snow and studded with stars.

This belvedere was a large platform from which miles of the surrounding country were visible.

It was a new place for Mr. Buttercup. He had climbed on a chair, and his head was turning.

"I'll jump off this place, if necessary," he cried, "rather than let that Thing get me!"

He walked across the thick carpet of snow to the edge of the platform, and an immense desolation took possession of his heart.

Far away, out on the black vastness of the sea, two lights were moving. And the yellow eye on the pier ogled him insolently from the blackness.

"Yes, that would be better—better—" the plump citizen sobbed.

A creaking of metal made his heart jump. It came from the rusty rungs of the ladder. The Thing was coming nearer and nearer. It had reached the trap.

Then Mr. Buttercup saw before him, shining gently in the light of the moon, the long, firm line of the lightning rod. Seizing it with a hiccup of terror, he clambered over the railing and with a cry like the shriek of a damned soul he slipped out into space.

Something leapt up on the platform.

A pale streak of light licked the horizon.

Away out in the ash-colored trench which was the railroad, a green light began to appear. The windows of the little station whitened under the cold flame of an acetylene lamp, and the first train whistled lazily in the invisible distance. Mr. Buttercup left the pile of creosoted railroad ties on which he had spent the night, and with creaking bones, bloody hands,

and a brain on fire, he staggered toward the little station, lighted and inhabited, which seemed to him the loveliest paradise on earth.

It was not till along toward eleven o'clock in the morning, after having eaten humble-pie and effected a reconciliation with the station-master, and after the physician who had come over on his bicycle from the neighboring village had assured him that Mr. Windgery had died very naturally from his sad affection of the lungs, that Mr. Buttercup ventured back to the hotel.

He found absolutely nothing suspicious there, and he had nearly reached the point of blaming the whole unpleasant affair on his loneliness, his fear and his whisky, when the idea struck him to examine the platform of the belvedere.

Like every good Englishman, like every well-informed citizen of any country for that matter, he had read *Robinson Crusoe*; but it did not occur to him, when he started back in horror at the sight that met his gaze up there, that he was repeating the celebrated gesture of the solitary mariner, when he discovered one morning on the sandy beach of his island a menacing footprint.

For Mr. Buttercup saw beside the marks of his own boots, distinctly printed in the faithful medium of the snow, two strange impressions, hideous, enormously large, which, just like his, continued to the very edge of the platform, and like his never returned, as if the Thing that walked in the night had flown off into the air like some monstrous bird of prey. . . .

Mr. Buttercup stumbled down into the hall again, and cried out with joy when he saw the somber vehicle arrive which was to carry away the mortal remains of poor Mr. Windgery.

He managed to keep the black-clad undertaker's men in play, with whisky and jocular conversation, till his moving-van arrived with its crew. And he promised these last-mentioned individuals such magnificent largess if they should have everything loaded on the van an hour before the last train

went through, that the poor fellows came near breaking their own limbs and the furniture in their earnest zeal.

But they did themselves proud, and a full hour before the last train whistled, Mr. Buttercup stood on the platform at the station.

He had brought two bottles of whisky for the station-master, and that functionary helped him on the train with fraternal tenderness and stood waving farewells to him till the last car was no more than a black speck on the horizon.

At the long table of the Silver Dragon, a substantial tavern in Richmond Road, Mr. Buttercup told the company his story just as they were calling for cards, dice and a checker-board.

"That's what they call suggestion, auto-suggestion," said Mr. Chickenbread, who has charge of the handsome big music-store next door to the tavern.

"You might call it an hallucination," condescended Bitterstone, who handles oils and linseed cakes.

Mr. Buttercup scratched his chapped face.

"A man doesn't have hallucinations," he replied coldly, "when his—when his name is Buttercup." Then it struck him that he had implied what might be taken as an aspersion on the honorable name of his ancestors, and he added with a touch of self-importance: "And when a man is proprietor of the Ocean Queen Hotel."

The dice rattled, and the fly-specks on cubes of yellow bone made some of the company richer and others poorer.

White disks melted away before the somber onslaughts of black disks on the squares of the checkerboard; a proud king stood dangerously isolated in a neatly enameled No Man's Land. But old Doctor Hellermund sat and thought, very seriously.

"I know," he murmured, rather to himself than to the placid Mr. Buttercup, who had completely regained his composure, "I know that step that paced the hotel. . . ."

"For many years I was resident physician in a hospital. I heard that step often in ghastly nights when the air was



filled with formalin and the death-agony. It paced round and round in the reddish gloom of the smoke-consumers; it sounded its dull 'tramp—tramp' down the long corridors with their tiny night-lamps. It went ahead of the litters that moved silently out at night when the attendants, with muffled footsteps, carried their melancholy burdens to the dreary, icy dead-house.

"We all heard it, but there was a silent agreement among all of us—doctors, nurses and attendants—never to mention it. Sometimes we would hear a green hand saying his prayers aloud. But every time that step sounded, we knew that one of the sufferers in that row of terrible white halls had ceased to suffer.

"The gruesome bailiffs in Newgate Prison, as they make ready to hang out when dawn comes the black flag with its capital *N*, hear that step approaching down the stone gallery, and they hear it stop before one dreadful cell which has taken on a ghastliness more terrible than all the other cells."

Old Doctor Hellermund fell silent and began to follow with interest the game of checkers, with his eyes on the board, a bright ocean on which from moment to moment the light raft of a man or the imposing galleon of a king suffered shipwreck.



## SONG OF THE SLAVES

By MANLY WADE WEILMAN

*What was that song that sounded through the night,  
filled with sinister warning?—a tale of the slave trade*

GENDER paused at the top of the bald rise, mopped his streaming red forehead beneath the wide hat-brim, and gazed backward at his forty-nine captives. Naked and black, they shuffled upward from the narrow, ancient slave trail through the jungle. Forty-nine men, seized by Gender's own hand and collared to a single long chain, destined for his own plantation across the sea. . . . Gender grinned in his lean, drooping mustache, a mirthless grin of greedy triumph.

For years he had dreamed and planned for this adventure, as other men dream and plan for European tours, 'holy pilgrimages, or returns to beloved birthplaces. He had told himself that it was intensely practical and profitable. Slaves passed through so many hands—the raider, the caravaner, the seashore factor, the slaver captain, the dealer in New Orleans or Havana or at home in Charleston. Each greedy hand clutched a rich profit, and all profits must come eventually from the price paid by the planter. But he, Gender, had come to Africa himself, in his own ship; with a dozen staunch ruffians from Benguela he had penetrated the Bihé-Bailundu country, had sacked a village and taken these forty-nine upstanding natives between dark and dawn. A single neck-shackle on his long chain remained empty, and he might fill even that before he came to his ship. By the Lord, he was making money this way, fairly coining it—and money was worth the making, to a Charleston planter in 1853.

So he reasoned, and so he actually believed, but the real joy to him was hidden in the darkest nook of his heart. He had conceived the raider-plan because of a nature that fed on

savagery and mastery. A man less fierce and cruel might have been satisfied with hunting lions or elephants, but Gender must hunt men. As a matter of fact, the money made or saved by the journey would be little, if it was anything. The satisfaction would be tremendous. He would broaden his thick chest each day as he gazed out over his lands and saw there his slaves hoeing seashore cotton or pruning indigo; his forty-nine slaves, caught and shipped and trained by his own big, hard hands, more indicative of assured conquest than all the horned or fanged heads that ever passed through the shops of all the taxidermists.

Something hummed in his ears, like a rhythmic swarm of bees. Men were murmuring a song under their breath. It was the long string of pinch-faced slaves. Gender stared at them, and mouthed one of the curses he always kept at tongue's end.

"Silva!" he called.

The lanky Portuguese who strode free at the head of the file turned aside and stood before Gender. "*Patrao?*" he inquired respectfully, smiling teeth gleaming in his walnut face.

"What are those men singing?" demanded Gender. "I didn't think they had anything to sing about."

"A slave song, *patrao*." Silva's tapering hand, with the silver bracelet at its wrist, made a graceful gesture of dismissal. "It is nothing. One of the things that natives make up and sing as they go."

Gender struck his boot with his coiled whip of hippopotamus hide. The afternoon sun, sliding down toward the shaggy jungle-tops, kindled harsh pale lights in his narrow blue eyes. "How does the song go?" he persisted.

The two fell into step beside the caravan as, urged by a dozen red-capped drivers, it shambled along the trail. "It is only a slave song, *patrao*," said Silva once again. "It means something like this: 'Though you carry me away in chains, I am free when I die. Back will I come to bewitch and kill you.'"

Gender's heavy body seemed to swell, and his eyes grew narrower and paler. "So they sing that, hmm?" He swore again. "Listen to that!"

The unhappy procession had taken up a brief, staccato refrain:

*"Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!"*

"Genda, that's my name," snarled the planter. "They're singing about me, aren't they?"

Silva made another fluid gesture, but Gender flourished his whip under the nose of the Portuguese. "Don't you try to shrug me off. I'm not a child, to be talked around like this. What are they singing about me?"

"Nothing of consequence, *patrao*," Silva made haste to reassure him. "It might be to say: 'I will bewitch Gender, I will kill Gender.'"

"They threaten me, do they?" Gender's broad face took on a deeper flush. He ran at the line of chained black men. With all the strength of his arm he slashed and swung with the whip. The song broke up into wretched howls of pain.

"I'll give you a music lesson!" he raged, and flogged his way up and down the procession until he swayed and dripped sweat with the exertion.

But as he turned away, it struck up again:

*"Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!"*

Whirling back, he resumed the rain of blows. Silva, rushing up to second him, also whipped the slaves and execrated them in their own tongue. But when both were tired, the flayed captives began to sing once more, softly but stubbornly, the same chant.

"Let them whine," panted Gender at last. "A song never killed anybody."

Silva grinned nervously. "Of course not, *patrao*. That is only an idiotic native belief."

"You mean, they think that a song will kill?"

"That, and more. They say that if they sing together, think together of one hate, all their thoughts and hates will become a solid strength—will strike and punish for them."

"Nonsense!" exploded Gender.

But when they made camp that night, Gender slept only in troubled snatches, and his dreams were of a song that grew deeper, heavier, until it became visible as a dark, dense cloud that overwhelmed him.

The ship that Gender had engaged for the expedition lay in a swampy estuary, far from any coastal town, and the dawn by which he loaded his goods aboard was strangely fiery and forbidding. Dunlapp, the old slaver-captain that commanded for him, met him in the cabin.

"All ready, sir?" he asked Gender. "We can sail with the tide. Plenty of room in the hold for that handful you brought. I'll tell the men to strike off those irons."

"On the contrary," said Gender, "tell the men to put manacles on the hands of each slave."

Dunlapp gazed in astonishment at his employer. "But that's bad for blacks, Mr. Gender. They get sick in chains, won't eat their food. Sometimes they die."

"I pay you well, Captain," Gender rumbled, "but not to advise me. Listen to those heathen."

Dunlapp listened. A moan of music wafted in to them.

"They've sung that cursed song about me all the way to the coast," Gender told him. "They know I hate it—I've whipped them day after day—but they keep it up. No chains come off until they hush their noise."

Dunlapp bowed acquiescence and walked out to give orders. Later, as they put out to sea, he rejoined Gender on the after deck.

"They do seem stubborn about their singing," he observed.

"I've heard it said," Gender replied, "that they sing together because they think many voices and hearts give power to hate, or to other feelings." He scowled. "Pagan fantasy!"

Dunlapp stared overside, at white gulls just above the wave-tips. "There may be a tithe of truth in that belief, Mr. Gender; sometimes there is in the faith of wild people. Hark ye, I've seen a good fifteen hundred Mohammedans praying at once, in the Barbary countries. When they bowed down, the touch

of all those heads to the ground banged like the fall of a heavy rock. And when they straightened, the motion of their garments made a swish like the gust of a gale. I couldn't help but think that their prayer had force."

"More heathen foolishness," snapped Gender, and his lips drew tight.

"Well, in Christian lands we have examples, sir," Dunlapp pursued. "For instance, a mob will grow angry and burn or hang someone. Would a single man do that? Would any single man of the mob do it? No, but together their hate and resolution becomes——"

"Not the same thing at all," ruled Gender harshly. "Suppose we change the subject."

On the following afternoon, a white sail crept above the horizon behind them. At the masthead gleamed a little blotch of color. Captain Dunlapp squinted through a telescope, and barked a sailorly oath.

"A British ship-of-war," he announced, "and coming after us."

"Well?" said Gender.

"Don't you understand, sir? England is sworn to stamp out the slave trade. If they catch us with this cargo, it'll be the end of us." A little later, he groaned apprehensively. "They're overtaking us. There's their signal, for us to lay to and wait for them. Shall we do it, sir?"

Gender shook his head violently. "Not we! Show them our heels, Captain."

"They'll catch us. They are sailing three feet to our two."

"Not before dark," said Gender. "When dark comes, we'll contrive to lessen our embarrassment."

And so the slaver fled, with the Britisher in pursuit. Within an hour, the sun was at the horizon, and Gender smiled grimly in his mustache.

"It'll be dark within minutes," he said to Dunlapp. "As soon as you feel they can't make out our actions by glass, get those slaves on deck."

In the dusk the forty-nine naked prisoners stood in a line

along the bulwark. For all their chained necks and wrists, they neither stood nor gazed in a servile manner. One of them began to sing and the others joined, in the song of the slave trail:

*"Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!"*

"Sing on," Gender snapped briefly, and moved to the end of the line that was near the bow. Here dangled the one empty collar, and he seized it in his hand. Bending over the bulwark, he clamped it shut upon something—the ring of a heavy spare anchor, that swung there upon a swivel-hook. Again he turned, and eyed the line of dark singers.

"Have a bath to cool your spirits," he jeered, and spun the handle of the swivel-hook.

The anchor fell. The nearest slave jerked over with it, and the next and the next. Others saw, screamed, and tried to brace themselves against doom; but their comrades that had already gone overside were too much weight for them. Quickly, one after another, the captives whipped from the deck and splashed into the sea. Gender leaned over and watched the last of them as he sank.

"Gad, sir!" exclaimed Dunlapp hoarsely.

Gender faced him almost threateningly.

"What else to do, hmm? You yourself said that we could hope for no mercy from the British."

The night passed by, and by the first gray light the British ship was revealed almost upon them. A megaphoned voice hailed them; then a shot hurtled across their bows. At Gender's smug nod, Dunlapp ordered his men to lay to. A boat put out from the pursuer, and shortly a British officer and four marines swung themselves aboard.

Bowing in mock reverence, Gender bade the party search. They did so, and remounted the deck crestfallen.

"Now, sir," Gender addressed the officer, "don't you think that you owe me an apology?"

The Englishman turned pale. He was a lean, sharp-featured man with strong, white teeth. "I can't pay what I owe you," he said with deadly softness. "I find no slaves, but I



smell them. They were aboard this vessel within the past twelve hours."

"And where are they now?" teased Gender.

"We both know where they are," was the reply. "If I could prove in a court of law what I know in my heart, you would sail back to England with me. Most of the way you would hang from my yards by your thumbs."

"You wear out your welcome, sir," Gender told him.

"I am going. But I have provided myself with your name and that of your home city. From here I go to Madeira, where I will cross a packet bound west for Savannah. That packet will bear with it a letter to a friend of mine in Charleston, and your neighbors shall hear what happened on this ship of yours."

"You will stun slave-owners with a story of slaves?" inquired Gender, with what he considered silky good-humor.

"It is one thing to put men to work in cotton fields, another to tear them from their homes, crowd them chained aboard a stinking ship, and drown them to escape merited punishment." The officer spat on the deck. "Good day, butcher. I say, all Charleston shall hear of you."

Gender's plantation occupied a great, bluff-rimmed island at the mouth of a river, looking out toward the Atlantic. Ordinarily that island would be called beautiful, even by those most exacting followers of Chateaubriand and Rousseau; but, on his first night at home again, Gender hated the fields, the house, the environs of fresh and salt water.

His home, on a seaward jut, resounded to his grumbled curses as he called for supper and ate heavily but without relish. Once he vowed, in a voice that quivered with rage, never to go to Charleston again.

At that, he would do well to stay away for a time. The British officer had been as good as his promise, and all the town had heard of Gender's journey to Africa and what he had done there. With a perverse squeamishness beyond Gender's understanding, the hearers were filled with disgust instead of admiration. Captain Hogue had refused to drink

with him at the Jefferson House. His oldest friend, Mr. Lloyd Davis of Davis Township, had crossed the street to avoid meeting him. Even the Reverend Doctor Lockin had turned coldly away as he passed, and it was said that a sermon was forthcoming at Doctor Lockin's church attacking despoilers and abductors of defenseless people.

What was the matter with everybody? savagely demanded Gender of himself; these men who snubbed and avoided him were slave-holders. Some of them, it was quite possible, even held slaves fresh from raided villages under the Equator. Unfair! . . . Yet he could not but feel the animosity of many hearts, chafing and weighing upon his spirit.

"Brutus," he addressed the slave that cleared the table, "do you believe that hate can take form?"

"Hate, Marsa?" The sooty face was solemnly respectful.

"Yes. Hate, of many people together." Gender knew he should not confide too much in a slave, and chose his words carefully. "Suppose a lot of people hated the same thing, maybe they sang a song about it——"

"Oh, yes, Marsa," Brutus nodded. "I heah 'bout dat, from ole gran-pappy when I was little. He bin in Affiky, he says many times dey sing somebody to deff."

"Sing somebody to death?" repeated Gender. "How?"

"Dey sing dat dey kill him. Afta while, maybe plenty days, he die——"

"Shut up, you black rascal!" Gender sprang from his chair and clutched at a bottle. "You've heard about this somewhere, and you dare to taunt me!"

Brutus darted from the room, mortally frightened. Gender almost pursued, but thought better and tramped into his parlor. The big, brown-paneled room seemed to give back a heavier echo of his feet. The windows were filled with the early darkness, and a hanging lamp threw rays into the corners.

On the center table lay some mail, a folded newspaper and a letter. Gender poured whisky from a decanter, stirred in

spring water, and dropped into a chair. First he opened the letter.

"Stirling Manor," said the return address at the top of the page. Gender's heart twitched. Evelyn Stirling, he had hopes of her . . . but this was written in a masculine hand, strong and hasty.

"Sir:

"Circumstances that have come to my knowledge compel me, as a matter of duty, to command that you discontinue your attentions to my daughter."

Gender's eyes took on the pale tint of rage. One more result of the Britisher's letter, he made no doubt.

"I have desired her to hold no further communication with you, and I have been sufficiently explicit to convince her how unworthy you are of her esteem and attention. It is hardly necessary for me to give you the reasons which have induced me to form this judgment, and I add only that nothing you can say or do will alter it.

"Your obedient servant,

"JUDGE FORRESTER STIRLING."

Gender hastily swigged a portion of his drink, and crushed the paper in his hand. So that was the judge's interfering way—it sounded as though he had copied it from a complete letter-writer for heavy fathers. He, Gender, began to form a reply in his mind:

"Sir:

"Your unfeeling and arbitrary letter admits of but one response. As a gentleman grossly misused, I demand satisfaction on the field of honor. Arrangements I place in the hands of . . ."

By what friend should he forward that challenge? It seemed that he was mighty short of friends just now. He sipped more whisky and water, and tore the wrappings of the newspaper.

It was a Massachusetts publication, and toward the bottom

of the first page was a heavy cross of ink, to call attention to one item. A poem, evidently, in four-line stanzas. Its title signified nothing—*The Witnesses*. Author, Henry W. Longfellow; Gender identified him vaguely as a scrawler of Abolitionist doggerel. Why was this poem recommended to a southern planter?

In Ocean's wide domains,  
Half buried in the sands,  
Lie skeletons in chains,  
With shackled feet and hands.

Once again the reader swore, but the oath quavered on his lips. His eye moved to a stanza farther down the column:

These are the bones of Slaves;  
They gleam from the abyss;  
They cry, from yawning waves . . .

But it seemed to Gender that he heard, rather than read, what that cry was.

He sprang to his feet, paper and glass falling from his hands. His thin lips drew apart, his ears strained. The sound was faint, but unmistakable—many voices singing.

The Negroes in his cabins? But no Negro on his plantation would know that song. The chanting refrain began:

*"Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!"*

The planter's lean mustaches bristled tigerishly. This would surely be the refined extremity of his persecution, this chanting of a weird song under his window-sill. It was louder now. *I will bewitch, I will kill*—but who would know that fierce mockery of him?

The crew of his ship, of course; they had heard it on the writhing lips of the captives, at the very moment of their destruction. And when the ship docked in Charleston, with no profit to show, Gender had been none too kindly in paying them off.

Those unsavory mariners must have been piqued. They had followed him, then, were setting up this vicious serenade.

Gender stepped quickly around the table and toward the

window. He flung up the sash with a violence that almost shattered the glass, and leaned savagely out.

On that instant the song stopped, and Gender could see only the seaward slope of his land, down to the lip of the bluff that overhung the water. Beyond that stretched an expanse of waves, patchily a gleam under a great buckskin-colored moon, that even now stirred the murmurous tide at the foot of the bluff. Here were no trees, no brush even, to hide pranksters. The singers, now silent, must be in a boat under the shelter of the bluff.

Gender strode from the room, fairly tore open a door, and made heavy haste toward the sea. He paused, on the lip of the bluff. Nothing was to be seen, beneath him or farther out. The mockers, if they had been here, had already fled. He growled, glared, and tramped back to his house. He entered the parlor once more, drew down the sash, and sought his chair again. Choosing another glass, he began once more to mix whisky and water. But he stopped in the middle of his pouring.

There it was again, the song he knew; and closer.

He rose, took a step in the direction of the window, then thought better of it. He had warned his visitors by one sortie, and they had hidden. Why not let them come close, and suffer the violence he ached to pour out on some living thing?

He moved, not to the window, but to a mantelpiece opposite. From a box of dark, polished wood he lifted a pistol, then another. They were duelling weapons, handsomely made, with hair-triggers; and Gender was a dead shot. With orderly swiftness he poured in glazed powder from a flask, rammed down two leaden bullets, and laid percussion caps upon the touchholes. Returning, he placed the weapons on his center table, then stood on tiptoe to extinguish the hanging lamp. A single light remained in the room, a candle by the door, and this he carried to the window, placing it on a bracket there. Moving into the gloomy center of the parlor, he sat in his chair and took a pistol in either hand.

The song was louder now, lifted by many voices:

*"Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!"*

Undoubtedly the choristers had come to land by now, had gained the top of the bluff. They could be seen, Gender was sure, from the window. He felt perspiration on his jowl, and lifted a sleeve to blot it. Trying to scare him, hmm? Singing about witchcraft and killing? Well, he'd show them who was the killer.

The singing had drawn close, was just outside. Odd how the sailors, or whoever they were, had learned that chant so well! It recalled to his mind the slave trail, the jungle, the long procession of crooning prisoners. But here was no time for idle revery on vanished scenes. Silence had fallen again, and he could only divine the presence, just outside, of many creatures.

Scratch-scratch-scratch; it sounded like the stealthy creeping of a snake over rough lumber. That scratching resounded from the window where something stole into view in the candlelight. Gender fixed his eyes there, and his pistols lifted their muzzles.

The palm of a hand, as gray as a fish, laid itself on the glass. It was wet; Gender could see the trickle of water descending along the pane. Something clinked, almost musically. Another hand moved into position beside it, and between the two swung links of chain.

This was an elaborately devilish joke, thought Gender, in an ecstasy of rage. Even the chains, to lend reality . . . and as he stared he knew, in a split moment of terror that stirred his flesh on his bones, that it was no joke after all.

A face had moved into the range of the candlelight, pressing close to the pane between the two palms.

It was darker than those palms, of a dirty, slaty deadness of color. But it was not dead, not with those dull, intent eyes that moved slowly in their blistery sockets . . . not dead, though it was foully wet, and its thick lips hung slackly open, and seaweed lay plastered upon the cheeks, even though the flat nostrils showed crumbled and gnawed away, as if by fish. The eyes quested here and there across the floor and

walls of the parlor. They came to rest, gazing full into the face of Gender.

He felt as though stale sea-water had trickled upon him, but his right hand abode steady as a gun-rest. He took aim and fired.

The glass crashed loudly, and fell in shattering flakes to the floor beneath the sill.

Gender was on his feet, moving forward, dropping the empty pistol on the table and whipping the loaded one into his right hand. Two leaping strides took him almost to the window, before he reeled backward.

The face had not fallen. It stared at him, a scant yard away. Between the dull, living eyes showed a round black hole, where the bullet had gone in. But the thing stood unflinchingly, somehow serenely. Its two wet hands moved slowly, methodically, to pluck away the jagged remains of the glass.

Gender rocked where he stood, unable for the moment to command his body to retreat. The shoulders beneath the face heightened. They were bare and wet and deadly dusky, and they clinked the collar-shackle beneath the lax chin. Two hands stole into the room, their fish-colored palms opening toward Gender.

He screamed, and at last he ran. As he turned his back, the singing began yet again, loud and horribly jaunty—not at all as the miserable slaves had sung it. He gained the seaward door, drew it open, and looked full into a gathering of black, wet figures, with chains festooned among them, awaiting him. Again he screamed, and tried to push the door shut.

He could not. A hand was braced against the edge of the panel—many hands. The wood fringed itself with gleaming black fingers. Gender let go the knob, whirled to flee into the house. Something caught the back of his coat, something he dared not identify. In struggling loose, he spun through the doorway and into the moonlit open.

Figures surrounded him, black, naked, wet figures; dead as to sunken faces and flaccid muscles, but horribly alive as to

eyes and trembling hands and slack mouths that formed the strange primitive words of the song; separate, yet strung together with a great chain and collar-shackles, like an awful fish on the gigantic line of some demon-angler. All this Gender saw in a rocking, moon-washed moment, while he choked and retched at a dreadful odor of death, thick as fog.

Still he tried to run, but they were moving around him in a weaving crescent, cutting off his retreat toward the plantation. Hands extended toward him, manacled and dripping. His only will was to escape the touch of those sodden fingers, and one way was open—the way to the sea.

He ran toward the brink of the bluff. From its top he would leap, dive and swim away. But they pursued, overtook, surrounded him. He remembered that he held a loaded pistol, and fired into their black midst. It had no effect. He might have known that it would have no effect.

Something was clutching for him. A great, inhuman talon? No, it was an open collar of metal, with a length of chain to it, a collar that had once clamped to an anchor, dragging down to ocean's depths a line of shackled men. It gaped at him, held forth by many dripping hands. He tried to dodge, but it darted around his throat, shut with a ringing snap. Was it cold . . . or scalding hot? He knew, with horror vividly etching the knowledge into his heart, that he was one at last with the great chained procession.

*"Hailowa—Genda! Haipana—Genda!"*

He found his voice. "No, no!" he pleaded. "No, in the name of——"

But he could not say the name of God. And the throng suddenly moved explosively, concertedly, to the edge of the bluff.

A single wailing cry from all those dead throats, and they dived into the waves below.

Gender did not feel the clutch and jerk of the chain that dragged him alone. He did not even feel the water as it closed over his head.



## THE PANELLED ROOM

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

WHEN Father Brauman could not change Mrs. Grant's mind, Miss Barbara Allen, seeing him come down the steps from the porch flung proudly across the face of the house Mrs. Grant had taken, shaking his head dolefully, his lips moving in silent speech, thought she would try. People said that if Miss Barbara Allen could do nothing there was no use trying longer. But it was necessary to do everything possible to convince Mrs. Grant that the house on Main Street was not a healthy place to live in, because of the things that were whispered and sometimes openly said about it since the murder some years back. So, after announcing her intention to the town through her friends, Miss Barbara Allen paid a visit to Mrs. Grant a week after that lady had moved into the house on Main Street with her sister and her sister's little daughter.

Her reception was not too cordial, and when she mentioned the house and spoke about what people said of it, Mrs. Grant put up her lorgnette and told the old lady that as she was a Freethinker she didn't believe in such things.

"I'm a Freethinker, too, Mrs. Grant," said Miss Barbara, "but I lived in this house once."

Mrs. Grant smiled politely and patiently and said, "Nothing seems to have happened to you," her inference clear and her manner no less so.

Miss Barbara blinked a little and said, "My sister died here," announcing it rather, as if this fact alone were incontestable proof of the strange rumors current about the house in which they sat.

Mrs. Grant thought, How provincial! and raised her eyebrows a little. "Surely you don't think that this house had

anything to do with that?" she asked, her voice more kind now.

The old lady was firm. "I know it did. If it wouldn't be for wanting to tell you, that being my duty, as I said to Elvira—that's my other sister—I'd never 've set foot in this house again. My sister was found dead in the panelled room, the parlor—at least, it was our parlor."

"Heart attack, I suppose?"

Miss Barbara shook her head. "There was never anything the matter with Abby. She was just found dead. Old Doctor Brown, he said it was shock—a scare, most likely. That was after poor Abby began to see things in that room."

"What things?"

The old lady picked at her shawl and looked at Mrs. Grant over her spectacles, as if trying to discover from Mrs. Grant's features how much she had already been told. "Fifty years ago, come next month, Peter Mason killed his wife in that room and then he killed himself. They found them both the next day, she choked to death, and he hanging there. Sometimes you can see him hanging there yet—and her a-lying on the floor pale and white."

"Why, Miss Allen, that's a childish invention!"

Miss Barbara smiled faintly. "Almost my very words, when Abby and I took this house. But I've seen Peter Mason hanging, myself—and I've seen his wife there, too." There was an intensity in her voice, but no flicker of emotion disturbed her face.

Mrs. Grant leaned forward a little, saying, "Yes?", still polite, still patient, urging her visitor to continue, though she did not wish to hear more.

"He was hanging from the cross-beam over the bookcase—just like they found him when I was a little girl. You don't know what it is to walk into that room and see him there all unexpected—you don't know, yet. And to see her like that again—all crumpled up on the floor, her face twisted. I wouldn't want to be in your place for anything. I'd move out right away, this very minute!"

Mrs. Grant sighed, having heard the admonition many times since she had come to the town and taken the house. Miss Barbara Allen began to feel uncomfortable and rose presently to go, feeling that she had done what she could.

"Will you promise me something, Mrs. Grant?" she asked.

Mrs. Grant hesitated. "That can be almost anything," she said, feeling her position becoming intolerable and wanting this woman to go away.

Miss Barbara said, "It's nothing unreasonable. Promise me that when you see the panels moving in the parlor, in that room, you'll leave this house right away. There's a horror hanging over this house—and it may be too late to get away when you see the panels move."

Curiosity prompted Mrs. Grant to ask, "What do you mean, Miss Allen?"

"If you're staying, you'll see soon enough. But I hope you'll change your mind before then." Then she was gone, the door closing heavily behind her.

Mrs. Grant watched the old woman go down the outer steps, thinking, What a queer person! Then she turned away and went into the living-room, where she sat down, aware of the critical eye her sister turned on her.

"The usual thing, Irma," said Mrs. Grant. "We are to move right away."

The child in one corner of the room took up the words. "I like moving, mamma. When are we going to move?" She allowed her block building to tumble to the floor and jumped to her feet, clapping her hands.

"Do be quiet, Ellen," said her mother, fixing the child with her eyes while Mrs. Grant nodded stern but not unkind approval. "We aren't going to move, dear." Then she turned again to her older sister.

"But there's something new, this time," Mrs. Grant went on. "The panels in the parlor are said to move—that serpent design, I suppose Miss Allen meant."

Irma smiled. "An illusion, Lydia. Everyone knows that if

you look at a design like that long enough, your eyes will seem to see a movement."

Mrs. Grant nodded, clasping her fingers and looking down at them in a moment of silent speculation. Presently she spoke again. "True, Irma. Still, there was something about Miss Allen that I didn't understand."

"What?"

"Why, I don't know. A peculiar earnestness—that's the best I can do by way of describing her attitude. She sat there telling me her story so simply, expecting me to believe every word of it. It was uncanny, Irma. I mean, she didn't look like the kind of woman who's very easily taken in by such things."

"I do believe the old lady's story has affected you," said Irma, not without impatience. "But I shan't let you fall under her spell. I declare, Lydia, you're white as a sheet, just thinking about it."

Mrs. Grant felt considerably better on coming down to breakfast next morning, for indeed Miss Allen's simple earnestness had insidiously destroyed her confident superiority the evening before. The prattle of Irma's child this unusually bright morning brought her mind away from Peter Mason and his unfortunate wife, and the unbelievable stories of weird hauntings that had been current since then.

In the afternoon Mrs. Grant let it be known that she would not welcome any more people, however well-intentioned, who came to warn her about the house. When she dropped this hint to her callers, she sensed immediately an air of restraint. Later, when she walked down Main Street at dusk, she felt a frightening air of waiting in the half-hidden faces peering out at her from behind the curtained windows of houses she passed.

In the evening she was afraid. With some reluctance, she said to her sister, "Really the house *is* beginning to oppress me," and when Irma said, "Nonsense, Lydia!" she was afraid to say more. She sat in comparative silence for the rest of the

evening, an obvious air of unnatural restraint cloaking her. For this she could not entirely account, Miss Allen's story being already too far in the past to explain it.

Mrs. Grant's strange oppression grew. It crept upon her from all sides, day by day, and she felt it suddenly even when doing the most ordinary things: dusting the room, or rearranging the furniture, things she trusted no maid with doing. She could not understand this oppression's growing in, building itself stronger about and within her, but when fear found her she knew.

Ten days after Miss Barbara Allen's call, Mrs. Grant walked into the panelled room one evening and saw a man hanging in the shadows where the bookcase was—and a crumpled shape oddly darkening the floor near by. She fell back against the wall, but the thing was gone. She thought, It's nothing. There's nothing there at all. But it was two hours before she had convinced herself that she had seen nothing. When she came out of the parlor, Irma noticed her paleness.

"Well, I declare, Lydia, there's something the matter with you!" she exclaimed.

Mrs. Grant looked at her sister and knew she could not tell her, knew she could not face Irma's scornful skepticism. "I've got a terrible headache," she said.

Irma was surprised. "A headache—that's strange. You've never had one before, Lydia." She looked queerly at Mrs. Grant for a moment before she said, "You'll find aspirin tablets in my purse. You'd better take one. But I can't understand your having a headache like this."

Mrs. Grant did not reply. Irma did not notice that Mrs. Grant went directly upstairs, avoiding the purse on the side table. In the night, Mrs. Grant's sleep was haunted by dreams of the panelled room and what she had seen there, and in her dreams there was no illusion.

After Mrs. Grant had seen the man hanging and the form huddled on the floor beneath four times, she steeled herself to speak to her sister, thinking that this was the only way,

for it must come some time. "I've seen him," she said abruptly one day while the two of them sat at the table.

Irma put down her cup of coffee and looked at her sister with a frown on her forehead. "You've seen him," she said. "What do you mean? Who is it you've seen?"

"Why, Peter Mason—the man who killed his wife. And I've seen her, too." Mrs. Grant made a vague and uncertain gesture in the direction of the panelled room.

A sudden comprehension came to Irma, and a strange gleam began to grow in her eyes. Mrs. Grant did not understand, but Irma was thinking, If anything happens to her, I shall get everything. The thought had come to her with startling suddenness, but she made no attempt to beat it down. It would mean freedom for her . . . and Ellen. No more bending to Lydia's wish. With an effort she controlled her voice, for her abrupt excitement was beating in her. "You imagined it," she said calmly, but her fingers trembled as she took up a tea-cake.

"I think we *had* better give up this house," said Mrs. Grant.

Irma smiled in a superior fashion calculated to disarm her sister. "Nonsense, Lydia. I refuse to consider giving up this fine old house because of a few stories—like as not unfounded, my dear."

"But, Irma, *I have seen him!*" Her voice had become intense with the intensity of conviction that had grown in her during the past few days.

Irma stirred her coffee and said, "That is a peculiar arrangement of the shadows from the street-lamp, Lydia. I myself have got that impression several times—of someone hanging there. I had hoped you wouldn't see it because I knew you half believed those stories."

Mrs. Grant said "Oh," weakly, and Irma thought, *If anything should happen to her: if anything . . .*

Abruptly Irma pressed the temporary advantage she had gained. "I'll go into the parlor with you, Lydia. Then we'll see." She got up immediately and took her sister's arm.

If Irma noticed the shadow, she gave no sign, even when

Mrs. Grant clutched her arm in fright. "There's nothing there, Lydia," she said, patting her sister's hand.

"Oh, you can't see him," breathed Mrs. Grant. "And now he's gone . . . he's gone."

Irma said, "You're tired, Lydia, dear."

Mrs. Grant stared at her sister in the semi-dusk and said, "I want to go away." Her voice was thick and rough. Her hands were shuddering.

"You must face what's worrying you, Lydia; that's the only way."

Mrs. Grant nodded and said, "Yes. I will." She did not notice the strange fixity of Irma's eyes.

Miss Barbara Allen called the next day. She sat in the living-room, fixing Mrs. Grant with her eyes. She looked tired, yet there was a curious alertness about her. The two of them—Irma had not come into the room—talked of everything but the house. Mrs. Grant did not want to give the old lady a chance to say anything; so she spoke a great deal and repeated many things she had said once already. And then, in spite of her talking, there came a lull in the conversation, and Miss Barbara said what she had come to say.

"Why are you staying here, Mrs. Grant?"

Mrs. Grant asked, "What do you mean?" She had meant her voice to be polite and calm; but it was unsteady, alarmed.

"I know you've seen him," said the old lady, dropping her voice. "And I had hoped you would leave when you saw—before the panels start moving. It's awful, when they start, unbearable. It works on your mind, Mrs. Grant."

"How did you know I had seen him, Miss Allen?"

The old lady said, "It's in your eyes, Mrs. Grant. I know what it is to see him, because I've seen him too—and her. And I remember Abby's eyes—waiting, always waiting, frightened."

Mrs. Grant made a nervous gesture with her hands as if seeking to brush the suggestion away like a tangible thing. "I've seen them both," she said, her words coming rapidly, "but it cannot be real, because Irma cannot see them."

Miss Barbara was obviously startled, for she jerked her head

up and looked at her hostess as if she believed that Mrs. Grant was deliberately misleading her. Her eyes narrowed, her thin lips folded together, and abruptly she said, "Your sister lies!" her voice sharp and accusing.

Mrs. Grant was confused. "There's no reason why she should lie to me, Miss Allen."

"If your sister says she cannot see them, it's because she wants you to stay here for a very strong reason. Does she go often into the panelled room?" Mrs. Grant's sudden start, her widened eyes, answered the old lady; she went on. "Are you sure there is no reason for her wanting you to stay, Mrs. Grant? Perhaps it would be better for her . . . if something happened to you? I understand she's entirely dependent on you, and as she's very young yet, I don't suppose she'd like that. Seems to me it's your sister who's keeping you here, Mrs. Grant."

Mrs. Grant's confusion became even more evident. "I don't know," she said. "I really don't. Irma doesn't go into the parlor at all. And she wouldn't want anything to happen to me—I know she wouldn't. No, no, it's unthinkable, Miss Allen. I feel bound to resent such a suggestion."

But the old lady paid no attention. "I think you'd better leave the house right away, Mrs. Grant. Tomorrow is a day no one should be in this house, an anniversary. It was seventeen years ago tomorrow . . ."

At this moment Irma swept into the room, eyeing the old lady in cold hostility. Miss Allen nodded politely, but she rose to go immediately. When she left the house, the old lady's eyes were pleading with Mrs. Grant to follow.

That afternoon Mrs. Grant called on Miss Barbara Allen. She had dropped all pretense and began to talk frankly about the house, admitting her inability to understand Irma's liking for it, and her being unable to see the man hanging—and what lay below. Miss Barbara let her talk a while before she advanced the plan which she had been formulating. She outlined it patiently, urging it upon Mrs. Grant as a means with which to test her sister—and to punish her if anything should



happen. After a while the two women went downtown to the local lawyer and Mrs. Grant made her will. In the evening Miss Barbara, having seen Mrs. Grant leave the house, made a short call on Irma.

"I don't know what you're up to," she said in her mild voice. "But I think you should know that Mrs. Grant has just made her will."

For a moment Irma was surprised. Then she drew herself together and said, "Really, Miss Allen, I don't understand." Her voice was edged and hostile.

"I think you do," the old lady went on, standing firmly before the younger woman. "I think you know as well as I do that Mrs. Grant should leave this house before anything happens—and I'm afraid something will happen."

"That's nonsense, Miss Allen, and you know it," Irma flung back. But her voice was not as firm as she would have liked, because she was thinking, Then something will happen, something will happen. . . .

The old lady disregarded this. "Mrs. Grant has put in her will that if anything happens to her here, if she is not gone tomorrow because you have kept her back, then you will get all she has—*providing you spend the rest of your life in this house!*"

Miss Barbara Allen went out of the house, and Irma stood in the dusk of the dimly lit room with her hands pressed to her breast. It was some moments before the full import of what the old lady had said broke in upon her, and then she thrust it blindly away, refusing to see it. It's not true, she told herself. But she looked at her little girl in growing fear. Something will happen tomorrow, she thought. Something must happen—afterward, we can go, Ellen and I.

Mrs. Grant got up early the next morning. She was definitely nervous and made little effort to hide it. At the breakfast table she said, "I must go away today. I can't stand this house any longer."

Irma steeled herself for combat. "Are you going to let children's tales and shadows affect you that way?" she de-

manded. Her voice was purposely very cold, and Mrs. Grant wavered in her resolve. Perhaps after all she *had* allowed herself to fall too easily a prey to unfounded fancies which her imaginative mind had lent support to by conjuring up suggestive hallucinations before her. And yet . . . Irma went on, "If you want, I shall send for a doctor. I can't help feeling that something's the matter with you. You've been acting so strangely of late, Lydia."

In the end, Mrs. Grant surrendered her resolve, so that when evening came, she was still in the house. Irma sat in the living-room with her, waiting, wondering whether her sister would go into the parlor. In her own mind was forming a question of her right. But she crushed her conscience and said quickly, "Will you get my gold thimble from the parlor, Lydia?" Her voice was casual, and her question suggested that she had already been in the parlor during the day.

Mrs. Grant looked at her sister, sitting calmly near her with folds of embroidery over her knees. She conquered the abrupt apprehension that had risen in her with patient effort, and presently she said, "Yes, I'll go," her voice as casual as Irma's.

She took a lamp and lit it, and went slowly toward the closed double doors leading into the panelled room. She opened them and went into the room. A moment of breathless silence descended, hanging in the house. And then Irma heard a short, shrill scream of terror. She sat there half paralyzed, thinking of Miss Barbara's accusing eyes. Then she sprang up with a cry and ran toward the panelled room, her little girl following.

Mrs. Grant was standing in the middle of the room, pointing at the walls. Little choking sounds came from her throat, and her hands went up to tear at her high collar. Then, before Irma could reach her, she fell in a heap on the floor. Irma came to her knees and caught up her sister's head.

"Lydia . . . Lydia," she moaned.

Even while she knelt there, she felt a horror such as she had never known, and she knew what it was that had stopped the beating of her sister's heart. She felt the brooding fear

that came throbbing toward her from the walls, and she knew that unless she escaped, she too would be smothered and choked, this fear pressing in upon her with its icy hands until her life was gone. Her sister's collar came open, and Irma saw on her throat a faint line, red and bruised, as if the collar had strangled her. Irma's hands began to tremble, and her lips fell open and shut. She thought with sudden horror of Lydia's will, and as she strove to push away the thought, she heard Ellen's voice coming it seemed from very far away.

"Mamma, will they do it again?"

The child was standing near her, pointing at the panels of the walls. Irma put one hand up to her throat, and her voice, as she answered the child, was little more than whisper. "What?" she asked harshly. God, there's nothing, she thought. There's nothing.

The child continued to point at the panels, and she said, "I saw them move. I saw them."

There's nothing . . . There's nothing there at all. Irma began to sway, and then suddenly she reached out and began to strike the child unmercifully, striking blindly, until at last the child's crying brought her to her senses. She crouched there on her knees looking with unseeing eyes at the crying child and screamed at her. "*You didn't see anything! You didn't see anything! You didn't . . . You didn't! . . .*"



## THE GRAVEYARD RATS

By HENRY KUTTNER

*A gruesome fate befell the old caretaker of the cemetery  
in the horrible burrows beneath the graves*

OLD Masson, the caretaker of one of Salem's oldest and most neglected cemeteries, had a feud with the rats. Generations ago they had come up from the wharves and settled in the graveyard, a colony of abnormally large rats, and when Masson had taken charge after the inexplicable disappearance of the former caretaker, he decided that they must go. At first he set traps for them and put poisoned food by their burrows, and later he tried to shoot them, but it did no good. The rats stayed, multiplying and overrunning the graveyard with their ravenous hordes.

They were large, even for the *mus decumanus*, which sometimes measures fifteen inches in length, exclusive of the naked pink and gray tail. Masson had caught glimpses of some as large as good-sized cats, and when, once or twice, the grave-diggers had uncovered their burrows, the malodorous tunnels were large enough to enable a man to crawl into them on his hands and knees. The ships that had come generations ago from distant ports to the rotting Salem wharves had brought strange cargoes.

Masson wondered sometimes at the extraordinary size of these burrows. He recalled certain vaguely disturbing legends he had heard since coming to ancient, witch-haunted Salem—tales of a moribund, inhuman life that was said to exist in forgotten burrows in the earth. The old days, when Cotton Mather had hunted down the evil cults that worshipped Hecate and the dark Magna Mater in frightful orgies, had passed; but dark gabled houses still leaned perilously toward each other over narrow cobbled streets, and blasphemous

secrets and mysteries were said to be hidden in subterranean cellars and caverns, where forgotten pagan rites were still celebrated in defiance of law and sanity. Wagging their gray heads wisely, the elders declared that there were worse things than rats and maggots crawling in the unhallowed earth of the ancient Salem cemeteries.

And then, too, there was this curious dread of the rats Masson disliked and respected the ferocious little rodents, for he knew the danger that lurked in their flashing, needle-sharp fangs; but he could not understand the inexplicable horror which the oldsters held for deserted, rat-infested houses. He had heard vague rumors of ghoulish beings that dwelt far underground, and that had the power of commanding the rats, marshaling them like horrible armies. The rats, the old men whispered, were messengers between this world and the grim and ancient caverns far below Salem. Bodies had been stolen from graves for nocturnal subterranean feasts, they said. The myth of the Pied Piper is a fable that hides a blasphemous horror, and the black pits of Avernus have brought forth hell-spawned monstrosities that never venture into the light of day.

Masson paid little attention to these tales. He did not fraternize with his neighbors, and, in fact, did all he could to hide the existence of the rats from intruders. Investigation, he realized, would undoubtedly mean the opening of many graves. And while some of the gnawed, empty coffins could be attributed to the activities of the rats, Masson might find it difficult to explain the mutilated bodies that lay in some of the coffins.

The purest gold is used in filling teeth, and this gold is not removed when a man is buried. Clothing, of course, is another matter; for usually the undertaker provides a plain broadcloth suit that is cheap and easily recognizable. But gold is another matter; and sometimes, too, there were medical students and less reputable doctors who were in need of cadavers, and not over-scrupulous as to where these were obtained.

So far Masson had successfully managed to discourage investigation. He had fiercely denied the existence of the rats, even though they sometimes robbed him of his prey. Masson did not care what happened to the bodies after he had performed his gruesome thefts, but the rats inevitably dragged away the whole cadaver through the hole they gnawed in the coffin.

The size of these burrows occasionally worried Masson. Then, too, there was the curious circumstance of the coffins always being gnawed open at the end, never at the side or top. It was almost as though the rats were working under the direction of some impossibly intelligent leader.

Now he stood in an open grave and threw a last sprinkling of wet earth on the heap beside the pit. It was raining, a slow, cold drizzle that for weeks had been descending from soggy black clouds. The graveyard was a slough of yellow, sucking mud, from which the rain-washed tombstones stood up in irregular battalions. The rats had retreated to their furrows, and Masson had not seen one for days. But his gaunt, unshaved face was set in frowning lines; the coffin on which he was standing was a wooden one.

The body had been buried several days earlier, but Masson had not dared to disinter it before. A relative of the dead man had been coming to the grave at intervals, even in the drenching rain. But he would hardly come at this late hour, no matter how much grief he might be suffering, Masson thought, grinning wryly. He straightened and laid the shovel aside.

From the hill on which the ancient graveyard lay he could see the lights of Salem flickering dimly through the downpour. He drew a flashlight from his pocket. He would need light now. Taking up the spade, he bent and examined the fastenings of the coffin.

Abruptly he stiffened. Beneath his feet he sensed an unquiet stirring and scratching, as though something were moving within the coffin. For a moment a pang of superstitious fear shot through Masson, and then rage replaced it as

he realized the significance of the sound. The rats had forestalled him again!

In a paroxysm of anger Masson wrenched at the fastenings of the coffin. He got the sharp edge of the shovel under the lid and pried it up until he could finish the job with his hands. Then he sent the flashlight's cold beam darting down into the coffin.

Rain spattered against the white satin lining; the coffin was empty. Masson saw a flicker of movement at the head of the case, and darted the light in that direction.

The end of the sarcophagus had been gnawed through, and a gaping hole led into darkness. A black shoe, limp and dragging, was disappearing as Masson watched, and abruptly he realized that the rats had forestalled him by only a few minutes. He fell on his hands and knees and made a hasty clutch at the shoe, and the flashlight incontinently fell into the coffin and went out. The shoe was tugged from his grasp, he heard a sharp, excited squealing, and then he had the flashlight again and was darting its light into the burrow.

It was a large one. It had to be, or the corpse could not have been dragged along it. Masson wondered at the size of the rats that could carry away a man's body, but the thought of the loaded revolver in his pocket fortified him. Probably if the corpse had been an ordinary one Masson would have left the rats with their spoils rather than venture into the narrow burrow, but he remembered an especially fine set of cuff-links he had observed, as well as a stickpin that was undoubtedly a genuine pearl. With scarcely a pause he clipped the flashlight to his belt and crept into the burrow.

It was a tight fit, but he managed to squeeze himself along. Ahead of him in the flashlight's glow he could see the shoes dragging along the wet earth of the bottom of the tunnel. He crept along the burrow as rapidly as he could, occasionally barely able to squeeze his lean body through the narrow walls.

The air was overpowering with its musty stench of carrion. If he could not reach the corpse in a minute, Masson decided, he would turn back. Belated fears were beginning to crawl,



maggot-like, within his mind, but greed urged him on. He crawled forward, several times passing the mouths of adjoining tunnels. The walls of the burrow were damp and slimy, and twice lumps of dirt dropped behind him. The second time he paused and screwed his head around to look back. He could see nothing, of course, until he had unhooked the flashlight from his belt and reversed it.

Several clods lay on the ground behind him, and the danger of his position suddenly became real and terrifying. With thoughts of a cave-in making his pulse race, he decided to abandon the pursuit, even though he had now almost overtaken the corpse and the invisible things that pulled it. But he had overlooked one thing: the burrow was too narrow to allow him to turn.

Panic touched him briefly, but he remembered a side tunnel he had just passed, and backed awkwardly along the tunnel until he came to it. He thrust his legs into it, backing until he found himself able to turn. Then he hurriedly began to retrace his way, although his knees were bruised and painful.

Agonizing pain shot through his leg. He felt sharp teeth sink into his flesh, and kicked out frantically. There was a shrill squealing and the scurry of many feet. Flashing the light behind him, Masson caught his breath in a sob of fear as he saw a dozen great rats watching him intently, their slit-eyes glittering in the light. They were great misshapen things, as large as cats, and behind them he caught a glimpse of a dark shape that stirred and moved swiftly aside into the shadow; and he shuddered at the unbelievable size of the thing.

The light had held them for a moment, but they were edging closer, their teeth dull orange in the pale light. Masson tugged at his pistol, managed to extricate it from his pocket, and aimed carefully. It was an awkward position, and he tried to press his feet into the soggy sides of the burrow so that he should not inadvertently send a bullet into one of them.

The rolling thunder of the shot deafened him, for a time,

and the clouds of smoke set him coughing. When he could hear again and the smoke had cleared, he saw that the rats were gone. He put the pistol back and began to creep swiftly along the tunnel, and then with a scurry and a rush they were upon him again.

They swarmed over his legs, biting and squealing insanely, and Masson shrieked horribly as he snatched for his gun. He fired without aiming, and only luck saved him from blowing a foot off. This time the rats did not retreat so far, but Masson was crawling as swiftly as he could along the burrow, ready to fire again at the first sound of another attack.

There was patter of feet and he sent the light stabbing back of him. A great gray rat paused and watched him. Its long ragged whiskers twitched, and its scabrous, naked tail was moving slowly from side to side. Masson shouted and the rat retreated.

He crawled on, pausing briefly, the black gap of a side tunnel at his elbow, as he made out a shapeless huddle on the damp clay a few yards ahead. For a second he thought it was a mass of earth that had been dislodged from the roof, and then he recognized it as a human body.

It was a brown and shriveled mummy, and with a dreadful unbelieving shock Masson realized that it was moving.

It was crawling toward him, and in the pale glow of the flashlight the man saw a frightful gargoyle face thrust into his own. It was the passionless, death's-head skull of a long-dead corpse, instinct with hellish life; and the glazed eyes swollen and bulbous betrayed the thing's blindness. It made a faint groaning sound as it crawled toward Masson, stretching its ragged and granulated lips in a grin of dreadful hunger. And Masson was frozen with abysmal fear and loathing.

Just before the Horror touched him, Masson flung himself frantically into the burrow at his side. He heard a scrambling noise at his heels, and the thing groaned dully as it came after him. Masson, glancing over his shoulder, screamed and propelled himself desperately through the narrow burrow. He crawled along awkwardly, sharp stones cutting his hands and

knees. Dirt showered into his eyes, but he dared not pause even for a moment. He scrambled on, gasping, cursing, and praying hysterically.

Squealing triumphantly, the rats came at him, horrible hunger in their eyes. Masson almost succumbed to their vicious teeth before he succeeded in beating them off. The passage was narrowing, and in a frenzy of terror he kicked and screamed and fired until the hammer clicked on an empty shell. But he had driven them off.

He found himself crawling under a great stone, embedded in the roof, that dug cruelly into his back. It moved a little as his weight struck it, and an idea flashed into Masson's fright-crazed mind. If he could bring down the stone so that it blocked the tunnel!

The earth was wet and soggy from the rains, and he hunched himself half upright and dug away at the dirt around the stone. The rats were coming closer. He saw their eyes glowing in the reflection of the flashlight's beam. Still he clawed frantically at the earth. The stone was giving. He tugged at it and it rocked in its foundation.

A rat was approaching—the monster he had already glimpsed. Gray and leprous and hideous it crept forward with its orange teeth bared, and in its wake came the blind dead thing, groaning as it crawled. Masson gave a last frantic tug at the stone. He felt it slide downward, and then he went scrambling along the tunnel.

Behind him the stone crashed down, and he heard a sudden frightful shriek of agony. Clods showered upon his legs. A heavy weight fell on his feet and he dragged them free with difficulty. The entire tunnel was collapsing!

Gasping with fear, Masson threw himself forward as the soggy earth collapsed at his heels. The tunnel narrowed until he could barely use his hands and legs to propel himself; he wriggled forward like an eel and suddenly felt satin tearing beneath his clawing fingers, and then his head crashed against something that barred his path. He moved his legs, discovering that they were not pinned under the collapsed earth. He

was lying flat on his stomach, and when he tried to raise himself he found that the roof was only a few inches from his back. Panic shot through him.

When the blind horror had blocked his path, he had flung himself desperately into a side tunnel, a tunnel that had no outlet. He was *in a coffin*, an empty coffin into which he had crept through the hole the rats had gnawed in its end!

He tried to turn on his back and found that he could not. The lid of the coffin pinned him down inexorably. Then he braced himself and strained at the coffin lid. It was immovable, and even if he could escape from the sarcophagus, how could he claw his way up through five feet of hard-packed earth?

He found himself gasping. It was dreadfully fetid, unbearably hot. In a paroxysm of terror he ripped and clawed at the satin until it was shredded. He made a futile attempt to dig with his feet at the earth from the collapsed burrow that blocked his retreat. If he were only able to reverse his position he might be able to claw his way through to air . . . air . . .

White-hot agony lanced through his breast, throbbed in his eyeballs. His head seemed to be swelling, growing larger and larger; and suddenly he heard the exultant squealing of the rats. He began to scream insanely but could not drown them out. For a moment he thrashed about hysterically within his narrow prison, and then he was quiet, gasping for air. His eyelids closed, his blackened tongue protruded, and he sank down into the blackness of death with the mad squealing of the rats dinning in his ears.

## THE RETURN OF ANDREW BENTLEY

By AUGUST W. DERLETH AND MARK SCHORER

*A weird shape with flapping black cape strove to drag  
the body of Amos Wilder from the vault in which it  
had been laid*

It is with considerable hesitation that I here chronicle the strange incidents which marked my short stay at the old Wilder homestead on the banks of the Wisconsin River not far from the rustic village of Sac Prairie. My reluctance is not entirely dispelled by the conviction that some record of these events should emphatically be made, if only to stop the circulation of unfounded rumors which have come into being since my departure from the vicinity.

The singular chain of events began with a peremptory letter from my aging uncle, Amos Wilder, ordering me to appear at the homestead, where he was then living with a housekeeper and a caretaker. Communications from my Uncle Amos were not only exceedingly rare, but usually tinged with biting and withering comments about my profession of letters, which he held in great scorn. Previous to this note, we had not seen each other for over four years. His curt note hinted that there was something of vital importance to both of us which he wished to take up with me, and though I had no inkling of what this might be, I did not hesitate to go.

The old house was not large. It stood well back in the rambling grounds, its white surface mottled by the shadows of leafy branches in the warm sunlight of the day on which I arrived. Green shutters crowded upon the windows, and the door was tightly closed, despite the day's somnolent warmth. The river was cerulean and silver in the immediate background, and farther beyond, the bluffs on the other side of the

river rose from behind the trees and were lost in the blue haze of distance to the north and south.

My uncle had grown incredibly old, and now hobbled about with the aid of a cane. On the morning of my arrival he was dressed in a long, ragged black robe that trailed along the floor; beneath this garment he wore a threadbare black jersey and a pair of shabby trousers. His hair was unkempt, and on his chin was a rough beard, masking his thin, sardonic mouth. His eyes, however, had lost none of their fire, and I felt his disapproval of me as clearly as ever. His expression was that of a man who is faced with an unpleasant but necessary task.

At last, after a rude scrutiny, he began to speak, having first made certain that no one lurked within earshot.

"It's hardly necessary for me to say I'm not too certain I've done a wise thing in choosing you," he began. "I've always considered you somewhat of a milksop, and you've done nothing to change my opinion."

He watched my face closely as he spoke, to detect any resentment that I might feel; but I had heard this kind of speech from him too often before to feel any active anger. He sensed this, apparently, for he went on abruptly.

"I'm going to leave everything I've got to you, but there'll be a condition. You'll have to spend most of your time here, make this your home, of course, and there are one or two other small things you'll have to see to. Mind, I'm not putting anything in my will; I want only your word. Do you think you can give it? Think you can say, 'Yes' to my terms?"

He paused, and I said, "I see no reason why I shouldn't—if you can guarantee that your terms won't interfere with my writing."

My uncle smiled and shook his head as if in exasperation. "Nothing is easier," he replied curtly. "Your time for writing will be virtually unlimited."

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

"Spend most of your time here, as I said before. Let no day go by during which you do not examine the vault behind the house. My body will lie there, and the vault will be sealed;

I want to know that I can depend upon you to prevent anything from entering that vault. If at any time you discover that some one has been tampering, you will find written instructions for your further procedure in my library desk. Will you promise me to attend to these things without too much curiosity concerning them?"

I promised without the slightest hesitation, though there were perplexing thoughts crowding upon my mind.

Amos Wilder turned away, his eyes glittering. Then he looked through the window directly opposite me and began to chuckle in a curiously guttural tone. At last he said, his eyes fixed upon a patch of blue sky beyond the tree near the window, "Good. I'll block him yet! Amos Wilder is still a match for you—do you hear, Andrew?"

What his words might portend I had no means of knowing, for he turned abruptly to me and said in his clipped, curt way, "You must go now, Ellis. I shall not see you again." With that, he left the room, and as if by magic, old Jacob Kinney, the caretaker, appeared to show me from the grounds, his lugubrious face regarding me with apologetic eyes from the doorway through which his master had so abruptly vanished but a moment before.

My uncle's strange words puzzled me, and it occurred to me that the old man was losing his mind. That I then did him an injustice I subsequently learned, but at the time all evidence pointed to mental derangement. I finally contented myself with this explanation, though it did not account for the old man's obvious rationality during most of the conversation. Two points struck me: my uncle had put particular stress upon the suggestion that something might enter his vault. And secondly, what was the meaning of his last words, and to whom was my uncle referring when he said, "I'll block him yet!" and "Amos Wilder is till a match for you—do you hear, Andrew?" Conjecture, however, was futile; for, since I knew very little of my uncle's personal affairs, any guesses I might have made as to his obscure references, if indeed he was not losing his mind, would be fruitless.

I left the old homestead that day in May only to find myself back there again within forty-eight hours, summoned by Thomas Weatherbee of Sac Prairie, my uncle's solicitor, whose short telegram apprising me of Amos Wilder's death reached me within three hours of my return to the St. Louis apartment which served me as my temporary home. My shock at the news of his sudden death was heightened when I learned that the circumstances surrounding his decease indicated suicide.

Weatherbee told me the circumstances of my uncle's singular death. It appeared that Jacob Kinney had found the old man in the very room in which he and I had discussed his wishes only a day before. He was seated at the table, apparently asleep. One hand still grasped a pen, and before him lay a sheet of note-paper upon which he had written my name and address, nothing more. It was presumed at first that he had had a heart attack, but a medical examination had brought forth the suspicion that the old man had made away with himself by taking an overdose of veronal. There was, however, considerable reluctance to presume suicide, for an overdose of veronal might just as likely be accident as suicide. Eventually a coroner's jury decided that my uncle had met his death by accident, but from the first I was convinced that Amos Wilder had killed himself. In the light of subsequent events and of his own cryptic words to me, "I shall not see you again," my suspicion was, I feel, justified, though no definite and conclusive evidence emerged.

My uncle was buried, as he had wished, in the long-disused family vault behind the house, and the vault was sealed from the outside with due ceremony and in the presence of witnesses. The reading of the will was a short affair, for excepting bequests made to the housekeeper and caretaker, I inherited everything. My living was thus assured, and as my uncle had said, I found the future holding many hours of leisure in which to pursue letters.

And yet, despite the apparent rosiness of the outlook, there was from the first a peculiar restraint upon my living in the



old homestead. It was indefinable and strange, and numerous small incidents occurred to supplement this odd impression. First old Jacob Kinney wanted to leave. With great effort I persuaded him to stay, and dragged from him his reason for wanting to go.

"There've been mighty strange things a-goin' on about this house, Mr. Wilder, all the time your uncle was alive—and I'm afraid things'll be goin' on again after a bit."

More than that cryptic utterance I could not get out of him. I took the liberty shortly after to repeat Kinney's words to the housekeeper, Mrs. Seldon. The startled expression that passed over her countenance did not escape me, and her immediate assurance that Jake Kinney was in his dotage did not entirely reassure me.

Then there was the daily function of examining the seal on the vault. The absurdity of my uncle's request began to grow on me, and my task, trivial as it was, became daily more irritating. Yet, having given my promise, I could do no more than fulfill it.

On the third night following my uncle's interment, my sleep was troubled by a recurrent dream which gave me no little thought when I remembered its persistence on the following day. I dreamed that my Uncle Amos stood before me, clad as I had last seen him on the visit just preceding his strange death. He regarded me with his beady eyes, and then abruptly said in a mournful and yet urgent voice, "You must bring Burkhardt back here. He forgot to protect me against them. You must get him to do so. If he will not, then see those books on the second shelf of the seventh compartment of my library."

This dream was repeated several times, and it had a perfectly logical basis, which was briefly this: My uncle was buried by Father Burkhardt, the Sac Prairie parish priest, who was not satisfied with the findings of the coroner's jury, and consequently, in the belief that Amos Wilder had killed himself, had refused to bless the grave of a suicide. Yet, what the dream-shape of the night before had obviously meant

when he spoke of what Father Burkhardt had forgotten to do, was the blessing of the grave.

I spent some time mulling over this solution of the dream, and at length went to see the priest. My efforts, however, were futile. The old man explained his attitude with great patience, and I was forced to agree with him.

On the following night the dream recurred, and in consequence, since a visit to Father Burkhardt had already failed to achieve the desired effect, I turned, impelled largely by curiosity, to the books on the second shelf of the seventh compartment indicated by the dream-figure of my uncle. From the moment that I opened the first of those books, the entire complexion of the occurrences at the homestead changed inexplicably, and I found myself involved in a chain of incidents, the singularity of which continues to impress me even as I write at this late date. For the books on the second shelf of the seventh compartment in my dead uncle's library were books on black magic—books long out of print, and apparently centuries old, for in many of them the print had faded almost to illegibility.

The Latin in which most of the books were written was not easily translated, but fortunately it was not necessary for me to search long for the portions indicated by my uncle, for in each book paragraphs were marked for my attention. The subjects of the marked portions were strangely similar. After some difficulty I succeeded in translating the first indicated paragraph to catch my eye. "For Protection from Things That Walk in the Night," it read. "There are many things stalking abroad by darkness, perhaps ghouls, perhaps evil demons lured from outer space by man's own ignorance, perhaps souls isolated in space, havenless and alone, and yet strongly attached to the things of this earth. Let no bodies be exposed to their evil wrath. Let there be all manner of protection for vaults and graves, for the dead as well as the living; for ghouls, incubi, and succubi haunt the near places as well as the far, and seek always to quench the fire of their unholy desire. . . . Take blessed water from a church and mix it with

the blood of a young babe, be it ever so small a measure, and with this cross the grave or the door of the vault thrice at the full of the moon."

If this was what my Uncle Amos desired me to do, I knew at once that the task had devolved upon the wrong man; for I could certainly not see myself going about collecting holy water and the blood of a young child and then performing ridiculous rites over the vault with an odious mixture of the two. I put the books aside and returned to my work, which seemed suddenly more inviting than it had ever been before.

Yet what I had read disturbed me, and the suggestion that my uncle had come to believe in the power of black magic—perhaps even more than this, for all I knew—was extremely distasteful to me. In consequence, my writing suffered, and immediately after my supper that evening, I went for a long walk on the river bank.

A half-moon high in the sky made the countryside bright and clear, and since the night was balmy and made doubly inviting by the sweet mystery of night sounds—the gasping and gurgling of the water, the splashing of distant fish, the muted cries of night-birds, particularly the *peet, peet* of the nighthawk and the eery call of the whippoorwill, and the countless mysterious sounds from the underbrush in the river bottoms—I extended my walk much farther than I had originally intended; so that it was shortly after midnight when I approached the house again, and the moon was close upon the western horizon.

As I came quietly along in the now still night, my eye caught a movement in the shadowy distance. The movement had come from the region of the large old elm which pressed close upon the house near the library window, and it was upon this tree that I now fixed my eyes. I had not long to wait, for presently a shadow detached itself from the giant bole and went slowly around the house toward the darkness behind. I could see the figure quite clearly, though I did not once catch sight of its face, despite the fact that the man, for man it was, wore no hat. He walked with a slight limp, and wore

a long black cape. He was near medium height, but quite bent, so that his back was unnaturally hunched. His hands were strikingly white in the fading light of the moon, and he walked with a peculiar flapping motion, despite his obvious limp. He passed beyond the house with me at his heels, for I was determined to ascertain if possible what design had brought him to the old house.

I lost sight of him for a few moments while I gained the shelter of the house, but in a minute I saw him again, and with a gasp of astonishment realized that he was making directly for the vault in which my Uncle Amos lay buried. I stifled an impulse to shout at him, and made my way cautiously in the shadow of a row of lilac bushes toward the vault, before which he was now standing. The darkness here was intense, owing to the fact that the trees from the surrounding copse pressed close upon this corner of the estate; yet I could see from my crouching position that the mysterious intruder was fumbling with the seals of the vault. My purpose in following him so closely was to collar him while he was engaged with the seals, but this design was now for the moment thwarted by his stepping back to survey the surface of the vault door. He remained standing in silence for some while, and I had almost decided that it might be just as easy to capture him in this position, when he moved forward once more. But this time he did not fumble with the seals. Instead, he seemed to flatten himself against the door of the vault. Then, incredible as it may seem, his figure began to grow smaller, to shrink, save for his gaunt and gleaming white fingers and arms!

With a strangled gasp, I sprang forward.

My memory at this point is not quite clear. I remember seizing the outstretched fingers of the man at the vault door, feeling something within my grasp. Then something struck me at the same moment that the intruder whirled and leaped away. I had the fleeting impression that a second person had leaped upon me from behind. I went down like a log.

I came to my senses not quite an hour later, and lay for a

moment recalling what had happened. I remembered having made a snatch at the intruder's fingers, and being struck. There was an appreciable soreness of the head, and a sensitive bruise on my forehead when finally I felt for it. But what most drew my attention was the thing that I held tightly in my left hand, the hand which had grasped at the strangely white fingers of the creature pressed against the door of the Wilder vault. I had felt it within my grasp from the first moment of consciousness, but from its roughness, I had taken it for a small twig caught up from the lawn. In consequence, it was not until I reached the security of the house that I looked at it. I threw it upon the table in the dim glow of the table lamp—and almost fell in my utter amazement; for the thing I had held in my hand was a fragment of human bone—the unmistakable first two joints of the little finger!

This discovery loosed a flood of futile conjectures. Was it after all a man I had surprized at the vault, or was it—something else? . . . That my uncle was in some way vitally concerned now became apparent, if it had not been entirely so before. The fact that Amos Wilder had looked for some such interruption of his repose in the old vault led me to believe that whatever he feared derived from some source in the past. Accordingly, I gave up all conjecture for the time, and promised myself that in the morning I would set on foot inquiries designed to make me familiar with my secluded uncle's past life.

I was destined to receive a shock in the morning. Determined to prosecute my curiosity concerning my uncle without loss of time, I summoned Jacob Kinney, whose surliness had noticeably increased during the few days I had been at the old Wilder house. Instead of asking directly about my uncle, I began with a short account of the figure I had seen outside the preceding night.

"I was out quite late last night, Jake," I began, "and when I came home I noticed a stranger on the grounds."

Kinney's eyebrows shot up in undisguised curiosity, but he

said nothing, though he began to exhibit signs of uneasiness which did not escape my notice.

"He was about five feet tall, I should say, and wore no hat," I went on. "He wore a long black cape, and walked with a slight limp."

Abruptly Kinney came to his feet, his eyes wide with fear. "What's that you say?" he demanded hoarsely. "Walked with a limp—wore a cape?"

I nodded, and would have continued my narrative, had not Kinney cut in.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Andrew Bentley's back!"

"Who's Andrew Bentley?" I asked.

But Kinney did not hear. He had whirled abruptly and run from the room as fast as his feeble legs would allow him to go. My astonishment knew no bounds, nor did subsequent events in any way lessen it; for Jacob Kinney ran not only from the house, but from the grounds, and his flight was climaxed shortly after by the appearance of a begrimed youth representing himself as the old man's nephew, who came for "Uncle Jake's things." From him I learned that Kinney was leaving his position at once, and would forfeit any wages due him, plus any amount I thought fit to recompense me for his precipitate flight.

Kinney's unaccountable action served only to sharpen my already keen interest, and I descended upon Mrs. Seldon post-haste. But the information which she was able to offer me was meager indeed. Andrew Bentley had arrived in the neighborhood only a few years back. He and my uncle had immediately become friends, and the friendship, despite an appearance of strain, had ended only when Bentley mysteriously disappeared about a year ago. She confirmed my description of the figure I had seen as that of Bentley. Mrs. Seldon, too, was inexplicably agitated, and when I sought to probe for the source of this agitation she said only that there were some very strange stories extant about Bentley, and about my uncle as well, and that most of the people in the neighborhood had been relieved of a great fear when Bentley disappeared from

the farm adjoining the Wilder estate. This farm, which he had inhabited for the years of his residence, but had not worked, and had yet always managed to exist without trouble, was now uninhabited. This, together with a passing hint that Thomas Weatherbee might be able to add something, was the sum of what Mrs. Seldon knew.

I lost no time in telephoning Weatherbee and making an appointment for that afternoon. On the way to the attorney's office I had ample time to think over the events of the last ten days. That it was Andrew Bentley whom my uncle Amos had referred to when he spoke so cryptically with me before his death, I had no longer any doubt. Evidently then, he, too, feared his strange neighbor, but how he hoped to thwart any attempt that Bentley might make to get the body—for what reason he might want it I could not guess—with black magic, was beyond my comprehension.

Thomas Weatherbee was a short and rather insignificant man, but his attitude was conducive to business, and he made clear to me that he had only a limited time at my disposal. I came directly to the matter of Andrew Bentley.

"Andrew Bentley," began Weatherbee with some reluctance, "was a man with whom I had no dealings, with whom I cared to have none. I have seldom met any one whose mere presence was so innately evil. Your uncle took up with him, it is true, but I believe he regretted it to the end of his days."

"What exactly was wrong with Bentley?" I cut in.

Weatherbee smiled grimly, regarded me speculatively for a moment or two, and said, "Bentley was an avowed sorcerer."

"Oh, come," I said; "that sort of thing isn't believed in any more." But a horrible suspicion began to grow in my mind.

"Perhaps not generally," replied Weatherbee at once. "But I can assure you that most of us around here believe in the power of black magic after even so short an acquaintance as ours with Andrew Bentley. Consider for a moment that you have spent the greater part of your life in a modern city, away from the countrysides where such beliefs flourish, Wilder."

He stopped with an abrupt gesture, and took a portfolio

from a cabinet. From this he took a photograph, looked at it with a slight curl of disgust on his lips, and passed it over to me.

It was a snapshot, apparently made surreptitiously, of Andrew Bentley, and it had been taken evidently at considerable risk after sunset, for the general appearance of the picture led me to assume that its vagueness was caused by the haziness of dusk—a supposition which Weatherbee confirmed. The figure, however, was quite clear, save for blurred arms, which had evidently been moving during the exposure, and for the head. The view had been taken from the side, and showed Andrew Bentley, certainly identified for me by the long cape he wore, standing as if in conversation with some one. Yet it struck me as strange that Bentley could have stood quietly during the exposure with no incentive to do so, and I commented upon it at once.

Weatherbee looked at me queerly. "Wilder," he said, "there was another person there—or should I say *thing*? And this thing was directly in line with the lens, for he was standing very close to Bentley—and yet, there is nothing on the snapshot, nor is there any evidence on the exposed negative itself that any one stood there; for, as you can see, the landscape is unbroken."

It was as he said.

"But this other person," I put in. "He was seen, and yet does not appear. Apparently the camera was out of focus, or the film was defective."

"On the contrary. There are logical explanations for the non-appearance of something on a film. You can't photograph a dream. And you can't photograph something that has no material form—I say *material* advisedly—even though our own eyes give that thing a physical being."

"What do you mean?"

"Father Burkhardt would call it a familiar," he said, clipping his words. "A familiar, in case you don't know, is an evil spirit summoned by a sorcerer to wait upon his desires. That tall, gaunt man was never seen by day—always by night, and



never without Bentley. I can give you no more of my time now, but if you can bring yourself to accept what I have to say at face value, I'll be glad to see you again."

My interview with Thomas Weatherbee left me considerably shaken, and I found myself discarding all my previously formed beliefs regarding black magic. I went immediately to my late uncle's store of books, and began to read through them for further information, in the hope that something I might learn would enable me to meet Andrew Bentley on more equal footing, should he choose to call.

I read until far into the night, and what inconceivable knowledge I assimilated lingers clearly in my mind as I write. I read of age-old horror summoned from the abyss by the ignorance of men, of cosmic ghouls that roamed the ether in search of prey, and of countless things that walk by night. There were many legends of familiars, ghastly demons called forth from the depths at the whims of long-dead sorcerers; and it was significant that each legend had been heavily scored along the margins, and in one case the name "Andrew Bentley" was written in my uncle's hand. In another place my uncle had written, "We are fools to play with powers of whose scope even the wisest of us has no knowledge!"

It was at this point that it occurred to me that my uncle had left a letter of sealed instructions for me in case the vault was tampered with. This letter was to be in the library desk, where I found it with little trouble, a long, legal-looking envelope with my name inscribed very formally. The handwriting was undoubtedly my uncle's, and the letter within was the thing that finally dispelled all doubt from my mind as to the reality of the sorcery that had been and was still being practised near the Wilder homestead; for it made clear what had happened between my uncle and Andrew Bentley—and that other.

"My Dear Ellis:

"If indeed they have come for me, as they must have if you read this, there is but one thing you can do. Bentley's body must be found and utterly destroyed; surely there can not be much left of it now. Perhaps you have seen him in the night when he

walks—as I have. He is not alive. I know, because I killed him a year ago—stabbed him with your grandfather's hunting-knife—which must yet lie in his black skeleton.

“I think both Burkhardt and Weatherbee suspected that I aided Bentley to his black rites, but that was long before I dreamed of what depths of evil lurked in his soul. And when he began to hound me so, when he brought forward that other, that hellish thing he had conjured up from the nethermost places of evil—could I do otherwise than rid myself of his evil presence? My mind was at stake—and yes, my body. When you read this, only my body is at stake. For they want it—conceive if you can the ghastly irony of my lifeless body given an awful new existence by being inhabited by Bentley's familiar!

“The body—Bentley's body—I put it in the vault, but that other removed it and hid it somewhere on the grounds. I have not been able to find it, and this past year has been a living hell for me—they have hounded me nightly, and though I can protect myself from them, I can not stop them from appearing to taunt me. And when I am dead, my protection must come from you. But I hope that Burkhardt will have closed his eyes and blessed the vault, for this I think will be strong enough to keep them away—and yet, I can not tell.

“And perhaps even this is being read too late—for if once they have my body, destroy me, too, with Bentley's remains—by fire.

“AMOS WILDER.”

I put down this letter and sat for a moment in silence. But what thoughts crowded upon my mind were interrupted by an odd sound from outside the window, a sound that was unnaturally striking in the still night. I glanced at my watch; it was one o'clock in the morning. Then I turned out the small reading-lamp and moved quietly toward the window, immediately beyond which stood the giant elm beneath which on the previous night I had first seen the ghostly figure of Andrew Bentley—for since he had been killed a year before, what I had seen could have been none other than his specter.

Then a thought struck me that paralyzed me with horror. Suppose I had been struck by *that other*? It seemed to me that the blow which had knocked me out had been struck from behind. At the same instant my eyes caught sight of the faint-

est movement beyond the window. The moon hung in a hazy sky and threw a faint illumination about the tree, despite the fairly heavy shadow of its overhanging limbs. There was a man pressed close to the bole of the tree, and even as I looked another seemed to rise up out of the ground at his side. And the second man was Andrew Bentley! I looked again at the first, and saw a tall, gaunt figure with malevolent red eyes, *through* whom I could see the line of moonlight and shadow on the lawn beyond the tree. They stood there together for only a moment, and then went quickly around the house—toward the vault!

From that instant events moved rapidly to a climax.

My eyes fixed themselves upon that place in the ground from which the figure of Andrew Bentley had sprung, and saw there an opening in the trunk of the old tree—for the elm was hollow, and its bole held the remains of Andrew Bentley! Small wonder that my uncle had been haunted by the presence of the man he had killed, when his remains were hidden in the tree near the library window!

But I stood there only for a fraction of a minute. Then I went quickly to the telephone, and after an agonizing delay got Weatherbee on the wire and asked him to come out at once, hinting enough of what was happening to gain his assent. I suggested also that he bring Father Burkhardt along, and this he promised to do.

Then I slipped silently from the house into the shadowy garden. I think the sight of those two unholy figures hovering about the door of the vault was too much for me, for I launched myself at them, heedless of my danger. But realization came almost instantly, for Andrew Bentley did not even turn at my appearance. Instead, the other looked abruptly around, fixed me with his red and fiery eyes, smiled wickedly so that his leathery face was weirdly creased, and leisurely watched my approach. Instinct, I believe, whirled me about and sent me flying from the garden.

The thing was somewhat surprised at my abrupt bolt, and this momentary hesitation on its part I continue to believe is

responsible for my being alive to write this. For I knew that I was flying for my life, and I ran with the utmost speed of which I was capable. A fleeting glance showed me that the thing loped after me, a weirdly flapping shape seeming to come with the wind in the moonlight night, and struck shuddery horror into my heart.

I made for the river, because I remembered reading in one of my uncle's old books that certain familiars could not cross water unless accompanied by those whose sorcery had summoned them to earth. I leaped into the cold water, tense with the hope that the thing behind could not follow.

It could not.

I saw it raging up and down along the river bank, impotent and furious at my fortunate escape, while I kept myself afloat in mid-current. The current carried me rapidly downstream, and I kept my eyes fixed upon the thing I had eluded until it turned and sped back toward the vault. Only when I was completely out of its sight did I make for the bank once more.

I ran madly down the road along which Weatherbee and the priest must come, flinging off some of my wet clothes as I went. What was happening at the vault I did not know—at the moment my only thought was temporary safety from the thing whose power I had so thoughtlessly challenged.

I had gone perhaps a half-mile beyond the estate when the headlights of Weatherbee's car swept around a curve and outlined me in the road. The car ground to an emergency stop, and Weatherbee's voice called out. I jumped into the car, and explained as rapidly as I could what had happened.

Father Burkhardt regarded me quizzically, half smiling.

"You've had a narrow escape, my boy," he said, "a very narrow escape. Now if only we can get to the vault before they succeed in their evil design. Such a fate is too harsh a punishment even for the sins of Amos Wilder."

He shuddered as he spoke, and Weatherbee's face was grim.

None of us wasted a moment when the car came to a stop near the house. Father Burkhardt, despite his age, led the way,

marshaling us behind him, for he went ahead with a crucifix extended.

But even he faltered at the horrifying sight that met our eyes when we rounded the house and came into the garden. For the vault was open, and from it emerged the skeletal Bentley and his familiar, and between them they dragged the lifeless body of my Uncle Amos! Burkhardt's hesitation, however, was only momentary, for he ran forward immediately; nor were Weatherbee and I far behind.

At the same moment the two at the vault caught sight of us. With a shrill scream, the tall, gaunt thing loosed his hold of the corpse and launched himself forward. But the crucifix served us well, for the thing fell shuddering away from it. Father Burkhardt immediately pressed his advantage, and following his sharp command, Weatherbee and I rushed at Bentley, who had up to this moment remained beside the corpse, still keeping hold of one dead arm.

But at our advance, Bentley wavered a moment, and then turned and took flight, dodging nimbly past us and running for the house. We were at his heels, and saw him when he vanished in the deep shadows of the tree near the library window.

Father Burkhardt presently made his appearance, walking warily, for the thing was still at bay but eager to attack.

"Find the bones," directed the priest. "They're in the tree, I suspect."

I bent obediently, and presently my searching hand encountered a scooped-out hollow in the trunk just above the opening at the base of the tree. In this lay the skeleton of Andrew Bentley, together with the weapon by which he had met his death, and here it had lain ever since the thing Bentley had summoned from the depths had removed the sorcerer's body from the old vault. Small wonder that it had never been discovered!

Father Burkhardt stood protectingly close while Weatherbee and I prepared a pyre to consume the remains of the sorcerer.

"But what can we do about that?" I asked once, pointing to the familiar that now raged in baffled fury just beyond us.

"We need not bother about that," said the priest. "He is held to earth only by the body of the man who summoned him from below. When once that body is destroyed, he must return. That's why they were after your uncle's body. If the familiar could inhabit a body fresh from a new grave, he could walk by day as well as by night, and need have no fear of having to return."

Once or twice the thing did rush at us—but each time its charge was arrested by the power of that crucifix held unflinchingly aloft by Father Burkhardt, and each time the thing shrank away, wailing.

It was over at last, but not without a short period of ghastly doubt. The remains of Andrew Bentley were reduced to ashes, utterly destroyed, and yet the thing Bentley had called from outside lingered beyond us, strangely quiet now, regarding us malevolently.

"I don't understand," admitted Father Burkhardt at last. "Now that Bentley's ashes alone remain, the thing should go back into the depths."

But if the priest did not understand, I did. Abruptly I ran to the library window, raised it as far as it would go, and scrambled into the room. In a moment I emerged, bearing the fragment of Bentley's little finger which I had snatched from the skeletal hand the night before. I threw it into the flames already dying down in the shadow of the tree.

In a moment it had caught fire, and at the same instant the thing hovering near gave a chilling scream of pain and fury, pushed madly toward us, and then abruptly shot into space and vanished like the last fragment of an unholy, ghastly nightmare.

"*Requiescat in pace,*" said Father Burkhardt softly, looking at the ashes at our feet. But the dubious expression in his eyes conveyed his belief that for the now released spirit of Andrew Bentley a greater and longer torture had just begun.



















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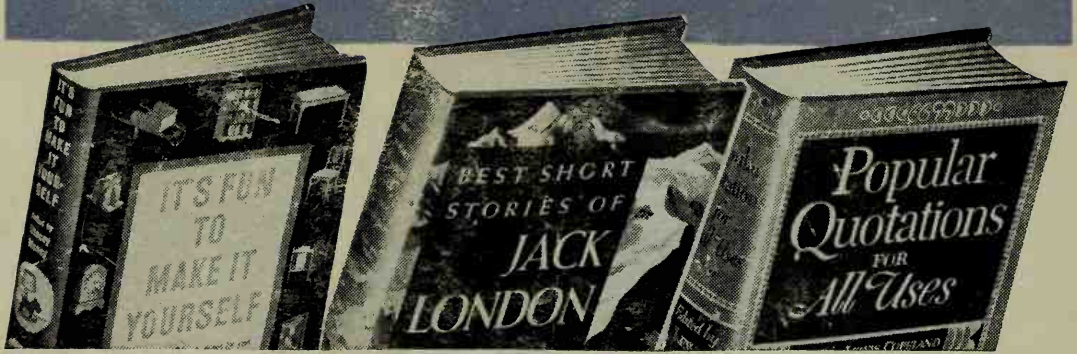
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