

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy

35 CENTS

Fall 1949

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BELLS ON HIS TOES *by Cleve Cartmill*

PRIVATE—KEEP OUT! *by Philip MacDonald*

THE LOST ROOM *by Fitz-James O'Brien*

THE HURKLE IS A HAPPY BEAST *by Theodore Sturgeon*

IN THE DAYS OF OUR FATHERS *by Winona McClintic*

THURNLEY ABBEY *by Perceval Landon*

and stories by H. H. Holmes Guy Endore Richard Sale Oliver Onions

AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST FANTASY STORIES, NEW AND OLD

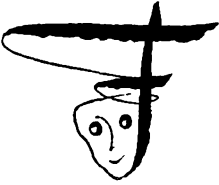
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Introduction

Fantasy fiction — the wondrous recounting of the impossible-made-convincing — is one of the oldest delights of mankind. The first tellers of tales, squatting around a cave fire, terrorized their listeners with reports of the awful horrors just outside the firelight, of ghosts that mourned in the first forests — in short, of things that went bump in the night.

Later story-tellers discovered that the unlikely could be delightful as well as terrifying — that the fantastic could fetch a smile as well as a shudder — and man, the only animal to whom the impossible can seem as real as the possible, has never lost his taste for these imaginative creations. There are stories of fantasy baked in Assyrian bricks, scrawled in Egyptian hieroglyphics, surviving from the singing of Greek bards and the writing of Latin poets; and, in our own language, hardly a major English author, from Chaucer through Shakespeare to Dickens, is without at least one important work of fantasy to his credit.

For most of this century, however, fantasy has suffered neglect from critics and publishers. Readers have found too little to satisfy their appetites for the weird, the awful, the delightfully unbelievable. It has been assumed, I fear, that twentieth century man is too practical, too efficient to bother with such "impractical" stuff. (Surely there is nothing more practical than putting that most efficient — if deceptive — of servants, the devil, to work for you!) Publishers, of

magazines and books alike, have taken the stand that citizens of a materialistic civilization don't care to read about . . . shall I say, "non-material things."

Of recent years, however, even these publishers have begun to realize the existence of a human demand which cannot be ignored. In the past few years some two dozen anthologies of fantasy stories have been published. Tales long buried in forgotten "pulps" are appearing in book form. A dozen or more novels of the supernatural have recently made their debuts. There must be a public demand!

I am convinced that there is. In this new periodical, The Magazine of Fantasy, I hope to satisfy every aspect of that demand for the finest available material in stories of the supernatural. I hasten to point out that by "the supernatural" I mean all of the world of fantasy, from the thrilling to the chilling, from the comic to the cosmic — whatever our senses may reject, but our imagination logically accepts.

I am happy to present as editors of this new magazine two of the outstanding contemporary specialists in this field.

Anthony Boucher is a mystery novelist and radio writer of long standing, author also of many fantasies, and currently editor of fantasy reviews for the Chicago Sun-Times.

J. Francis McComas has combined many years of experience in the book business with occasional pseudonymous ventures into fantasy-writing and the co-editing of the definitive anthology of science-fiction, Adventures in Time and Space.

Between them they possess (with occasional bitter blood-feuds over who owns what) one of the most comprehensive libraries of fantasy fiction ever assembled, from long out-of-print masterpieces or otherwise unavailable foreign works to thorough files of every important modern magazine story in the field.

This first issue offers a comprehensive sample of what my editors will give you in each appearance of the magazine. They have chosen

what I consider a series of distinguished and unusual stories which are in themselves a superb cross-section of fantasy writing. There is the plausible cold terror of Philip Macdonald, the horrible hilarity of Stuart Palmer, the border-line humor of Richard Sale, the social irony of Guy Endore, the supernatural vengeance of H. H. Holmes, the broad farce-fantasy of Cleve Cartmill — some of them new stories written expressly for this magazine, some of them resurrected (for Boucher & McComas are as accomplished as Burke & Hare) from the obscurity of long-forgotten magazine files.

And typical, too, of their finds are the oldest and the newest stories in this issue: an eerie masterpiece, long lost and underrated, by that early master, Fitz-James O'Brien, and the first published story by a distinctive new fantasy writer, Winona McClintic.

To authors who have long wished to try their hand at this sort of thing and found the usual markets closed to such experiments, let me assure you that the latch-string is out and the welcome-mat freshly dusted. Send us your material. There is no formula. Just make your efforts sufficiently out of this world to contradict the laws of man's logic — while adhering firmly to a freshly-created logic of their own.

To readers we will offer the best of imaginative fiction, from obscure treasures of the past to the latest creations in the field, from the chill of the unknown to the comedy of the known-gone-wrong. In short, the best of fantasy and horror.

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, Publisher

In 1944 — mark well the date! — Mr. Cartmill wrote a story for one of the better science-fiction magazines on an atom bomb. And promptly found himself being investigated by the F. B. I. That Cartmill fantasy ran awfully close to top secret truth. He managed to convince the G-men, after a very polite, but deadly-serious interrogation, that it was just his imagination working on publicly known data on atomic energy and not a leak from Oak Ridge or Hanford. While this story of a Los Angeles cultist being right runs (we hope) far from probability, it does represent Mr. Cartmill's plausible attitude toward the supernatural and is one of his best demonstrations that fantasy can be fun.

Bells On His Toes

by CLEVE CARTMILL

SERGEANT HANK SMILEY of the Bunco squad was a large young man, built somewhat on the scale of a Norse hammer-thrower, and he did not like appearing in public in his stocking feet.

But, the pretty blonde guardian of the Temple's outer portals assured him, he must remove his shoes before entering into the presence of Dr. Ishmael Swaam, whose *D.Sc.M.D.* Hank had been delegated to investigate.

"Maybe you didn't understand," Hank said firmly. "I am a cop, not a convert."

The round blue eyes below the glittering turban were pleasant, but adamant. "You must obey the Orders, sir."

So Hank went to one of the chairs along the wall and removed his oxfords, furtively examining his socks for holes. He was flushed with discomfort, and lapped one large foot over the other when he had pushed his brogans under the chair.

The blonde, unsmiling, said "Come" and led the way in whispering blue robes.

Hank filed the pitch of her voice in the E-flat cubby-hole of his mind, an

unconscious hangover from a childhood musical education, and noted that she was somewhat like Lakmé in her nightclub costume. She conducted him to a door which was covered with cabalistic symbols and apparently led to the inner sanctum. When she opened it, a gong somewhere in the dim interior rang out an announcement on middle C.

Presently he was in a circular room at the end of a corridor and seated across an ebony table from Dr. Swaam.

"You," said the doctor in a deep B-flat, "are not here for guidance."

Hank looked steadily at the dark triangular face with its bright, wide eyes. "I'm here to find out about this cult of yours, Doctor, and your degree."

"Cult? This is no cult, young man. I am a teacher, carrying the lamp of mental culture down dim corridors of unused minds. My degree translates into Doctor of the Science of Mental Dynamics."

"We have certain laws regulating pseudo-religious groups," Hank said tentatively.

"I observe them. My followers are not a pseudo-religious group. We are scientific. I know your laws, and stay well inside. What do you want to know?"

"Well, mainly just that. Now and then some lug comes along and promises to show anybody the other side of the moon for a four-dollar initiation fee and a course of instruction. I just want to make sure no fraud is present."

"I promise nothing," said Dr. Swaam. "My degree, straight from the High Lama of the order in Tibet, simply states that I am qualified to direct mental calisthenics designed to develop little used, if any, portions of the brain. Emoluments for this service come from increased earnings made possible by increased mental activities of my students."

Hank reflected on this, drumming a soft tattoo on the polished table top. "I'm no lawyer, and I can't kick any holes in it. But I'm supposed to make a report. If you could give me a short demonstration, say, of a lesson —"

"Certainly. The theory is simply that mind triumphs over matter."

Dr. Swaam put a long, graceful hand under the table, and the circular room went dark save for a bar of light across the doctor's eyes.

"Look at the spot between my eyes, Sergeant. Blank your mind of all thoughts except one. If you are sure enough that it will be true, it will be. Look steadily, relax, and concentrate."

Hank looked, relaxed, and concentrated on the first thing that popped into his mind, a nursery rhyme his mother had crooned to him in childhood:

*“Rings on his fingers, bells on his toes,
He shall make music wherever he goes.”*

This went on for some time, the rhyme running through his head, his gaze fixed on the smooth spot between the eyes of Dr. Ishmael Swaam, *D.Sc.M.D.*

The lights glowed again, and Dr. Swaam snapped his fingers at Hank, who had become somewhat rigid. “That is a sample. We go from there gradually to consideration of specific problems. In some instances, our accomplishments are gratifying.”

Hank shook his head free of a curious lethargy, dropped his glance to his own hands, and was slightly startled to see a ring on each. They were his, one a plain gold band, the other set with a reconstructed ruby. But he never wore them, and he did not remember having put them on this morning. He shrugged away any further thoughts of this and got to his feet. Somewhere an orchestra was playing “Six Lessons From Madame La Zonga.”

Dr. Swaam rose and stood listening for a moment. “This room is supposed to be soundproof,” he said. “I wonder where that radio is.” He seemed witlessly adrift for a moment. “Ah . . . er . . . oh, yes, literature.”

He parted drapes on one wall and took pamphlets from a polished cabinet. He gave these to Hank, murmured farewells, and Hank left. As he was closing the door behind him, the orchestra modulated into Tosti’s “Goodbye.”

He walked down the carpeted corridor to the big door, humming the words which formed in his mind: “Goodbye, forever. Goodbye, forever.” He opened the door into the reception room where the blonde presided, and had the first intimation of what had happened to him.

As he stepped into the room, a full symphonic orchestra crashed into the majestic opening chords of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony:

“Ta-ta-ta

DUMMMM!

Ta-ta-ta

DUMMMMMMMMMMM!”

The blonde lost her ritualistic calm. She jerked her turbaned head toward the door. Hank grinned a trifle foolishly.

"Some entrance," he said. "I used to think how nice it would be to be a dictator and have that music played every time I came into a room."

He went over to the chair and put on his shoes while the blonde smiled doubtfully at him. A hill-billy band began to play "Oh, Dem Golden Slippers" and "All God's Chillun Got Shoes" alternately.

He departed from the Temple in a cloud of confusion shared by the blonde, who pondered on the receding strains of "Aloha Oe" played on steel guitars and ukeleles.

Followed by the puzzled glances of loiterers in the City Hall, Hank entered the office of Chief of Detectives Joe Ross.

"Ta-ta-ta

DUMMMM!

Ta-ta-ta

DUMMMMMMMMMMI!"

The chief started, snapped up a somewhat choleric countenance as the mighty chords died, and shot a glance full of suspicion across his desk.

"Oh," he said in a hoarse whisper. "It's you, Hank. Gotta job for you."

"What's the matter with your voice, chief?"

"Laryngitis. Bad."

The unseen orchestra began to play the mournful strains of "Moanin' Low" as Hank clucked in sympathy and sank into a chair. The chief's eyes wheeled about the calcimined room, touched on the closed windows and doors, came to rest on Hank.

"Where the hell's the music comin' from?"

Hank kept his face blank, muttered "Outside, I guess," and pondered the situation. He had thought it strange that he had heard Von Suppe's "Light Cavalry Overture" during his journey from Dr. Swaam's Temple to the City Hall. When he had entered its concrete archway and the sonorous fanfare of Beethoven's Fifth had sounded again, his musical experiences of the morning had shifted into uneasy focus. As he had walked down the corridor to the chief's office accompanied by a brass band softly playing Sousa's "El Capitan" he had come to a fearful conclusion. When the full symphony had again announced his entrance into this office, he was certain. It must be that nursery rhyme:

*“Rings on his fingers, bells on his toes,
He shall make music wherever he goes.”*

Dr. Swaam had said, “If you are sure enough that it will be true, it will be.” Apparently, Hank had been sure.

Chief Ross cut short his thoughts by shoving a manuscript across the desk. “Radio speech,” he said. “You make it. Eight o’clock tonight. My throat’s too bad.”

Hank winced at the rasp of Chief Ross’s voice, and the orchestra shifted into the Dead March from *Saul*.

“I’m no radio speaker,” Hank protested. “Why can’t somebody else do it?”

“Tricd ’em all. Refused. You do it. Orders. I can’t. It’d kill me.”

Somewhere rollicking woodwinds began to swing “I’ll Be Glad When You’re Dead” while Hank glanced at the speech. It was titled “Activities of Bunco Artists in Southern California and How To Stop Them.”

“That damned music!” rasped Chief Ross. “Stop it when you go out.”

Hank nodded, got to his feet.

“You see Dr. Swaam?” the chief asked.

“Yeah,” Hank said grimly. “I’m going to see him again. Then I’ll make my report.”

“O.K. And see who’s got that radio. Stuff it down his throat. I hate music.”

Hank tore through traffic toward the Temple with a screaming siren, accompanied by a stirring interpretation of the “Ride of the Valkyries,” slid to a halt before the Gate and plunged up the marble steps. The blonde was there, sans robe, sans turban, obviously rifling her desk of personal effects.

Her glance at Hank gave off an almost tangible blue fire as she tucked a white purse under her elbow and flounced toward the door.

“Just a minute!” Hank said. “I want to see Dr. Swaam, and quick.”

“He’s gone.”

“When will he be back?”

“He won’t be.”

“Has he skipped?”

“You should know,” the blonde said bitterly.

Hank went into action. "Where's your phone? Where was he headed for?"

"He didn't say. The phone's in the bottom drawer of the desk."

She started for the door again, but halted at Hank's command and stood waiting while he turned in a general order to pick up Dr. Ishmael Swaam and transport him to headquarters. An unseen violin carried the melody of "Some Day I'll Find You." Hank cradled the phone and looked grimly at the pretty blonde.

"Now. What goes on here?"

"Nothing. Not any more."

"You know where he is. You'd better tell me."

"I don't know!" she protested. "All I know is he skipped out because he's afraid of cops. He's a fake, and he didn't want to be arrested."

"I don't want to arrest him," Hank said. "He's no fake."

The blonde sank into one of the chairs along the wall and made an empty smile. "Just my luck. I finally get a job, after pounding pavements and haunting movie studios for months, and a week later it folds up through a misunderstanding. What am I going to do now?"

"Don't worry," Hank soothed. "You'll get your job back as soon as we pick up the doctor."

"Where's that music coming from?" she asked.

Hank told her.

She didn't think it was funny. In fact, she was a trifle awed. But she wearied of music before the day was through at her apartment, where Hank had gone on the theory that if Dr. Swaam tried to establish contact with anybody he would choose his ex-receptionist.

Though the blonde, who was named Helen, tired of solid musical fare, the little girl across the hall, aged 6, thought Hank was wonderful. Until she was called for dinner, she stood around, entranced, with finger in her mouth, and requested an occasional selection between Hank's reading of the radio speech and phone calls to headquarters.

As the hour grew later, a sickening certainty grew within Hank. Dr. Ishmael Swaam, *D.Sc.M.D.*, had apparently vanished.

The radio announcer, who sat across the little table from Hank, and the engineer in the glassed cubicle were both fairly earnest young men who

strove for precision and quality in each program under the aegis of their chain. They knew what each program was like before it began, and they worked as a team in presenting it to the public. The announcer set the stage in rich, authoritative tones, and paced the show; the engineer protected the modulation curve from distortion.

They were shocked, then, when the introduction of the Bunco squad man was augmented by impressive chords from Ludwig von Beethoven's most famous symphony.

"— Sergeant Henry Smiley," the announcer concluded and nodded a dark head at Hank.

"Ta-ta-ta

DUMMMM!

Ta-ta-ta

DUMMMMMMMMM!"

The announcer was too well-trained to make a sound before an open microphone. He stifled his surprise and hurried into the control room to rage at the equally bewildered engineer.

"There's no music on this!" the announcer said.

The engineer pointed at the empty turntables. "I didn't play it," he said.

"Who the hell did, then?"

"There must be a feedback. Listen!"

Hank's voice poured out of the control room monitor.

"In the near future," he was reading, "this entire community will be completely rid of men who promote fraudulent schemes of any nature, and the public will be able to relax and conduct business with perfect confidence."

The words were from the script, a copy of which the engineer followed with his eyes, but not the organ which accompanied this utopian forecast with "The Voice That Breathed O'er Eden."

"That's going on the air!" the announcer snapped.

"That doesn't worry me," retorted the engineer, "half so much as where it's coming from. Scurry around the other studios. See if anybody's rehearsing. I'll check my circuits."

The announcer ran from one studio to another, and found them deserted. The next program was a transcription, and the remainder of the day's

broadcasting was composed of remote dance jobs and chain pick-ups. None of the studios was in use. During his search, the announcer heard snatches of Hank's speech with a variety of musical backgrounds.

"— and the bunco artist must go!" Hank said. This warning was backed up by a swing arrangement of "Get Out Of Town!"

"— fraudulent promoters are parasites on the body politic," Hank said, and out over the air went a smooth rhumba arrangement of "I've Got You Under My Skin."

The engineer felt that he should take the program off the air, but was afraid to do so without orders from one of the higher-ups, all of whom had gone home, and none of whom would be listening to a civic welfare speech. So he and the announcer watched through the control room window as Hank read the speech and musical accompaniments changed in conformance with the text with no regard to the clearance of radio rights.

Hank's last paragraph was forceful. The announcer was back at the table, ready to close the program and read a used-car plug, and he tried not to listen to the speech or the music that came from nowhere. He was a beaten man.

"— and in the name of the community," Hank said, "in the name of its citizens, in the name of public decency, I warn all swindlers that we have no place here for you."

As this sturdy announcement modulated the station's carrier wave, a little jive outfit applied a jungle beat to the "Take It Away, Henry, I Don't Want It No More" blues, featuring a brawling trombone and a very dirty trumpet.

The speech and its musical condiments led to a conference on the next day between the radio station manager, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, Hank, and Chief Ross. The meeting established an historic high in confusion. The radio man demanded an explanation of the music and payment of fines for broadcasting three ASCAP tunes; the president of the Chamber of Commerce demanded an apology to the fair city; and Chief Ross demanded Hank's resignation from the force.

Not that it settled anything, or explained anything; but they were mollified to a certain extent when Hank complied with the chief's wish and walked out jobless. Hank refused to admit any knowledge of the music, pretended not to hear the cacophony which accompanied the confab, and

hid his affliction with deep sense of shame. He stalked out of the meeting with the remembered strains of "My Last Goodbye" quivering in the electric atmosphere of the office.

First, it was his landlady. While paying his rent that evening, in advance, the power went off for some thirty seconds. Though the radio went dead instantly, one of Hank's little combinations continued in key, spotlighting a hot piano in "Scrub Me, Mama, With a Boogie Beat."

The landlady, a large gray woman, handed him his money when the lights came on again. "You move out tonight," she ordered. When Hank started a protest, she went on firmly: "I don't want to talk about it. I hope, some day, I'll be able to forget it. Goodbye, Mr. Smiley, whatever you are."

Hank went from one hotel to another, was turned out sometimes before the day was over, and was asked to leave a series of flophouses. He refused even to discuss the source of his musical accompaniments, and as a result was regarded by others with a certain fear. Finally he rented a room from a deaf landlady, and took up the search for Dr. Swaam with a worried eye on his dwindling savings. The search necessitated, of course, his entering hotels, theaters, restaurants and other buildings; and each occasion was announced by Beethoven's ominous fanfare.

He became chary of doorways, and made fantastic efforts to avoid them. He began to hate humanity as one experience after another brought its inevitable embarrassment. His growing poverty and final resignation to the fact that Dr. Ishmael Swaam would never be found to remove this curse led Hank finally to his room near the end of this period. He shunned friends and public contacts of any sort, a bitter young man who regarded life and the future with a morbid eye.

One experimental meeting with the pretty blonde, Helen, after their first, had convinced both that further relations were impractical, and they had parted incompatible friends. But she was the only person who knew what had happened to him, and he felt a desire to find her, for she would be a comfortable light in his sodden world of gloom. He finally ran her to earth by phone at Colossal Studios.

"I've been combing the town for three days for you," she said. "Listen, I'm a receptionist here in the music department. I don't have anything to do with the music, but I learned they have a problem here. You might be able to solve it. Would you care to try?"

Hank leaped at it like a piranha at raw meat. He had lost hope, drowned it in shame and misery, and had never considered turning his affliction to commercial use.

"Would I! Whatever it is. They don't have to pay me, either. Just give me an old sack to sleep on, and an old shoe to gnaw, and a kind word on Wednesdays."

"Well, come out, and I'll explain."

Singing strings, playing "Clap Hands, Here Comes Charley!" accompanied him to the studio.

Helen, in a pert blue dress and high heels, vouched for him at the gate and tucked a hand under his arm as they walked across the lot to the Administration Building.

"I had to tell Mr. Taran, the music director, what had happened to you," Helen said. "He didn't believe it, but he said if it was true you could be a big help in scoring scripts. He's got one for you to try."

"I can't write music."

"You won't need to. If you can make the right music as you read the script, they have musicians who can jot it down. Your audition is going to be on the toughest one they have. They've been wrangling about it in the music departments for weeks."

"I don't know," Hank said doubtfully. "I've never tried turning it on and off, like a phonograph."

"Oh, don't try," Helen said quickly. "The best part about it is what your subconscious does. You feel a certain way, and out comes the right music. Just forget the music when you read the script."

Hank was introduced to the dark, whip-like Mr. Taran, who was in turn skeptical, interested, amazed, and finally respectful when Hank read the script. As in his single venture in radio broadcasting, appropriate music was played by a variety of orchestras. There was hot swing and stinging brasses for a dance sequence, jive for a dive, and a bank of shimmering violins for a moonrise over a lake.

"This is colossal!" said Mr. Taran. "Wait till I call Mr. Vortel."

Hank went through his paces for a series of officials, and was happy to find that these men not only did not regard his ability with distrust and fear, but expressed an honest admiration for his talent and forecast a brilliant future.

He auditioned for several days, during which the rains came to Southern California. They held up contractual negotiations to see if the change in weather affected Hank's performance.

It did not. He provided the right music at the right time, and in addition provided a pleasant note of irony by walking through downpours accompanied by an energetic rendition of "Rain, Rain, Go Away!"

Finally they signed a contract, an ironclad document, for they regarded Hank as a valuable property and did not wish to chance his bettering himself at a rival studio. The contract expressly stated that as long as Hank reported for duty and was able to produce music he was to be paid a beginning salary of \$1000 each week, with a rising scale adjusted to the passage of time. Any possible breach was defined in its clauses, and huge forfeits were required for same.

In celebration, Hank took Helen to dinner that evening. They braved the rain and flooded streets to dine at a swank Mecca of cookery. Hank's happiness was so incoherent that their meal was accompanied by soft, invisible string combinations playing purring little tunes that had no names.

"Gosh!" Hank said in awe as they lit cigarettes over their coffee. "I still don't believe it."

"I'm terribly glad I happened to think of you," Helen said. "I've been worried about you."

Hank subjected her to a silent, though pleasant, scrutiny. Her blondeness, her pertness, her sleekness in the simple white evening gown made a neat and desirable package.

"I can't tell you, Helen, how honest-to-God happy I am. I'd got used to this screwy situation, and don't even hear the music myself, but it bid fair to wreck my chances at a job. I wish I could do something you'd like to express my appreciation."

She didn't speak, but her eyes had an expectant light.

Hank Smiley was not one to take the long way round. "I might as well find out," he said. "The only way I know is to ask. Do you think you could get used to the music, too, and not hear it after a while?"

She smiled at him, but her eyes were serious. "Almost everybody is trying to hide something, Hank. You've turned a liability into an asset, but you're still trying to hide it. As long as you're conscious of it, I can't forget it. It'll be easy for me to forget it as soon as you do."

“Well, I was ashamed of it for a long time,” Hank admitted. “But that seems silly. I’ll forget it, all right.”

“Then,” Helen said, “sure I’ll marry you.”

Hank’s happiness soared to impossible peaks during the remainder of the evening. The dark brown future he had envisioned had become a bright blue present. He had a job, he had a girl, and life was marvelous. Until it was time to take Helen home, the various orchestras subject to his mental beck and call improvised on the theme of love, with “You Go To My Head,” “It’s the Talk of the Town,” excerpts from *Tristan und Isolde*, and others.

He overcame his self-consciousness to such an extent that he took off his shoes and socks to carry Helen across an ankle-deep sidewalk to her door and she heard the tinkle of little invisible bells that sounded whenever Hank walked barefoot. They chuckled at this, Hank’s most carefully guarded secret. She thought it was delicious.

So, after a brief idyllic honeymoon, Hank reported for work. He was happy. He knew it. He wanted others to know.

They soon did.

He had been on the pay roll two months when studio heads met in an ornate office in a final despairing effort to solve a problem that had become intolerable. Hank was not present at this meeting, for he had been banished some weeks before to a sound-proof cubicle at the far edge of Colossal’s lot. He was represented by his attorney, however, and that gentleman was firm.

“You can’t break his contract!” he told the assembled officials and the studio attorney. He pounded the desk a little. “Read his contract. As long as he reports for work and produces music, you’ve got to pay him. He can’t be fired except for certain breaches he hasn’t made and won’t make.”

One of the officials, a bald man called Moe by the others, seemed near to tears. “A thousand good dollars, a grand a week we’re paying!” he wailed. “It ain’t right. It ain’t decent!”

Hank’s attorney was like a rock. “You can’t do anything but hope he’ll pull out of this groove. I’m ashamed of you all, making such a hullabaloo over this. My God, haven’t you any sympathy for my client?”

“Sure we got sympathy,” Moe interrupted. “But just thinking about it gives me the creepy jeebies. Ever since he went to work here, day and night and maybe even holidays, over and over and over and *over* he’s playing only ‘Happy Days Are Here Again!’ ”

Unfortunately, we have learned but little about Perceval Landon, whose Thurnley Abbey was published in England in 1908. But the story itself is sufficient evidence of its author's stature, though it has occasioned long and serious arguments between us. One editor claims that it is unequaled among the innumerable chronicles of haunting and the horror thereof, while the other holds that it is merely one of the three most terrifying stories in the English language. We leave the final decision to you, with the warning that in the supernatural field, things are not always what they seem . . . or even what they seem not to be.

Thurnley Abbey

by PERCEVAL LANDON

THREE YEARS AGO I WAS ON my way out to the East, and as an extra day in London was of some importance I took the Friday evening mail-train to Brindisi instead of the usual Thursday morning Marseilles express. Many people shrink from the long forty-eight-hour train journey through Europe, and the subsequent rush across the Mediterranean on the nineteen-knot *Isis* or *Osiris*; but there is really very little discomfort on either the train or the mail-boat, and, unless there is actually nothing for me to do, I always like to save the extra day and a half in London before I say good-bye to her for one of my longer tramps.

This time — it was early, I remember, in the shipping season, probably about the beginning of September — there were few passengers, and I had a compartment in the P. & O. Indian express to myself all the way from Calais. All Sunday I watched the blue waves dimpling the Adriatic, and the pale rosemary along the cuttings; the plain white towns, with their flat roofs and their bold *duomos*, and the grey-green, gnarled, olive orchards of Apulia. The journey was just like any other. We ate in the dining-car as often and as long as we decently could. We slept after luncheon; we dawdled the afternoon away with yellow-backed novels; sometimes we ex-

From "Raw Edges," by Perceval Landon, published by William Heinemann, Ltd.

changed platitudes in the smoking room, and it was there that I met Alastair Colvin.

Colvin was a man of middle height, with a resolute, well-cut jaw; his hair was turning grey; his moustache was sun-whitened, otherwise he was clean-shaven — obviously a gentleman, and obviously also a pre-occupied man. He had no great wit. When spoken to, he made the usual remarks in the right way, and I dare say he refrained from banalities only because he spoke less than the rest of us; most of the time he buried himself in the Wagon-lit Company's time-table, but seemed unable to concentrate his attention on any one page of it. He found that I had been over the Siberian railway, and for a quarter of an hour he discussed it with me. Then he lost interest in it, and rose to go to his compartment. But he came back again very soon, and seemed glad to pick up the conversation again.

Of course this did not seem to me to be of any importance. Most travellers by train become a trifle infirm of purpose after thirty-six hours' rattling. But Colvin's restless way I noticed in somewhat marked contrast with the man's personal importance and dignity; especially ill-suited was it to his finely made, large hand with its strong, broad, regular nails and its few lines. As I looked at his hand I noticed a long, deep and recent scar of ragged shape. However, it is absurd to pretend that I thought anything was unusual. I went off at five o'clock on Sunday afternoon to sleep away the hour or two that had still to be got through before we arrived at Brindisi.

Once there, we few passengers transhipped our hand baggage, verified our berths — there were only a score of us in all — and then, after an aimless ramble of half an hour in Brindisi, we returned to dinner at the Hotel International, not wholly surprised that the town had been the death of Virgil. If I remember rightly, there is a gaily painted hall at the International — I do not wish to advertise anything, but there is no other place in Brindisi at which to await the coming of the mails — and after dinner I was looking with awe at a trellis overgrown with blue vines; when Colvin moved across the room to my table. He picked up *Il Secolo*, but almost immediately gave up the pretence of reading it. He turned squarely to me and said: "Would you do me a favour?"

One doesn't do favours to stray acquaintances on Continental expresses without knowing something more of them than I knew of Colvin. But I smiled in a non-committal way, and asked him what he wanted.

“Will you let me sleep in your cabin on the *Osiris*?” And he coloured a little as he said it.

Now, there is nothing more tiresome than having to put up with a stable-companion at sea, and I asked him rather pointedly:

“Surely there is room for all of us?” I thought that perhaps he had been partnered off with some mangy cabin-mate, and wanted to escape from him at all hazards.

Colvin, still somewhat confused, said: “Yes, I am in a cabin by myself. But you would do me the greatest favour if you would allow me to share yours.”

This was all very well, but, besides the fact that I always sleep better when alone, there had been some recent thefts on board English liners, and I hesitated, frank and honest and self-conscious as Colvin was. Just then the mail-train came in with a clatter and a rush of escaping steam, and I asked him to see me again about it on the boat when we started. He answered me curtly — I suppose he saw the mistrust in my manner — “I am a member of White’s.” I smiled to myself as he said it, but I remembered in a moment that the man — if he were really what he claimed to be, and I make no doubt that he was — must have been sorely put to it before he urged the fact as a guarantee of his respectability to a total stranger at a Brindisi hotel.

That evening, as we cleared the red and green harbour-lights of Brindisi, Colvin explained. This is his story in his own words.

“When I was travelling in India some years ago, I made the acquaintance of a youngish man in the Woods and Forests. We camped out together for a week, and I found him a pleasant companion. John Broughton was a light-hearted soul when off duty, but a steady and capable man in any of the small emergencies that continually arise in that department. He was liked and trusted by the natives, and, though a trifle over-pleased with himself when he escaped to civilization at Simla or Calcutta, Broughton’s future was well assured in Government service when a fair-sized estate was unexpectedly left to him, and he joyfully shook the dust of the Indian plains from his feet and returned to England.

“For five years he drifted about London. I saw him now and then. We dined together about every eighteen months, and I could trace pretty

exactly the gradual sickening of Broughton with a merely idle life. He then set out on a couple of long voyages, returned as restless as before, and at last told me that he had decided to marry and settle down at his place, Thurnley Abbey, which had long been empty. He spoke about looking after the property and standing for his constituency in the usual way. Vivien Wilde, his fiancee, had, I suppose, begun to take him in hand. She was a pretty girl with a deal of fair hair and rather an exclusive manner; deeply religious in a narrow school, she was still kindly and high-spirited and I thought that Broughton was in luck. He was quite happy and full of information about his future.

“Among other things, I asked him about Thurnley Abbey. He confessed that he hardly knew the place. The last tenant, a man called Clarke, had lived in one wing for fifteen years and seen no one. He had been a miser and a hermit. It was the rarest thing for a light to be seen at the Abbey after dark. Only the barest necessities of life were ordered, and the tenant himself received them at the sidedoor. His one half-caste manservant, after a month’s stay in the house, had abruptly left without warning, and had returned to the Southern States.

“One thing Broughton complained bitterly about: Clarke had wilfully spread the rumour among the villagers that the Abbey was haunted, and had even condescended to play childish tricks with spirit-lamps and salt in order to scare trespassers away at night. He had been detected in the act of this tomfoolery, but the story spread, and no one, said Broughton, would venture near the house, except in broad daylight. The hauntedness of Thurnley Abbey was now, he said with a grin, part of the gospel of the countryside, but he and his young wife were going to change all that. Would I propose myself any time I liked? I, of course, said I would, and equally, of course, intended to do nothing of the sort without a definite invitation.

“The house was put in thorough repair, though not a stick of the old furniture and tapestry was removed. Floors and ceilings were relaid; the roof was made water-tight again, and the dust of half a century was scoured out. He showed me some photographs of the place. It was called an Abbey, though as a matter of fact it had been only the infirmary of the long-vanished Abbey of Closter some five miles away. The larger part of this building remained as it had been in pre-Reformation days, but a wing had been added in Jacobean times, and that part of the house had been kept in

something like repair by Mr. Clarke. He had in both the ground and first floors set a heavy timber door, strongly barred with iron, in the passage between the earlier and the Jacobean parts of the house, and had entirely neglected the former. So there had been a good deal of work to be done.

“Broughton, whom I saw in London two or three times about this period, made a deal of fun over the positive refusal of the workmen to remain after sundown. Even after the electric light had been put into every room, nothing would induce them to remain, though, as Broughton observed, electric light was death on ghosts. The legend of the Abbey’s ghosts had gone far and wide, and the men would take no risks. They went home in batches of five and six, and even during the daylight hours there was an inordinate amount of talking between one and another, if either happened to be out of sight of his companion. On the whole, though nothing of any sort or kind had been conjured up even by their heated imaginations during their five months’ work upon the Abbey, the belief in the ghosts was rather strengthened than otherwise in Thurnley because of the men’s confessed nervousness, and local tradition declared itself in favour of the ghost of an immured nun.

“ ‘Good old nun!’ said Broughton.

“I asked him whether in general he believed in the possibility of ghosts, and, rather to my surprise, he said that he couldn’t say he entirely disbelieved in them. A man in India had told him one morning in camp that he believed that his mother was dead in England, as her vision had come to his tent the night before. He had not been alarmed, but had said nothing, and the figure vanished again. As a matter of fact, the next possible *dak-walla* brought on a telegram announcing the mother’s death. ‘There the thing was,’ said Broughton. But at Thurnley he was practical enough. He roundly cursed the idiotic selfishness of Clarke, whose silly antics had caused all the inconvenience. At the same time, he couldn’t refuse to sympathize to some extent with the ignorant workmen. ‘My own idea,’ said he, ‘is that if a ghost ever does come in one’s way, one ought to speak to it.’

“I agreed. Little as I knew of the ghost world and its conventions, I had always remembered that a spook was in honour bound to wait to be spoken to. It didn’t seem much to do, and I felt that the sound of one’s own voice would at any rate reassure oneself as to one’s wakefulness. But there are few ghosts outside Europe — few, that is, that a white man can see — and I had

never been troubled with any. However, as I have said, I told Broughton that I agreed.

“So the wedding took place, and I went to it in a tall hat which I bought for the occasion, and the new Mrs. Broughton smiled very nicely at me afterwards. As it had to happen, I took the Orient Express that evening and was not in England again for nearly six months. Just before I came back I got a letter from Broughton. He asked if I could see him in London or come to Thurnley, as he thought I should be better able to help him than anyone else he knew. His wife sent a nice message to me at the end, so I was reassured about at least one thing. I wrote from Budapest that I would come and see him at Thurnley two days after my arrival in London, and as I sauntered out of the Pannonia into the Kerepesi Utcza to post my letters, I wondered of what earthly service I could be to Broughton. I had been out with him after tiger on foot, and I could imagine few men better able at a pinch to manage their own business. However, I had nothing to do, so after dealing with some small accumulations of business during my absence, I packed a kit-bag and departed to Euston.

“I was met by Broughton’s great limousine at Thurnley Road station, and after a drive of nearly seven miles we echoed through the sleepy streets of Thurnley village, into which the main gates of the park thrust themselves, splendid with pillars and spread-eagles and tom-cats rampant atop of them. I never was a herald, but I know that the Broughtons have the right to supporters — heaven knows why! From the gates a quadruple avenue of beech-trees led inwards for a quarter of a mile. Beneath them a neat strip of fine turf edged the road and ran back until the poison of the dead beech leaves killed it under the trees. There were many wheel tracks on the road, and a comfortable little pony trap jogged past me laden with a country parson and his wife and daughter. Evidently there was some garden-party going on at the Abbey. The road dropped away to the right at the end of the avenue, and I could see the Abbey across a wide pasturage and a broad lawn thickly dotted with guests.

“The end of the building was plain. It must have been almost mercilessly austere when it was first built, but time had crumbled the edges and toned the stone down to an orange-lichened grey wherever it showed behind its curtain of magnolia, jasmine, and ivy. Farther on was the three-storied Jacobean house, tall and handsome. There had not been the slightest attempt

to adapt the one to the other, but the kindly ivy had glossed over the touching point. There was a tall *flèche* in the middle of the building, surmounting a small bell tower. Behind the house there rose the mountainous verdure of Spanish chestnuts all the way up the hill.

“Broughton had seen me coming from afar, and walked across from his other guests to welcome me before turning me over to the butler’s care. This man was sandy-haired and rather inclined to be talkative. He could, however, answer hardly any questions about the house; he had, he said, been there only three weeks. Mindful of what Broughton had told me, I made no inquiries about ghosts, though the room into which I was shown might have justified anything. It was a very large, low room with oak beams projecting from the white ceiling. Every inch of the walls, including the doors, was covered with tapestry, and a remarkably fine Italian four-post bedstead, heavily draped, added to the darkness and dignity of the place. All the furniture was old, well made, and dark. Underfoot there was a plain green pile carpet, and the only new thing about the room except the electric light fittings and the jugs and basins. Even the looking-glass on the dressing-table was an old pyramidal Venetian glass set in heavy repoussé frame of tarnished silver.

“After a few minutes’ cleaning up, I went downstairs and out upon the lawn, where I greeted my hostess. The people gathered there were of the usual country type, all anxious to be pleased and roundly curious as to the new master of the Abbey. Rather to my surprise, and quite to my pleasure, I rediscovered Glenham, whom I had known well in old days in Barotsland; he lived quite close, as, he remarked with a grin, I ought to have known. ‘But,’ he added, ‘I don’t live in a place like this.’ He swept his hand to the long, low lines of the Abbey in obvious admiration, and then, to my intense interest, muttered beneath his breath: ‘Thank God!’ He saw that I had overheard him, and turning to me said decidedly: ‘Yes, “thank God” I said, and I meant it. I wouldn’t live at the Abbey for all Broughton’s money!’

“‘But surely,’ I demurred, ‘you know that old Clarke was discovered in the very act of setting light to his bug-a-boos?’

“Glenham shrugged his shoulders. ‘Yes, I know about that. But there is something wrong with the place still. All I can say is that Broughton is a different man since he has lived here. I don’t believe that he will remain much longer. But — you’re staying here? — well, you’ll hear all about it

tonight. There's a big dinner, I understand.' The conversation turned off to old reminiscences, and Glenham soon after had to go.

"Before I went to dress that evening I had twenty minutes' talk with Broughton in his library. There was no doubt that the man was altered, gravely altered. He was nervous and fidgety, and I found him looking at me only when my eye was off him. I naturally asked him what he wanted of me. I told him I would do anything I could, but that I couldn't conceive what he lacked that I could provide. He said with a lustreless smile that there was, however, something and that he would tell me the following morning. It struck me that he was somehow ashamed of himself, and perhaps ashamed of the part he was asking me to play. However, I dismissed the subject from my mind and went up to dress in my palatial room. As I shut the door a draught blew out the Queen of Sheba from the wall, and I noticed that the tapestries were not fastened to the wall at the bottom. I have always held very practical views about spooks, and it has often seemed to me that the slow waving in firelight of loose tapestry upon a wall would account for ninety-nine per cent of the stories one hears. Certainly the dignified undulation of this lady with her attendants and huntsmen — one of whom was untidily cutting the throat of a fallow deer upon the very steps on which King Solomon, a grey-faced Flemish nobleman with the order of the Golden Fleece, awaited his fair visitor — gave colour to my hypothesis.

"Nothing much happened at dinner. The people were very much like those of the garden-party. A young woman next me seemed anxious to know what was being read in London. As she was far more familiar than I with the most recent magazines and literary supplements, I found salvation in being myself instructed in the tendencies of modern fiction. All true art, she said, was shot through and through with melancholy. How vulgar were the attempts at wit that marked so many modern books! From the beginning of literature it had always been tragedy that embodied the highest attainment of every age. To call such works morbid merely begged the question. No thoughtful man — she looked sternly at me through the steel rim of her glasses — could fail to agree with her.

"Of course, as one would, I immediately and properly said that I slept with Pett Ridge and Jacobs under my pillow at night, and that if *Jorrocks* weren't quite so large and cornery, I would add him to the company. She hadn't read any of them, so I was saved — for a time. But I remember

grimly that she said that the dearest wish of her life was to be in some awful and soul-freezing situation of horror, and I remember that she dealt hardly with the hero of Nat Paynter's vampire story, between nibbles at her brown-bread ice. She was a cheerless soul, and I couldn't help thinking that if there were many such in the neighbourhood it was not surprising that old Glenham had been stuffed with some nonsense or other about the Abbey. Yet nothing could well have been less creepy than the glitter of silver and glass, and the subdued lights and cackle of conversation all round the dinner-table.

"After the ladies had gone I found myself talking to the rural dean. He was a thin, earnest man, who at once turned the conversation to old Clarke's buffooneries. But, he said, Mr. Broughton had introduced such a new and cheerful spirit, not only into the Abbey but, he might say, into the whole neighbourhood, that he had great hopes that the ignorant superstitions of the past were from henceforth destined to oblivion. Thereupon his other neighbour, a portly gentleman of independent means and position, audibly remarked 'Amen,' which damped the rural dean, and we talked of partridges past, partridges present, and pheasants to come. At the other end of the table Broughton sat with a couple of his friends, red-faced hunting men. Once I noticed that they were discussing me, but I paid no attention to it at the time. I remembered it a few hours later.

"By eleven all the guests were gone, and Broughton, his wife, and I were alone together under the fine plaster ceiling of the Jacobean drawing-room. Mrs. Broughton talked about one or two of the neighbours, and then, with a smile, said that she knew I would excuse her, shook hands with me, and went off to bed. I am not very good at analysing things, but I felt that she talked a little uncomfortably and with a suspicion of effort, smiled rather conventionally, and was obviously glad to go. These things seem trifling enough to repeat, but I had throughout the faint feeling that everything was not square. Under the circumstances, this was enough to set me wondering what on earth the service could be that I was to render — wondering also whether the whole business were not some ill-advised jest in order to make me come down from London for a mere shooting-party.

"Broughton said little after she had gone. But he was evidently labouring to bring the conversation round to the so-called haunting of the Abbey. As soon as I saw this, of course, I asked him directly about it. He then seemed at once to lose interest in the matter. There was no doubt about it: Brough-

ton was somehow a changed man and to my mind he had changed in no way for the better. Mrs. Broughton seemed no sufficient cause. He was clearly very fond of her, and she of him. I reminded him that he was going to tell me what I could do for him in the morning, pleaded my journey, lighted a candle, and went upstairs with him. At the end of the passage leading into the old house he grinned weakly and said: 'Mind, if you see a ghost, do talk to it; you said you would.' He stood irresolutely a moment and then turned away. At the door of his dressing-room he paused once more: 'I'm here,' he called out, 'if you should want anything. Good night,' and he shut his door quietly.

"I went along the passage to my room, undressed, switched on a lamp beside my bed, read a few pages of the *Jungle Book*, and then, more than ready for sleep after my long day, turned the light off and went fast asleep.

"Three hours later I woke up. There was not a breath of wind outside. There was not even a flicker of light from the fireplace. As I lay there, an ash tinkled slightly as it cooled, but there was hardly a gleam of the dull red in the grate. An owl cried among the silent Spanish chestnuts on the slope outside. I idly reviewed the events of the day, hoping that I should fall off to sleep again before I reached dinner. But at the end I seemed as wakeful as ever. There was no help for it. I must read my *Jungle Book* again till I felt ready to go off, so I fumbled for the pear at the end of the cord that hung down inside the bed, and I switched on the bedside lamp. The sudden glory dazzled me for a moment. I felt under my pillow for my book with half-shut eyes. Then, growing used to the light, I happened to look down to the foot of my bed.

"I can never tell you really what happened then. Nothing I could ever confess in the most abject words could even faintly picture to you what I felt. I know that my heart stopped dead, and my throat shut automatically. In one instinctive movement I crouched back up against the head-boards of the bed, staring at the horror. The movement set my heart going again, and the sweat dripped from every pore. I am not a particularly religious man, but I had always believed that God would never allow any supernatural appearance to present itself to man in such a guise and in such circumstances that harm, either bodily or mental, could result to him. I can

only tell you that at that moment both my life and my reason rocked unsteadily on their seats.”

The other *Osiris* passengers had gone to bed. Only he and I remained leaning over the starboard railing, which rattled uneasily now and then under the fierce vibration of the over-engined mail-boat. Far over, there were the lights of a few fishing-smacks riding out the night, and a great rush of white combing and seething water fell out and away from us overside.

At last Colvin went on:

“Leaning over the foot of my bed, looking at me, was a figure swathed in a rotten and tattered veiling. This shroud passed over the head, but left both eyes and the right side of the face bare. It then followed the line of the arm down to where the hand grasped the bed-end. The face was not entirely that of a skull, though the eyes and the flesh of the face were totally gone. There was a thin, dry skin drawn tightly over the features, and there was some skin left on the hand. One wisp of hair crossed the forehead. It was perfectly still. I looked at it, and it looked at me, and my brains turned dry and hot in my head. I had still got the pear of the electric lamp in my hand, and I played idly with it; only I dared not turn the light out again. I shut my eyes only to open them in a hideous terror the same second. The thing had not moved. My heart was thumping, and the sweat cooled me as it evaporated. Another cinder tinkled in the grate, and a panel creaked in the wall.

“My reason failed me. For twenty minutes, or twenty seconds, I was able to think of nothing else but this awful figure, till there came, hurtling through the empty channels of my senses, the remembrance that Broughton and his friends had discussed me furtively at dinner. The dim possibility of its being a hoax stole gratefully into my unhappy mind, and once there, one’s pluck came creeping back along a thousand tiny veins. My first sensation was one of blind, unreasoning thankfulness that my brain was going to stand the trial. I am not a timid man, but the best of us needs some human handle to steady him in time of extremity, and in this faint but growing hope that after all it might be only a brutal hoax, I found the fulcrum that I needed. At last I moved.

“How I managed to do it I cannot tell you, but with one spring towards the foot of the bed I got within arm’s length and struck out one fearful blow

with my fist at the thing. It crumbled under it, and my hand was cut to the bone. With a sickening revulsion after my terror, I dropped half-fainting across the end of the bed. So it was merely a foul trick after all. No doubt the trick had been played many a time before: no doubt Broughton and his friends had had some large bet among themselves as to what I should do when I discovered the gruesome thing. From my state of abject terror I found myself transported into an insensate anger. I shouted curses upon Broughton. I dived rather than climbed over the bed-end on the sofa. I tore at the robed skeleton — how well the whole thing had been carried out, I thought — I broke the skull against the floor, and stamped upon its dry bones. I flung the head away under the bed, and rent the brittle bones of the trunk in pieces. I snapped the thin thigh-bones across my knee, and flung them in different directions. The shin-bones I set up against a stool and broke with my heel. I raged like a Berserker against the loathly thing, and stripped the ribs from the backbone and slung the breastbone against the cupboard.

“At last my work was done. There was but a raffle of broken bones and strips of parchment and crumbling wool. Then, picking up a piece of the skull — it was the cheek and temple bone of the right side, I remember — I opened the door and went down the passage to Broughton’s dressing-room.

“Broughton was in bed. He had already turned the light on and seemed shrunken and horrified. For a moment he could hardly pull himself together. Then I spoke. I don’t know what I said. I only know that from a heart full and over-full with hatred and contempt, spurred on by shame of my own recent cowardice, I let my tongue run on. He answered nothing. I was amazed at my own fluency. My hair still clung lankily to my wet temples, my hand was bleeding profusely, and I must have looked a strange sight. Broughton huddled himself up at the head of the bed just as I had. Still he made no answer, no defence. He seemed preoccupied with something beside my reproaches, and once or twice moistened his lips with his tongue.

“At last the door into Mrs. Broughton’s room opened and she came in, white and terrified. ‘What is it? What is it? Oh, in God’s name, what is it?’ she cried again and again, and then she went up to her husband and sat on the bed in her night-dress, and the two faced me. I told her what the matter was. I spared her husband not a word for her presence there.

“‘I have smashed the foul thing into a hundred pieces.’ I said. Broughton

licked his lips again and his mouth worked. 'By God!' I shouted, 'it would serve you right if I thrashed you within an inch of your life. I will take care that no decent man or woman of my acquaintance ever speaks to you again. And there,' I added, throwing the broken piece of the skull upon the floor beside his bed — 'there is a souvenir for you of your damned work tonight!'

"Broughton saw the bone, and in a moment it was his turn to frighten me. He squealed like a hare caught in a trap. He screamed and screamed till Mrs. Broughton, almost as bewildered as myself, held onto him and coaxed him like a child to be quiet. But Broughton — and as he moved I thought that ten minutes ago I perhaps looked as terribly ill as he did — thrust her from him, and scrambled out of the bed on to the floor, and still screaming put out his hand to the bone. It had blood on it from my hand. He paid no attention to me whatever. In truth I said nothing. This was a new turn indeed to the horrors of the evening. He rose from the floor with the bone in his hand and stood silent. He seemed to be listening. 'Time, time, perhaps,' he muttered, and almost at the same moment fell at full length on the carpet, cutting his head against the fender. The bone flew from his hand and came to rest near the door. I picked Broughton up, haggard and broken, with blood over his face. He whispered hoarsely and quickly: 'Listen, listen!'

"After ten seconds' utter quiet, I seemed to hear something, I could not be sure, but at last there was no doubt. There was a quiet sound as of one moving along the passage. Little regular steps came towards us over the hard oak flooring. Broughton moved to where his wife sat, white and speechless, on the bed, and pressed her face into his shoulder.

"Then, the last thing that I could see as he turned the light out, he fell forward with his own head pressed into the pillow of the bed. Something in their company, something in their cowardice, helped me, and I faced the open doorway of the room which was outlined fairly clearly against the dimly lighted passage. I put out one hand and touched Mrs. Broughton's shoulder in the darkness. But at the last moment I too failed. I sank on my knees and put my face in the bed. Only we all heard. The footsteps came to the door, and there they stopped. The piece of bone was lying a yard inside the door. There was a rustle of moving stuff, and the thing was in the room. Mrs. Broughton was silent; I could hear Broughton's voice praying, muffled in the pillow; I was cursing my own cowardice. Then the steps moved out again on the oak boards of the passage, and I heard the sounds dying away.

In a flash of remorse I went to the door and looked out. At the end of the corridor I thought I saw something that moved away. A moment later the passage was empty.

“‘You can turn the light on,’ I said, and there was an answering flare. There was no bone at my feet. Mrs. Broughton had fainted. Broughton was almost useless, and it took me ten minutes to bring her to. Broughton only said one thing worth remembering: ‘You didn’t speak to her.’

“We spent the remainder of the night together. Mrs. Broughton actually fell off into a kind of sleep before dawn, but she suffered so horribly in her dreams that I shook her into consciousness again. Never was dawn so long in coming. Three or four times Broughton spoke to himself. Mrs. Broughton would then just tighten her hold on his arm, but she could say nothing.

“At last, when the light came in pretty strongly, and the birds outside were chattering and singing, we felt that we must do something. Yet we never moved. You might have thought that we should particularly dislike being found as we were by the servants: yet nothing of that kind mattered a straw, and an overpowering listlessness found us as we sat, until Chapman, Broughton’s man, actually knocked and opened the door. None of us moved. Broughton, speaking hardly and stiffly, said: ‘Chapman, you can come back in five minutes.’

“We looked at one another and I said I must go back. I meant to wait outside until Chapman returned. I simply dared not re-enter my bedroom alone. Broughton roused himself and said that he would come with me. Mrs. Broughton agreed to remain in her own room for five minutes if the blinds were drawn up and all the doors left open.

“So Broughton and I, leaning stiffly one against the other, went down to my room. By the morning light that filtered past the blinds we could see our way, and I released the blinds. There was nothing wrong in the room from end to end, except smears of my own blood on the end of the bed, on the sofa and on the carpet where I had torn the thing to pieces.”

Colvin had finished his story. There was nothing to say. Seven bells stuttered out from the fo’c’sle, and the answering cry wailed through the darkness. I took him downstairs.

“Of course I am much better now, but it is a kindness of you to let me sleep in your cabin.”

There is little to say about this splendid story. Only that Philip MacDonald has written what we, personally, think to be one of the three most terrifying stories we have ever read. There are no ghosts in it. No crawling horrors from hell. No vampires or werewolves. Just prepare yourself to meet the most chilling terror of all. That which was and is not. That which is more deadly than death for the dead are remembered.

Private—Keep Out!

by PHILIP MACDONALD

THE WORLD goes mad — and people tend to put the cause of its sickness down to Man; sometimes even to one particular little man. Perhaps, only a few months ago, I would have thought like this myself about the existing outbreak of virulent insanity — but now I can't.

I can't because of something which happened to me a little while ago. I was in Southern California, working at Paramount. Most days, I used to get to the studio about ten and leave at five forty-five, but on this particular evening — it was Wednesday, the 18th of June — I was a little late getting away.

I went out through the front hall and hurried across the street to the garage. The entrance is a tunnelled archway. It was fairly dark in there — and I bumped square into a man who'd either been on his way out or standing there in the deepest part of the shadow. The latter didn't seem probable, but I had an odd sort of feeling that that was just what he had been doing.

"Sorry," I said. "I was . . ." I cut myself off short and stared. I recognized him, but what with the semi-darkness and the funny, stiff way he was standing and looking at me, I couldn't place him. It wasn't one of those half-memories of having once met someone somewhere. It was a definite, full-fledged memory which told me this man had been a friend closely knit into my particular life-pattern, and not so long ago.

He turned away — and something about the movement slipped the loose memory-cog back into place. It was Charles Moffat — Charles who'd been

a friend for fifteen years; Charles whom I hadn't seen or heard about since he'd gone east in a mysterious hurry two years ago; Charles whom I was delighted to see again; Charles who'd changed amazingly; Charles, as I realized with a shock, who must have been very ill.

I shouted his name and leapt after him and grabbed him by the arm and swung him around to face me.

"You old sucker!" I said. "Don't you know me?"

He smiled with his mouth but nothing happened to his eyes. He said:

"How are you? I thought you'd forgotten me."

It should have been a jest — but it wasn't. I felt . . . *uncomfortable*.

"It's so damn' dark in here!" I said, and dragged him out into the sunshine of the street. His arm felt very thin.

"Straight over to Lucey's for a drink!" I was prattling and knew it. "We can talk there. Listen, Charles: you've been ill, haven't you? I can see it. Why didn't you let me know?"

He didn't answer, and I went on babbling rubbish; trying to talk myself out of the . . . the *apprehensiveness* which seemed to be oozing out of him and wrapping itself around the pair of us like a grey fog. I kept looking at him as we walked past the barber's and reached the corner and turned towards Melrose and its rushing river of traffic. He was looking straight ahead of him. He was extraordinarily thin: he must have lost twenty pounds — and he'd never been fat. I kept wishing I could see his eyes again, and then being glad I couldn't.

We stood on the curb by the auto-park and waited a chance to cross Melrose. The sun was low now, and I was shading my eyes from it when Charles spoke for the first time.

"I can use that drink," he said, but he still didn't look at me.

I half-turned, to get the sun out of my eyes — and noticed the briefcase for the first time. It was tucked firmly under his left arm and clamped tightly to his side. Even beneath his sleeve I could see an unusual tensing of the wasted muscles. I was going to say something, but a break came in the traffic and Charles plunged out into the road ahead of me.

It was cool in Lucey's bar, and almost empty. I wondered if the barman would remember Charles, then recalled that he'd only been here a couple of months. We ordered — a gin-and-tonic for me and a whiskey-sour for Charles which he put down in a couple of gulps.

"Another?" he said. He was looking at the pack of cigarettes in his hand. "Mine's long," I said. "Miss me this time."

While I finished my tall glass, he had two more whiskey-sours, the second with an absinthe float. I chatted, heavily. Charles didn't help: with the briefcase tucked under his arm and clamped against his side, he looked like a starving bird with one wing.

I bought another round — and began to exchange my uneasiness for a sort of anger. I said:

"Look here! This is damn ridiculous!" I swivelled around on my stool and stared at him.

He gave a small barking sound which I suppose was meant to be a laugh. He said:

"*Ridiculous!* . . . Maybe that's not *quite* the word, my boy."

He barked again — and I remembered his old laugh, a Gargantuan affair which would make strangers smile at thirty paces. My anger went and the other feeling came back.

"Look," I said, dropping my voice. "Tell me what's wrong, Charles. There's something awfully wrong. What *is* it?"

He stood up suddenly and clicked his fingers at the barman. "Two more," he said. "And don't forget the absinthe on mine."

He looked at me fully. His eyes were brighter now, but that didn't alter the look in them. I couldn't kid myself any more: it was fear — and, even to me who have seen many varieties of this unpleasant ailment, a new mixture. Not, in fact, as before, but a *new* fear; a fear which transcended all known variations upon the fear theme.

I suppose I sat there gaping at him. But he didn't look at me any more. He clamped the briefcase under his arm and turned away.

"Phone," he said. "Back in a minute."

He took a step and then halted, turning his head to speak to me over his shoulder. He said:

"Seen the Archers lately?" and then was gone.

That's exactly what he said, but at the time, I thought I must have mis-heard him — because I didn't know any Archers. Twenty-five years before, there'd been a John Archer at school with me but I hadn't known him well and hadn't liked what I did know.

I puzzled over this for a moment; then went back to my problem. What

was the matter with Charles? Where had he been all this time? Why hadn't anyone heard from or about him? Above all, what was he afraid of? And why should I be feeling, in the most extraordinary way, that life was a thin crust upon which we all moved perilously?

The barman, a placid crust-walker, set a new drink down in front of me and said something about the weather. I answered him eagerly, diving into a sunny sanctuary of platitude.

It did me good — until Charles came back. I watched him cross the room — and didn't like it. His clothes hung loose about him, with room for another Charles inside them. He picked up his drink and drained it. He drank with his left hand, because the briefcase was under his right arm now. I said: "Why don't you put that thing down? What's in it, anyway — nuggets?"

He shifted it under the other arm and looked at me for a moment. He said:

"Just some papers. Where're you dining?"

"With you." I made a quick mental cancellation. "Or you are with me, rather."

"Good!" He nodded jerkily. "Let's get a booth now. One of the end ones."

I stood up. "Okay. But if we're going to drink any more, I'll switch to a martini."

He gave the order and we left the bar and in a minute were facing each other in a far corner booth. Charles looked right at me now, and I couldn't get away from his eyes and what was in them. A waiter came with the drinks and put them in front of us and went away. I looked down at mine and began to fool with the toothpick which speared the olive.

"You're not a moron," he said suddenly. "Nor a cabbage. Ever wake up in the morning and know you know the Key — but when you reach for it, you can't remember it? It was just *there*. . . ." He made a vague, sharp gesture in the air, close to his head. "But it's gone the minute your waking mind reaches for it. Ever do that? Ever feel that? Not only when you wake maybe; perhaps at some other sort of time?"

He was looking down at the table now and I didn't have to see his eyes. He was looking down at his hands, claw-like as they fiddled with the brass locks on the briefcase. I said:

"What're you talking about? What key?" I was deliberately dense.

His eyes blazed at me with some of the old Carolian fire.

"Listen, numbskull!" He spoke without opening his teeth. "Have you, at any moment in your wretched existence, ever felt that you knew, only a moment before, the answer to . . . to *everything*? To the colossal WHY of the Universe? To the myriad questions entailed by the elaborate creation of Man? To . . . to *Everything*, you damned fool!"

I stopped pretending. "Once or twice," I said. "Maybe more than that. You mean that awful sensation that you're on the verge of knowing the . . . the Universal Answer: and you know it's amazingly simple and you wonder why you never thought of it before — and then you find you don't know it at all. It's gone; snatched away. And you go practically out of your mind trying to get it back but you never succeed. That's it, isn't it? I've had the feeling several times, notably coming out of ether. Everyone has. Why?"

He was fiddling with the briefcase again. "Why what?" he said dully. The momentary flash of the old fire had died away.

But I kept at him. I said:

"You can't start something like that and then throw it away. Why did you bring the subject up? Did you finally grab the Key this morning — or did it bite you — or what?"

He still didn't look up. He went on fiddling with the brass locks on the case.

"For God's sake, leave that thing alone!" My irritation was genuine enough. "It's getting on my nerves. Sit on it or something, if it's so precious. But quit *fiddling*!"

He stood up suddenly. He didn't seem to hear me.

"'Phone again," he said. "Sorry. Forgot something. Won't be long." He started away; then turned and slapped the case down in front of me. "Have a look through it. Might interest you."

And he was gone. I put my hands on the case and was just going to slip the locks back with my thumbs, when a most extraordinary sensation . . . *permeated* me is the only word I can think of. I was suddenly extremely loath to open the thing. I pushed it away from me with a quick involuntary gesture, as if it were hot to the touch.

And immediately I was ashamed of this childish behavior and took myself in hand and in a moment had it open and the contents spread in front of me.

They were mostly papers, and all completely innocuous and unrelated. If you tried for a year you couldn't get together a less alarming collection.

There was a program from the Frohman Theatre, New York, for a play called "Every Other Friday" which I remembered seeing in '31. There was a letter from the Secretary to the Dean of Harvard, with several pages of names attached to it, saying that in answer to Mr. Moffat's letter he would find attached the list he had requested of the Alumni of 1925. There was a letter from the Manager of a Fifth Avenue apartment house, courteously replying to Mr. Moffat's request for a list of the tenants of his penthouse during the years 1933 to 1935. There were several old bills from a strange miscellany of stores, a folded page from an old school magazine containing the photograph of the football team of C.M.I. in the year 1919, and a page torn from "Who's Who" around one entry of which heavy blue pencil lines had been drawn.

And that finished the papers. There were only three other things — an empty, much-worn photograph frame of leather, a small silver plate (obviously unscrewed from the base of some trophy) with the names *Charles Moffat* and *T. Perry Devonshire* inscribed upon it, and an old briar pipe with a charred bowl and broken mouthpiece but a shiny new silver band.

The photograph frame stared up at me from the white tablecloth. I picked it up — and, as I did so, was struck by a sudden but undefinable familiarity. I turned it over in my hands, struggling with the elusive memory-shape, and I saw that, although the front of it bore every sign of considerable age and usage, it had never in fact been used. It was one of those frames which you undo at the back to insert the photograph, and pasted across the joint between the body of the frame and the movable part was the original price tag, very old and very dirty, but still bearing the dim figures \$5.86.

I was still looking at it when Charles came back.

"Remember it?" he said.

I twisted the thing about, trying to find a new angle to look at it from. He said:

"It used to be on my desk. You've seen it hundreds of times."

I began to remember. I could see it sitting beside a horseshoe inkpot — but I couldn't see what was inside it. I said:

"I can't think what was in it." And then I remembered. "But there can't

have been anything." I turned the thing over and showed him the price tag. I was suddenly conscious of personal fear.

"Charles!" I said. "What the hell *is* all this?"

He spoke — but he didn't answer me. He picked up the collection of nonsense and put it back into the briefcase.

"Did you look at all the stuff?" he said.

I nodded, watching him. It seemed that we never looked at each other squarely, for his eyes were upon his hands.

"Did it suggest anything?" he said.

"Not a thing. How could it?" I saw that the knuckles of his interlocked fingers were white. "Look here, Charles, if you don't tell me what all this is about I'll go out of my mind."

And then the head waiter came. He smiled at me and bowed gravely to Charles and asked whether we wished to order.

I was going to tell him to wait, but Charles took the menu and looked at it and ordered something, so I did the same.

It was nearly dark outside now and they'd put on the lights. People were beginning to come in and there was quite a murmur of talk from the bar. I held my tongue: the moment had passed — I must wait for another.

They brought cocktails and we sipped them and smoked and didn't speak until Charles broke the silence. He said then, much too casually:

"So you haven't been seeing much of the Archers?"

"Charles," I said carefully, "I don't know anyone called Archer. I never have — except an unpleasant little tick at school."

Our eyes met now, and he didn't look away. But a waiter came with hors d'oeuvres. I refused them, but Charles heaped his plate and began to eat with strange voracity.

"These Archers?" I said at last. "Who are they? Anything to do with this . . . this . . . trouble you seem to have?"

He looked at me momentarily; then down at his plate again. He finished what was on it and leaned back and gazed at the wall over my right shoulder. He said:

"Adrian Archer was a great friend of mine." He took a cigarette from the pack on the table and lit it. "He was also a friend of yours."

The waiter came again and took away my full plate and Charles's empty one.

"What did you say?" I wasn't trusting my ears.

He took the briefcase from the seat beside him and groped in it and brought his hand out holding the extract from "Who's Who."

"Look at this." He handed me the sheet. "That's Adrian's father."

I took the paper, but went on staring at him. His eyes were glittering.

"Go on!" he said. "Read it."

The marked entry was short and prosaic. It was the history, in seven lines, of an Episcopalian minister named William Archibald Archer.

I read it carefully. I ought to have been feeling, I suppose, that Charles was a sick man. But I wasn't feeling anything of the sort. I can't describe what I was feeling.

I read the thing again.

"Look here, Charles," I said. "This man had three daughters. There's no mention of a son."

"Yes," said Charles. "I know."

He twitched the paper out of my hand and fished in the briefcase again and brought out the little silver plate. He said:

"In '29 I won the doubles in the Lakeside tennis tournament. Adrian Archer was my partner." His voice was flat, and the words without any emphasis. He handed the piece of metal across to me and once more I read *Charles Moffat — T. Perry Devonshire*. . . .

And then the waiter was with us again and for the longest half hour of my life I watched Charles devour his food while I pushed mine aside and drank a glass of wine. I watched him eat. I couldn't help myself. He ate with a sort of desperate determination; like a man clutching at the one reality.

Then, at last, the meal was over, with even the coffee gone and just brandy glasses before us. He began to talk. Not in the guarded, jerky way he had been using, but with words pouring out of him. He said:

"I'm going to tell you the story of Adrian Archer — straight. He was a contemporary of ours — in fact, I was at C.M.I. and Harvard with him. It was settled he should be a lawyer, but a year after he left Harvard he suddenly went on the stage. His father and all his friends — *you* included — advised him not to. But Adrian didn't pay any attention. He just smiled, with that odd, *secret* smile he'd use sometimes. He just smiled — and his rise to what they call fame was what they call meteoric. In three years he was a big name on Broadway. In four he was another in London. In six

they were billing his name before the title of the play — and in the eighth, Hollywood grabbed him and made what they call a star out of him in a period they call overnight. That was four years ago — same year that you and I first came out here. We were both at RKO when he made his terrific hit in *Judgment Day*, playing the blind man. . . .”

For the first time I interrupted.

“Charles!” I said. “Charles! I saw *Judgment Day*. Spencer Tracy played . . .”

“Yes,” said Charles. “I know. . . . When Adrian came to Hollywood, you and I were awfully glad to see him — and when Margaret came to join him and brought the kid and we’d installed them comfortably in a house on the Santa Monica Palisades, everything was fine.”

He drained the brandy in his glass and tipped some more into it from the bottle. The single lamp on the table threw sharp-angled shadows across his face. He said:

“Well, there they were. Adrian went from success to success in things like *The Key Above the Door*, *Fit for Heroes* and *Sunday’s Children*.”

He stopped again — and looked directly at me.

“I’m sorry for you,” he said suddenly. “It’s a bad spot to be in — meeting an old friend and finding he’s gone out of his mind. And pretending to listen while your mind’s busy with doctors’ names and ’phone numbers.”

I said: “I don’t know what I think — except that I’m not doubting your sanity. And I can’t understand why I’m not.”

I wished he’d stop looking at me now. But his eyes didn’t leave my face. He said:

“Seen the Mortimers lately?”

I jumped as if he’d hit me. But I answered in a minute.

“Of course I have,” I said. “I see ’em all the time. Frank and I have been working together. Matter of fact, I had dinner there only last night.”

His mouth twisted into the shape of a smile. “Still living on the Palisades, are they? 107 Paloma Drive?”

“Yes.” I tried to keep my voice steady. “They bought that place, you know.”

“Yes,” said Charles, “I know. The Archers had the next house, 109. You found it actually. Adrian liked it all right and Margaret and the boy were crazy about it, especially the pool.”

He drank some more brandy — and there was a long, sharp-edged silence. But I wouldn't say anything, and he began again. He said:

“D'you remember when you were at MGM two years ago? You were revamping that *Richard The Lion-Heart* job and you had to go to Del Monte on location?”

I nodded. I remembered very well.

“That,” said Charles, “was when it happened. The Mortimers gave a cocktail party. At least, that's what it started out to be, but it was after midnight when I left — with the Archers. I'd parked my car at the corner of Paloma and Palisade, right outside their house, so I walked along with them and went in for a nightcap. It was pretty hot, and we sat on the patio, looking over the swimming pool. There weren't any servants up and Adrian went into the house for the drinks. He'd been very quiet all night and not, I thought, looking particularly fit. I said something casual about this to Margaret — and then was surprised when she took me up, very seriously. She said: 'Charles: he's worried — and so am I!' I remember looking at her and finding that her eyes were grave and troubled as I'd never seen them. 'Charles,' she said, 'he's . . . *frightened* — and so am I!' ”

Charles broke off again. He pulled out a handkerchief and I saw that sweat was glistening on his forehead. He said:

“Before I could say anything Adrian came out with a tray and put it down and began mixing drinks. He looked at Margaret — and asked what we'd been talking about and wouldn't be put off. She looked apprehensive when I told him, but he didn't seem to mind. He gave us both drinks and took one himself — and suddenly asked me a question I asked you earlier this evening.”

“About the Key?” My voice surprised me: I hadn't told it to say anything. Charles nodded. But he didn't go on.

“Then what?” said my voice. “Then what?”

“It's funny,” he said. “But this is the first time I've told all this — and I've just realized I should've begun at the other end and said *I* was worried and frightened. Because I was — had been for weeks. . . .”

A frightful feeling of verification swept over me. I said excitedly:

“By God, I remember. About the time I went on location you were sort of down. You'd had a polo spill. I was a bit worried about you, but you said you were O.K. . . .”

For a moment I thought he was going to break. He looked — *Charles Moffat* looked — as if he were going to weep. But he took hold of himself, and the jaw-muscles in his face stood out like wire rope. He said:

“The doctor said I was all right. But I wasn’t. Not by a mile! There was only one thing wrong with me — but that was plenty. I wasn’t sleeping. It may have been something to do with the crack on the head or it may not. But, whatever it was, it was bad. Very bad. And dope made no difference — except, perhaps, for the worse. I’d *go* to sleep all right — but then I’d keep waking up. And that was the bad part. Because every time I’d wake, that God-damned Key would be a little nearer. . . . At first, it wasn’t so worrying — merely an irritation. But as it went on, stronger and stronger, three and four and six times a night — well, it was *bad!*”

He stopped abruptly. His tongue seemed to be trying to moisten his lips. He took a swallow of brandy and then, incredibly, a long draught of water. The film of sweat was over his forehead again, and he mopped at it absent-mindedly, with the back of his hand. He said:

“So there you are: and we’re back again — half in moonlight, half in shadow — on Adrian’s patio, and he’s just asked me the question and Margaret is leaning forward, her chin cupped in her hands and I can feel her eyes on my face and I’m staring at Adrian in amazement that *he* should ask *me* whether *I* know what it’s like to feel that you’re coming nearer and nearer to the Answer — that simple, A.B.C. *answer* which has always eluded Man; the Answer which is forbidden to Man but which, when it’s dangled in front of his nose like a donkey’s carrot, he’s bound to clutch for desperately. . . .

“We were pretty full of drink — you know what the Mortimer hospital-ity’s like — and once I’d got over the awful shock of egotistical surprise at finding that another man, and my greatest friend to boot, was being ridden by a demon I’d considered my own personal property, we began to talk thirty to the dozen, while Margaret turned those great dark eyes upon us in turn. There was fear in them, but we went on, theorizing to reduce *our* fear, and traced the *Key-awareness* back to our adolescence and wondered why we’d never told each other about it at school and gradually — with the decanter getting lower and lower and the impossible California moon beginning to pale — began to strive to put into words what we *thought* might be the *shape* of the Key. . . .

“We didn’t get very far and we didn’t make much sense: who can when they’re talking about things for which there are no words. But we frightened ourselves badly — and Margaret. We began to talk — or Adrian did, rather, because he was much *nearer* than I’d ever been — we began to talk about the feeling that made it all the more essential to grasp the thing; the feeling that the knowledge wasn’t *allowed*. And Margaret suddenly jumped to her feet, and a glass fell from the wicker table and smashed on the tiles with a thin, shivering ring. I can remember what she said. I can hear her say it any time I want to and many times when I don’t. She looked down at us — and she seemed, I remember, to look very tall although she was a little woman. She said: ‘Look at it all! *Look!*’ and she made a great sweeping gesture with her arms towards everything in the world outside this little brick place where we were sitting. And then she said: ‘Leave it there — *leave it!*’ . . .”

Charles shivered — like a man with ague. And then he took hold of himself. I could see the jaw-muscles again, and the shine of the sweat on his forehead. He said at last:

“Margaret sort of crumpled up and fell back into her chair. She looked small again, and tears were rolling slowly down her cheeks. I know she didn’t know there were any tears. She sat with her head up and her arms on the edge of the table and stared out at the world beyond the swimming pool; the world which was turning from solid, moon-shot darkness to vague and nebulous and unhappy grey. Adrian got up. He sat on the arm of her chair and put an arm around her shoulders and laid his cheek against her hair. They were very still and absolutely silent. I couldn’t stand it and went into the house and found Adrian’s cellar and a couple of bottles of Perrier Jouet — it was ’28, I remember — and put some ice in a pail and found some glasses and took my loot back to the patio. They were still exactly as I’d left them and I shouted at them to break that immobility: I didn’t like it. . . .

“It broke all right — and I fooled around with the pail and the bottles and began talking a streak and at last shoved some wine down their throats and put away half a pint at a swallow myself and started in to be very funny. . . .

“Adrian began to help me — and we played the fool and drank the second bottle and he found a third and at last we got Margaret laughing and then he stole the curtain with a very nice swan dive from the patio-wall into the pool, ruining a good dinner-jacket in the process. . . .

"It was nearly dawn when I left — and they both came around to the front of the house to see me off. And Margaret asked me to come to lunch. And I said I would and waved at them and started the car. And . . . that was all."

He didn't stop abruptly this time. His voice and words just trailed softly into silence. He sat looking straight at me, absolutely still. I wanted to get away from his eyes — but I couldn't. The silence went on too long. I said:

"Go on! I don't understand. What d'you *mean* — 'that was all'?"

He said: "I didn't see the Archers any more. They weren't there. They . . . weren't. I heard Margaret's voice again — but it only said one word."

And then more silence. I said, finding some words:

"I don't understand. Tell me."

He dropped his eyes while he found a cigarette and lit it. He said:

"There's a lot in slang. As Chesterton once pointed out, the greatest poet of 'em all is Demos. The gag-man or gangster or rewrite man who first used the phrase '*rub him out*', said a whole lot more than he knew. . . . Because that's what happened to Adrian. He was *rubbed out* — erased — deleted in all three dimensions of Time — cancelled — made not!"

"You can't stop in the middle like that! Tell me what you're talking about. What d'you mean?"

He still looked at me. "I mean what I said. After that morning, there was no more Adrian. . . . He was — *rubbed out*. Remember the things in the briefcase? Well, they'll help to explain. After . . . it happened, I was — sort of ill. I've no idea for how long — but when I could *think* again, I set out on a sort of crusade: to prove to myself that I was the only living thing which remembered — which knew there'd ever been such an entity as Adrian Archer. Mind you, I hoped to *disprove* it, though I felt all the time I never would. And I haven't. You saw those papers and things — they're just an infinitesimal fraction of my proof. There *was* an Adrian Archer — but now there never has been. That photograph frame used to have his and Margaret's picture in it — but now there's the old price-tag to show it's never been opened. That pipe: Adrian gave it to me and my initials were on it in facsimile of his writing — but now the band's plain and bare and new. . . . Adrian Archer was at school and college with me — but no records show the name and no contemporary mind remembers. I've known his father since I was a pup — but his father *knows* he never had a son. There

were pictures — photographs — in which Adrian and I both were, sometimes together — and now those same pictures show me with someone whom every one knows but me. On the programmes of all his plays there's another man listed for his part — and that man is a known and living man in every case; a man who *knows* he played the part and remembers doing it as well as other people — you, for instance — remember his playing it. The pictures he made are all available to be seen — but there's no Adrian in them: there's some other star — who remembers everything about playing the part and has the weeks he took in shooting intricately woven into his life-pattern. Adrian — and everything that was Adrian's — have been removed and replaced: he *isn't* and *wasn't* and *won't be* and *never has been*: he was cancelled in *esse* and *posse*; taken out of our little life and time and being like a speck out of yeast. And over the hole which the speck made the yeast has bubbled and seethed and closed — and there never was any speck — except to the knowledge of another speck; a speck who was almost as near to the danger-point of accidental knowledge as the one which was removed; a speck whose punishment and warning are memory!"

"Tell me!" I said. "Tell me what *happened* — after you drove away. . . ."

"My God!" said Charles, and there seemed to be tears in his eyes. "My God! You're believing me! . . . I'll tell you: I drove home. I was so tired I thought I might really sleep. I tore off my clothes and rolled into bed after I'd pulled the blinds tight down against the sun which would be up in a few minutes. And I *did* sleep. I'd put a note on the door for my servant not to wake me, and he didn't. But the telephone did — and I cursed and rolled over and groped for it without opening my eyes. . . ."

"And then I heard Margaret's voice, calling my name. I knew it was her voice — though it was shrill and harsh with wild, incredible terror. It called my name, over and over again. And then, when I answered, it said 'Adrian's . . .' And then, without any other sound — without any click or noise or any sound at all — she wasn't there.

"I didn't waste any time. I slammed the phone down — and in nothing flat I was in the car and racing up Sunset, past the Riviera.

"I took the turn into Paloma Drive on two wheels and went on, around those endless curves, at well over sixty. And I came, past the Mortimers' house, to the corner of Paloma and Palisade. . . ."

I interrupted again, in that voice which didn't feel like mine.

"Wait! I've remembered something. You say this house was on the corner of Palisade Avenue and Paloma Drive, next the Mortimers'? Well, *there isn't any house there!* There's a little park-place there — a garden. . . ."

"Yes," said Charles, "I know. That's what *you* know; what everyone knows; what the Urban records would prove. . . . But there, right on that corner, *had been* a white colonial house, which *you* got for the Archers, and out of which I had come only a few hours before. . . ."

"It was a glaring, monstrous impossibility — and a brutal, inescapable fact! The green grass and the red flowers blazed at me with appalling reality, flaunting neat and well-tended and matured beauty — and the little white railings and the odd-shaped green seats and the yellow gravel paths and the spraying fountain all stared at me with smug actuality. . . ."

"I stopped the car somehow. I knew I was on the right road because I'd seen Mary Mortimer talking to a gardener in front of their house. I was shaking all over — and Fear had me by the guts with a cold claw which twisted. I fumbled at the car door. I had to have air. The sunshine was bright and golden but it was . . . *filthy* somehow; it was like the light which might be shed by some huge, undreamt-of reptile. I had to have air, though. I stumbled out onto the sidewalk and staggered across it towards one of the seats by the fountain. And my foot caught against something and there was a sharp pain in my leg and I looked down. I'd run my shin onto one of those little metal signs they stick up on lawns, and the plate was bent back so that the white printing on the green background was staring up at me. It said: 'KEEP OFF THE GRASS!'"

The crust felt thin beneath my feet. I knew he wasn't going to say any more — but I kept expecting him to. We sat for a long time, while a waiter came and cleared away and spread a clean cloth and finally went.

"Just a minute," said Charles suddenly. "Have to 'phone again."

He walked away — and I went on sitting.

In half an hour, the waiter came back. I asked him where Mr. Moffat was; surely not still in the 'phone-booth?

He stared. "Mr. Who, sir?"

I said, after a long pause but very sharply:

"Mr. Moffat. The gentleman who was dining with me."

He didn't seem to know what I was talking about.

I wonder how much longer there is for me.

Just as Poe, in four short stories, anticipated almost every element of the detective story from the locked room to the least suspected person, so did his contemporary Fitz-James O'Brien hit upon a great number of the dominant themes in later fantasy — the microcosmic world in "The Diamond Lens," the invisible being in "What Was It?," the terrible mannikin in "The Wonder Smith," and many more. The incredible fertility of his imagination, the convincing realism of his settings, the ease of his style could have made him the founder of a new American, un-Gothic school of fantasy, if an unnecessary petty episode of the Civil War had not abruptly ended a barely commenced career. "The Lost Room" is another of his firsts — an anticipation of the Lady-Vanishes Paris Exhibition legend, with no rational explanation. This is pure nightmare, cogent and inexplicable . . . and what was the Thing in the garden that vanished with a whirring noise?

The Lost Room

by FITZ-JAMES O'BRIEN

It was oppressively warm. The sun had long disappeared, but seemed to have left its vital spirit of heat behind it. The air rested; the leaves of the acacia-trees that shrouded my windows hung plumb-like on their delicate stalks. The smoke of my cigar scarce rose above my head, but hung about me in a pale blue cloud, which I had to dissipate with languid waves of my hand. My shirt was open at the throat, and my chest heaved laboriously in the effort to catch some breaths of fresher air. The noises of the city seemed to be wrapped in slumber, and the shrilling of the mosquitoes was the only sound that broke the stillness.

As I lay with my feet elevated on the back of a chair, wrapped in that peculiar frame of mind in which thought assumes a species of lifeless motion, the strange fancy seized me of making a languid inventory of the principal articles of furniture in my room. It was a task well suited to the mood in which I found myself. Their forms were duskily defined in the dim twilight that floated shadowily through the chamber; it was no labor to note and

particularize each, and from the place where I sat I could command a view of all my possessions without even turning my head.

There was, *imprimis*, that ghostly lithograph by Calame. It was a mere black spot on the white wall, but my inner vision scrutinized every detail of the picture. A wild, desolate, midnight heath, with a spectral oak-tree in the centre of the foreground. The wind blows fiercely, and the jagged branches, clothed scantily with ill-grown leaves, are swept to the left continually by its giant force. A formless wrack of clouds streams across the awful sky, and the rain sweeps almost parallel with the horizon. Beyond, the heath stretches off into endless blackness, in the extreme of which either fancy or art has conjured up some undefinable shapes that seem riding into space. At the base of the huge oak stands a shrouded figure. His mantle is wound by the blast in tight folds around his form, and the long cock's feather in his hat is blown upright, till it seems as if it stood on end with fear. His features are not visible, for he has grasped his cloak with both hands, and drawn it from either side across his face. The picture is seemingly objectless. It tells no tale, but there is a weird power about it that haunts one.

Next to the picture comes the round blot that hangs below it, which I know to be a smoking-cap. It has my coat of arms embroidered on the front, and for that reason I never wear it; though, when properly arranged on my head, with its long blue silken tassel hanging down by my cheek, I believe it becomes me well. I remember the time when it was in the course of manufacture. I remember the tiny little hands that pushed the colored silks so nimbly through the cloth that was stretched on the embroidery-frame, — the vast trouble I was put to to get a colored copy of my armorial bearings for the heraldic work which was to decorate the front of the band, — the pursings up of the little mouth, and the contractions of the young forehead, as their possessor plunged into a profound sea of cogitation touching the way in which the cloud should be represented from which the armed hand, that is my crest, issues, — the heavenly moment when the tiny hands placed it on my head, in a position that I could not bear for more than a few seconds, and I, king-like, immediately assumed my royal prerogative after the coronation, and instantly levied a tax on my only subject, which was, however, not paid unwillingly. Ah, the cap is there, but the embroiderer has fled; for Atropos was severing the web of life above her head while she was weaving that silken shelter for mine!

How uncouthly the huge piano that occupies the corner at the left of the door looms out in the uncertain twilight! I neither play nor sing, yet I own a piano. It is a comfort to me to look at it, and to feel that the music is there, although I am not able to break the spell that binds it. It is pleasant to know that Bellini and Mozart, Cimarosa, Porpora, Gluck, and all such, — or at least their souls, — sleep in that unwieldy case. There lie embalmed, as it were, all operas, sonatas, oratorios, nocturnos, marches, songs, and dances, that ever climbed into existence through the four bars that wall in a melody. Once I was entirely repaid for the investment of my funds in that instrument which I never use. Blokeeta, the composer, came to see me. Of course his instincts urged him as irresistibly to my piano as if some magnetic power lay within it compelling him to approach. He tuned it, he played on it. All night long, until the gray and spectral dawn rose out of the depths of the midnight, he sat and played, and I lay smoking by the window listening. Wild, unearthly, and sometimes insufferably painful, were the improvisations of Blokeeta. The chords of the instrument seemed breaking with anguish. Lost souls shrieked in his dismal preludes; the half-heard utterances of spirits in pain, that groped at inconceivable distances from anything lovely or harmonious, seemed to rise dimly up out of the waves of sound that gathered under his hands. Melancholy human love wandered out on distant heaths, or beneath dank and gloomy cypresses, murmuring its unanswered sorrow, or hateful gnomes sported and sang in the stagnant swamps, triumphing in unearthly tones over the knight whom they had lured to his death. Such was Blokeeta's night's entertainment; and when he at length closed the piano, and hurried away through the cold morning, he left a memory about the instrument from which I could never escape.

Those snowshoes that hang in the space between the mirror and the door recall Canadian wanderings, — a long race through the dense forests, over the frozen snow, through whose brittle crust the slender hoofs of the caribou that we were pursuing sank at every step, until the poor creature despairingly turned at bay in a small juniper coppice, and we heartlessly shot him down. And I remember how Gabriel, the *habitant*, and François, the half-breed, cut his throat, and how the hot blood rushed out in a torrent over the snowy soil; and I recall the snow *cabane* that Gabriel built, where we all three slept so warmly; and the great fire that glowed at our feet, painting all kinds of demoniac shapes on the black screen of forest that lay without;

and the deer-steaks that we roasted for our breakfast; and the savage drunkenness of Gabriel in the morning, he having been privately drinking out of my brandy-flask all the night long.

That long, haftless dagger that dangles over the mantelpiece makes my heart swell. I found it, when a boy, in a hoary old castle in which one of my maternal ancestors once lived. That same ancestor — who, by the way, yet lives in history — was a strange old sea-king, who dwelt on the extremest point of the southwestern coast of Ireland. He owned the whole of that fertile island called Inniskeiran, which directly faces Cape Clear, where between them the Atlantic rolls furiously, forming what the fishermen of the place call “the Sound.” An awful place in winter is that same Sound. On certain days no boat can live there for a moment, and Cape Clear is frequently cut off for days from any communication with the mainland.

This old sea-king — Sir Florence O'Driscoll by name — passed a stormy life. From the summit of his castle he watched the ocean, and when any richly laden vessels, bound from the south to the industrious Galway merchants, hove in sight, Sir Florence hoisted the sails of his galley, and it went hard with him if he did not tow into harbor ship and crew. In this way, he lived; not a very honest mode of livelihood, certainly, according to our modern ideas, but quite reconcilable with the morals of the time. As may be supposed, Sir Florence got into trouble. Complaints were laid against him at the English court by the plundered merchants, and the Irish viking set out for London, to plead his own cause before good Queen Bess, as she was called. He had one powerful recommendation: he was a marvelously handsome man. Not Celtic by descent, but half Spanish, half Danish in blood, he had the great northern stature with the regular features, flashing eyes, and dark hair of the Iberian race. This may account for the fact that his stay at the English court was much longer than was necessary, as also for the tradition, which a local historian mentions, that the English Queen evinced a preference for the Irish chieftain, of other nature than that usually shown by monarch to subject.

Previous to his departure, Sir Florence had intrusted the care of his property to an Englishman named Hull. During the long absence of the knight, this person managed to ingratiate himself with the local authorities, and gain their favor so far that they were willing to support him in almost any scheme. After a protracted stay, Sir Florence, pardoned of all his mis-

deeds, returned to his home. Home no longer. Hull was in possession, and refused to yield an acre of the lands he had so nefariously acquired. It was no use appealing to the law, for its officers were in the opposite interest. It was no use appealing to the Queen, for she had another lover, and had forgotten the poor Irish knight by this time; and so the viking passed the best portion of his life in unsuccessful attempts to reclaim his vast estates, and was eventually, in his old age, obliged to content himself with his castle by the sea and the island of Inisikeiran, the only spot of which the usurper was unable to deprive him. So this old story of my kinsman's fate looms up out of the darkness that enshrouds that haftless dagger hanging on the wall.

It was somewhat after the foregoing fashion that I dreamily made the inventory of my personal property. As I turned my eyes on each object, one after the other, — or the places where they lay, for the room was now so dark that it was almost impossible to see with any distinctness, — a crowd of memories connected with each rose up before me, and, perforce, I had to indulge them. So I proceeded but slowly, and at last my cigar shortened to a hot and bitter morsel that I could barely hold between my lips, while it seemed to me that the night grew each moment more insufferably oppressive. While I was revolving some impossible means of cooling my wretched body, the cigar stump began to burn my lips. I flung it angrily through the open window, and stooped out to watch it falling. It first lighted on the leaves of the acacia, sending out a spray of red sparkles, then, rolling off, it fell plump on the dark walk in the garden, faintly illuminating for a moment the dusky trees and breathless flowers. Whether it was the contrast between the red flash of the cigar-stump and the silent darkness of the garden, or whether it was that I detected by the sudden light a faint waving of the leaves, I know not; but something suggested to me that the garden was cool. I will take a turn there, thought I, just as I am; it cannot be warmer than this room, and however still the atmosphere, there is always a feeling of liberty and spaciousness in the open air, that partially supplies one's wants. With this idea running through my head, I arose, lit another cigar, and passed out into the long, intricate corridors that led to the main staircase. As I crossed the threshold of my room, with what a different feeling I should have passed it had I known that I was never to set foot in it again!

I lived in a very large house, in which I occupied two rooms on the second floor. The house was old-fashioned, and all the floors communicated by a

huge circular staircase that wound up through the centre of the building, while at every landing long, rambling corridors stretched off into mysterious nooks and corners. This palace of mine was very high, and its resources, in the way of crannies and windings, seemed to be interminable. Nothing seemed to stop anywhere. Cul-de-sacs were unknown on the premises. The corridors and passages, like mathematical lines, seemed capable of indefinite extensions, and the object of the architect must have been to erect an edifice in which people might go ahead forever. The whole place was gloomy, not so much because it was large, but because an unearthly nakedness seemed to pervade the structure. The staircases, corridors, halls, and vestibules all partook of a desert-like desolation. There was nothing on the walls to break the sombre monotony of those long vistas of shade. No carvings on the wainscoting, no moulded masks peering down from the simply severe cornices, no marble vases on the landings. There was an eminent dreariness and want of life — so rare in an American establishment — all over the abode. It was Hood's haunted house put in order and newly painted. The servants, too, were shadowy, and chary of their visits. Bells rang three times before the gloomy chambermaid could be induced to present herself; and the Negro waiter, a ghoulish-looking creature from Congo, obeyed the summons only when one's patience was exhausted or one's want satisfied in some other way. When he did come, one felt sorry that he had not stayed away altogether, so sullen and savage did he appear. He moved along the echoless floors with a slow, noiseless shambling, until his dusky figure, advancing from the gloom, seemed like some reluctant afreet, compelled by the superior power of his master to disclose himself. When the doors of all the chambers were closed, and no light illuminated the long corridor save the red, unwholesome glare of a small oil lamp on a table at the end, where late lodgers lit their candles, one could not by any possibility conjure up a sadder or more desolate prospect.

Yet the house suited me. Of meditative and sedentary habits, I enjoyed the extreme quiet. There were but few lodgers, from which I infer that the landlord did not drive a very thriving trade; and these, probably oppressed by the sombre spirit of the place, were quiet and ghost-like in their movements. The proprietor I scarcely ever saw. My bills were deposited by unseen hands every month on my table, while I was out walking or riding, and my pecuniary response was intrusted to the attendant afreet. On the whole,

when the bustling wideawake spirit of New York is taken into consideration, the sombre, half-vivified character of the house in which I lived was an anomaly that no one appreciated better than I who lived there.

I felt my way down the wide, dark staircase in my pursuit of zephyrs. The garden, as I entered it, did feel somewhat cooler than my own room, and I puffed my cigar along the dim, cypress-shrouded walks with a sensation of comparative relief. It was very dark. The tall-growing flowers that bordered the path were so wrapped in gloom as to present the aspect of solid pyramidal masses, all the details of leaves and blossoms being buried in an embracing darkness, while the trees had lost all form, and seemed like masses of overhanging cloud. It was a place and time to excite the imagination; for in the impenetrable cavities of endless gloom there was room for the most riotous fancies to play at will. I walked and walked, and the echoes of my footsteps on the ungravelled and mossy path suggested a double feeling. I felt alone and yet in company at the same time. The solitariness of the place made itself distinct enough in the stillness, broken alone by the hollow reverberations of my step, while those very reverberations seemed to imbue me with an undefined feeling that I was not alone. I was not, therefore, much startled when I was suddenly accosted from beneath the solid darkness of an immense cypress by a voice saying, "Will you give me a light, sir?"

"Certainly," I replied, trying in vain to distinguish the speaker amidst the impenetrable dark.

Somebody advanced, and I held out my cigar. All I could gather definitely about the individual who thus accosted me was that he must have been of extremely small stature; for I, who am by no means an overgrown man, had to stoop considerably in handing him my cigar. The vigorous puff that he gave his own lighted up my Havana for a moment, and I fancied that I caught a glimpse of a pale, weird countenance, immersed in a background of long, wild hair. The flash was, however, so momentary that I could not even say certainly whether this was an actual impression or the mere effort of imagination to embody that which the senses had failed to distinguish.

"Sir, you are out late," said this unknown to me, as he, with half-uttered thanks, handed me back my cigar, for which I had to grope in the gloom.

"Not later than usual," I replied, dryly.

"Hum! you are fond of late wanderings, then?"

"That is just as the fancy seizes me."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes."

"Queer house, isn't it?"

"I have only found it quiet."

"Hum! But you *will* find it queer, take my word for it." This was earnestly uttered; and I felt at the same time a bony finger laid on my arm, that cut it sharply like a blunted knife.

"I cannot take your word for any such assertion," I replied, rudely, shaking off the bony finger with an irrepressible motion of disgust.

"No offence, no offence," muttered my unseen companion rapidly, in a strange, subdued voice, that would have been shrill had it been louder; "your being angry does not alter the matter. You will find it a queer house. Everybody finds it a queer house. Do you know who live there?"

"I never busy myself, sir, about other people's affairs," I answered sharply, for the individual's manner, combined with my utter uncertainty as to his appearance, oppressed me with an irksome longing to be rid of him.

"O, you don't? Well, I do. I know what they are, — well, well, well!" and as he pronounced the three last words his voice rose with each, until, with the last, it reached a shrill shriek that echoed horribly among the lonely walks. "Do you know what they eat?" he continued.

"No, sir, — nor care."

"O, but you will care. You must care. You shall care. I'll tell you what they are. They are enchanters. They are ghouls. They are cannibals. Did you never remark their eyes, and how they gloated on you when you passed? Did you never remark the food that they served up at your table? Did you never in the dead of night hear muffled and unearthly footsteps gliding along the corridors, and stealthy hands turning the handle of your door? Does not some magnetic influence fold itself continually around you when they pass, and send a thrill through spirit and body, and a cold shiver that no sunshine will chase away? O, you have! You have felt all these things! I know it!"

The earnest rapidity, the subdued tones, the eagerness of accent, with which all this was uttered, impressed me most uncomfortably. It really seemed as if I could recall all those weird occurrences and influences of which he spoke; and I shuddered in spite of myself in the midst of the impenetrable darkness that surrounded me.

"Hum!" said I, assuming, without knowing it, a confidential tone, "may I ask how you know these things?"

"How I know them? Because I am their enemy; because they tremble at my whisper; because I follow upon their track with the perseverance of a bloodhound and the stealthiness of a tiger; because — because — I was *of* them once!"

"Wretch!" I cried excitedly, for involuntarily his eager tones had wrought me up to a high pitch of spasmodic nervousness, "then you mean to say that you —"

As I uttered this word, obeying an uncontrollable impulse, I stretched forth my hand in the direction of the speaker and made a blind clutch. The tips of my fingers seemed to touch a surface as smooth as glass, that glided suddenly from under them. A sharp, angry hiss sounded through the gloom, followed by a whirring noise, as if some projectile passed rapidly by, and the next moment I felt instinctively that I was alone.

A most disagreeable feeling instantly assailed me; — a prophetic instinct that some terrible misfortune menaced me; an eager and overpowering anxiety to get back to my own room without loss of time. I turned and ran blindly along the dark cypress alley, every dusky clump of flowers that rose blackly in the borders making my heart each moment cease to beat. The echoes of my own footsteps seemed to redouble and assume the sounds of unknown pursuers following fast upon my track. The boughs of lilac-bushes and syringas, that here and there stretched partly across the walk, seemed to have been furnished suddenly with hooked hands that sought to grasp me as I flew by, and each moment I expected to behold some awful and impassable barrier fall across my track and wall me up forever.

At length I reached the wide entrance. With a single leap I sprang up the four or five steps that formed the stoop, and dashed along the hall, up the wide, echoing stairs, and again along the dim, funereal corridors until I paused, breathless and panting, at the door of my room. Once so far, I stopped for an instant and leaned heavily against one of the panels, panting lustily after my late run. I had, however, scarcely rested my whole weight against the door, when it suddenly gave way, and I staggered in headforemost. To my utter astonishment the room I had left in profound darkness was now a blaze of light. So intense was the illumination that, for a few seconds while the pupils of my eyes were contracting under the sudden

change, I saw absolutely nothing save the dazzling glare. This fact in itself, coming on me with such utter suddenness, was sufficient to prolong my confusion, and it was not until after several minutes had elapsed that I perceived the room was not only illuminated, but occupied. And such occupants! Amazement at the scene took such possession of me that I was incapable of either moving or uttering a word. All that I could do was to lean against the wall, and stare blankly at the strange picture.

It might have been a scene out of Faublas, or Grammont's Memoirs, or happened in some palace of Minister Fouque.

Round a large table in the centre of the room, where I had left a student-like litter of books and papers, were seated a half a dozen persons. Three were men and three were women. The table was heaped with a prodigality of luxuries. Luscious eastern fruits were piled up in silver filigree vases, through whose meshes their glowing rinds shone in the contrasts of a thousand hues. Small silver dishes that Benvenuto might have designed, filled with succulent and aromatic meats, were distributed upon a cloth of snowy damask. Bottles of every shape, slender ones from the Rhine, stout fellows from Holland, sturdy ones from Spain, and quaint basket-woven flasks from Italy, absolutely littered the board. Drinking-glasses of every size and hue filled up the interstices, and the thirsty German flagon stood side by side with the aerial bubbles of Venetian glass that rest so lightly on their threadlike stems. An odor of luxury and sensuality floated through the apartment. The lamps that burned in every direction seemed to diffuse a subtle incense on the air, and in a large vase that stood on the floor I saw a mass of magnolias, tuberoses, and jasmines grouped together, stifling each other with their honeyed and heavy fragrance.

The inhabitants of my room seemed beings well suited to so sensual an atmosphere. The women were strangely beautiful, and all were attired in dresses of the most fantastic devices and brilliant hues. Their figures were round, supple, and elastic; their eyes dark and languishing; their lips full, ripe, and of the richest bloom. The three men wore half-masks, so that all I could distinguish were heavy jaws, pointed beards, and brawny throats that rose like massive pillars out of their doublets. All six lay reclining on Roman couches about the table, drinking down the purple wines in large draughts, and tossing back their heads and laughing wildly.

I stood, I suppose, for some three minutes, with my back against the wall

staring vacantly at the bacchanal vision, before any of the revellers appeared to notice my presence. At length, without any expression to indicate whether I had been observed from the beginning or not, two of the women arose from their couches, and, approaching, took each a hand and led me to the table. I obeyed their motions mechanically. I sat on a couch between them as they indicated. I unresistingly permitted them to wind their arms about my neck.

"You must drink," said one, pouring out a large glass of red wine, "here is Clos Vougeot of a rare vintage; and here," pushing a flask of amber-hued wine before me, "is Lachryma Christi."

"You must eat," said the other, drawing the silver dishes toward her. "Here are cutlets stewed with olives, and here are slices of a *filet* stuffed with bruised sweet chestnuts"; — and as she spoke, she, without waiting for a reply, proceeded to help me.

The sight of the food recalled to me the warnings I had received in the garden. This sudden effort of memory restored to me my other faculties at the same instant. I sprang to my feet, thrusting the women from me with each hand.

"Demons!" I almost shouted, "I will have none of your accursed food. I know you. You are cannibals, you are ghouls, you are enchanters. Begone, I tell you! Leave my room in peace!"

A shout of laughter from all six was the only effect that my passionate speech produced. The men rolled on their couches, and their half-masks quivered with the convulsions of their mirth. The women shrieked, and tossed the slender wine-glasses wildly aloft, and turned to me and flung themselves on my bosom fairly sobbing with laughter.

"Yes," I continued, as soon as the noisy mirth had subsided, "yes, I say, leave my room instantly! I will have none of your unnatural orgies here!"

"His room!" shrieked the woman on my right.

"His room!" echoed she on my left.

"His room! He calls it his room!" shouted the whole party, as they rolled once more into jocular convulsions.

"How know you that it is your room?" said one of the men who sat opposite to me, at length, after the laughter had once more somewhat subsided.

"How do I know?" I replied, indignantly. "How do I know my own room? How could I mistake it, pray? There's my furniture — my piano —"

"He calls that a piano!" shouted my neighbors.

The peculiar emphasis they laid on the word "piano" caused me to scrutinize the article I was indicating more thoroughly. Up to this time, though utterly amazed at the entrance of these people into my chamber, and connecting them somewhat with the wild stories I had heard in the garden, I still had a sort of indefinite idea that the whole thing was a masquerading freak got up in my absence, and that the bacchanalian orgy I was witnessing was nothing more than a portion of some elaborate hoax of which I was to be the victim. But when my eyes turned to the corner where I had left a huge and cumbrous piano, and beheld a vast and sombre organ lifting its fluted front to the very ceiling, and convinced myself, by a hurried process of memory, that it occupied the very spot in which I had left my own instrument, the little self-possession that I had left forsook me. I gazed around me bewildered.

In like manner everything was changed. In the place of that old haftless dagger, connected with so many historic associations personal to myself, I beheld a Turkish yataghan dangling by its belt of crimson silk, while the jewels in the hilt blazed as the lamplight played upon them. In the spot where hung my cherished smoking-cap, memorial of a buried love, a knightly casque was suspended, on the crest of which a golden dragon stood in the act of springing. That strange lithograph by Calame was no longer a lithograph, but it seemed to me that the portion of the wall which it had covered, of the exact shape and size, had been cut out, and, in place of the picture, a *real* scene on the same scale, and with real actors, was distinctly visible. The old oak was there, and the stormy sky was there; but I saw the branches of the oak sway with the tempest, and the clouds drive before the wind. The wanderer in his cloak was gone; but in his place I beheld a circle of wild figures, men and women, dancing with linked hands around the bole of the great tree, chanting some wild fragment of a song, to which the winds roared an unearthly chorus. The snowshoes, too, on whose sinewy woof I had sped for many days amidst Canadian wastes, had vanished, and in their place lay a pair of strange upcurled Turkish slippers.

All was changed. Wherever my eyes turned they missed familiar objects, yet encountered strange representatives. Still, in all the substitutes there seemed to me a reminiscence of what they replaced. They seemed only for a time transmuted into other shapes, and there lingered around them the

atmosphere of what they once had been. Thus I could have sworn the room to have been mine, yet there was nothing in it that I could rightly claim.

"Well, have you determined whether or not this is your room?" asked the girl on my left, proffering me a huge tumbler creaming over with champagne, and laughing wickedly as she spoke.

"It is mine," I answered, doggedly, striking the glass rudely with my hand, and dashing the aromatic wine over the white cloth.

"Hush! hush!" she said, gently, not in the least angered at my rough treatment. "You are excited. Alf shall play something to soothe you."

At her signal, one of the men sat down at the organ. After a short, wild, spasmodic prelude, he began what seemed to me to be a symphony of recollections. Dark and sombre, and all through full of quivering and intense agony, it appeared to recall a dark and dismal night, on a cold reef, around which an unseen but terribly audible ocean broke with eternal fury. It seemed as if a lonely pair were on the reef, one living, the other dead; one clasping his arms around the tender neck and naked bosom of the other, striving to warm her into life, when his own vitality was being each moment sucked from him by the icy breath of the storm. Here and there a terrible wailing minor key would tremble through the chords like the shriek of sea-birds, or the warning of advancing death. While the man played I could scarce restrain myself. It seemed to be Blokeeta whom I listened to, and on whom I gazed. That wondrous night of pleasure and pain that I had once passed listening to him seemed to have been taken up again at the spot where it had broken off, and the same hand was continuing it. I stared at the man called Alf. There he sat with his cloak and doublet, and long rapier and mask of black velvet. But there was something in the air of the peaked beard, a familiar mystery in the wild mass of raven hair that fell as if wind-blown over his shoulders, which riveted my memory.

"Blokeeta! Blokeeta!" I shouted, starting up furiously from the couch on which I was lying, and bursting the fair arms that were linked around my neck as if they had been hateful chains, — "Blokeeta! my friend! speak to me, I entreat you! Tell these horrid enchanters to leave me. Say that I hate them. Say that I command them to leave my room."

The man at the organ stirred not in answer to my appeal. He ceased playing, and the dying sound of the last note he had touched faded off into a melancholy moan.

"Why will you persist in calling this your room?" said the woman next me, with a smile meant to be kind, but to me inexpressibly loathsome. "Have we not shown you by the furniture, by the general appearance of the place, that you are mistaken, and that this cannot be your apartment? Rest content, then, with us."

"Rest content?" I answered, madly; "live with ghosts! eat of awful meats, and see awful sights! Never, never!"

"Softly, softly!" said another of the sirens. "Let us settle this amicably. This poor gentleman seems obstinate and inclined to make an uproar.

"Now," she continued, "I have a proposition to make. It would be ridiculous for us to surrender this room simply because this gentleman states that it is his; and yet I feel anxious to gratify, as far as may be fair, his wild assertion of ownership. A room, after all, is not much to us; we can get one easily enough, but still we should be loath to give this apartment up to so imperious a demand. We are willing, however, to *risk* its loss. That is to say," — turning to me, — "I propose that we play for the room. If you win, we will immediately surrender it to you just as it stands; if, on the contrary, you lose, you shall bind yourself to depart."

Agonized at the ever-darkening mysteries that seemed to thicken around me, and despairing of being able to dissipate them by the mere exercise of my own will, I caught almost gladly at the chance thus presented to me.

"I agree," I cried, eagerly; "I agree. Anything to rid myself of such unearthly company!"

The woman touched a small golden bell that stood near her on the table, and it had scarce ceased to tinkle when a Negro dwarf entered with a silver tray on which were dice-boxes and dice. A shudder passed over me as I thought in this stunted African I could trace a resemblance to the ghoul-like black servant to whose attendance I had been accustomed.

"Now," said my neighbor, seizing one of the dice-boxes and giving me the other, "the highest wins. Shall I throw first?"

I nodded assent. She rattled the dice, and I felt an inexpressible load lifted from my heart as she threw fifteen.

"It is your turn," she said, with a mocking smile; "but before you throw, I repeat the offer I made you before. Live with us. Be one of us."

My reply was a fierce oath, as I rattled the dice with spasmodic nervous-

ness and flung them on the board. They rolled over and over again, and during that brief instant I felt a suspense, the intensity of which I have never known before or since. At last they lay before me. A shout of the same horrible, maddening laughter rang in my ears. I peered in vain at the dice, but my sight was so confused that I could not distinguish the amount of the cast. This lasted for a few moments. Then my sight grew clear, and I sank back almost lifeless with despair as I saw that I had thrown but *twelve!*

"Lost! Lost!" screamed my neighbor, with a wild laugh. "Lost! Lost!" shouted the deep voices of the masked men. "Leave us, coward!" they all cried; "you are not fit to be one of us. Remember your promise; leave us!"

Then it seemed as if some unseen power caught me by the shoulders and thrust me toward the door. In vain I resisted. In vain I screamed and shouted for help. In vain I screamed and twisted in despair. In vain I implored them for pity. All the reply I had was those mocking peals of merriment, while, under the invisible influence, I staggered like a drunken man toward the door. As I reached the threshold the organ pealed out a wild, triumphal strain. The power that impelled me concentrated itself into one vigorous impulse that sent me blindly staggering out into the echoing corridor, and, as the door closed swiftly behind me, I caught one glimpse of the apartment I had left forever. A change passed like a shadow over it. The lamps died out, the siren women and masked men had vanished, the flowers, the fruits, the bright silver and bizarre furniture faded swiftly, and I saw again, for the tenth of a second, my own old chamber restored.

The next instant the door closed violently, and I was left standing in the corridor stunned and despairing.

As soon as I had partially recovered my comprehension I rushed madly to the door, with the dim idea of beating it in. My fingers touched a cold and solid wall. There was no door! I felt all along the corridor for many yards on both sides. There was not even a crevice to give me hope. No one answered. In the vestibule I met the Negro; I seized him by the collar, and demanded my room. The demon showed his white and awful teeth, which were filed into a saw-like shape, and, extricating himself from my grasp with a sudden jerk, fled down the passage with a gibbering laugh. Nothing but echo answered to my despairing shrieks.

Since that awful hour I have never found my room. Everywhere I look for it, yet never see it. Shall I ever find it?

Such sober-minded individuals as the British Astronomer Royal keep telling us that life cannot exist on such-and-such a planet because conditions there would not support life as we know it. The writers of science fiction prefer to believe that the Creator is too versatile to be restricted to our familiar nitrogen metabolism, and like to speculate on the literally unearthly forms of life that may exist elsewhere. Theodore Sturgeon, whose book WITHOUT SORCERY has been one of the critically best received ventures in recent fantasy publishing, has here speculated so delightfully on the nature of hurkles that you may almost find yourself wishing that the astonishing ending were factually true.

The Hurkle Is a Happy Beast

by THEODORE STURGEON

THIS IS EARTH, and it once was horrible with wars, and murders, and young love in the spring. It would be today, but for a man of principle, a man of action. So gather around me, and hear about how it began. It began on Lirht.

Lirht is either in a different universal plane or in another island galaxy. Perhaps these terms mean the same thing. The fact remains that Lirht is a planet with three moons (one of which is unknown) and a sun.

Lirht is inhabited by gwik, its dominant race, and by several less highly developed species which, for purposes of this narrative, can be ignored. Except, of course, for the hurkle. The hurkle are highly regarded by the gwik as pets, in spite of the fact that a hurkle is so affectionate that it can have no loyalty.

The prettiest of the hurkle are blue.

Now, on Lirht, in its greatest city, there was trouble, the nature of which does not matter to us, and a gwik named Hvov, whom you may immediately forget, blew up a building which was important for reasons we cannot understand. This event caused great excitement, and gwik left their homes and factories and strubles and streamed toward the center of town, which is how a certain laboratory door was left open.

In times of such huge confusion, the little things go on. During the "Ten Days That Shook the World" the cafes and theaters of Moscow and Petrograd remained open, people fell in love, sued each other, died, shed sweat and tears; and some of these were tears of laughter. So on Lirht, while the decisions on the fate of the miserable Hvov were being formulated, gwik still fardled, funted, and fupped. The great central hewton still beat out its mighty pulse, and in the anams the corsons grew. . . .

Into the above-mentioned laboratory, which had been left open through the circumstances described, wandered a hurkle kitten. It was very happy to find itself there; but then, the hurkle is a happy beast. It prowled about fearlessly — it could become invisible if frightened — and it glowed at the legs of the tables and at the glittering, racked walls. It moved sinuously, humping its back and arching along on the floor. Its front and rear legs were stiff and straight as the legs of a chair; the middle pair had two sets of knees, one bending forward, one back. It was engineered as ingeniously as a scorpion, and it was exceedingly blue.

Occupying almost a quarter of the laboratory was a huge and intricate machine, unhoused, showing the signs of development projects the galaxies over — temporary hookups from one component to another, cables terminating in spring clips, measuring devices standing about on small tables near the main work. The kitten regarded the machine with curiosity and friendly intent, sending a wave of radiations outward which were its glow, or purr. It arched daintily around to the other side, stepping delicately but firmly on a floor switch.

Immediately there was a rushing, humming sound, like small birds chasing large mosquitos, and parts of the machine began to get warm. The kitten watched curiously, and saw, high up inside the clutter of coils and wires, the most entrancing muzziness it had ever seen. It was like heat-flicker over a fallow field; it was like a smoke-vortex; it was like red neon lights on a wet pavement. To the hurkle kitten's senses, that red-orange flicker was also like the smell of catnip to a cat, or anise to a terrestrial terrier.

It reared up toward the glow, hooked its forelegs over a busbar — fortunately there was no ground potential — and drew itself upward. It climbed from transformer to power-pack, skittered up a variable condenser — the setting of which was changed thereby — disappeared momentarily as it felt the bite of a hot tube, and finally teetered on the edge of the glow.

The glow hovered in midair in a sort of cabinet, which was surrounded by heavy coils embodying tens of thousands of turns of small wire and great loops of bus. One side, the front, of the cabinet was open, and the kitten hung there fascinated, rocking back and forth to the rhythm of some unheard music it made to contrast this sourceless flame. Back and forth, back and forth it rocked and wove, riding a wave of delicious, compelling sensation. And once, just once, it moved its center of gravity too far from its point of support. Too far — far enough. It tumbled into the cabinet, into the flame.

One muggy, mid-June day a teacher, whose name was Stott and whose duties were to teach seven subjects to forty moppets in a very small town, was writing on a blackboard. He was writing the word Madagascar, and the air was so sticky and warm that he could feel his undershirt pasting and unpasting itself on his shoulder-blades with each round "a" he wrote.

Behind him there was a sudden rustle from the moist seventh-graders. His schooled reflexes kept him from turning from the board until he had finished what he was doing, by which time the room was in a young uproar. Stott about-faced, opened his mouth, closed it again. A thing like this would require more than a routine reprimand.

His forty-odd charges were writhing and squirming in an extraordinary fashion, and the sound they made, a sort of whimpering giggle, was unique. He looked at one pupil after another. Here a hand was busily scratching a nape; there a boy was digging guiltily under his shirt; yonder a scrubbed and shining damsel violently worried her scalp.

Knowing the value of individual attack, Stott intoned, "Hubert, what seems to be the trouble?"

The room immediately quieted, though diminished scrabblings continued. "Nothin', Mister Stott," quavered Hubert.

Stott flicked his gaze from side to side. Wherever it rested, the scratching stopped and was replaced by agonized control. In its wake was rubbing and twitching. Stott glared, and idly thumbed a lower left rib. Someone snickered. Before he could identify the source, Stott was suddenly aware of an intense itching. He checked the impulse to go after it, knotted his jaw, and swore to himself that he wouldn't scratch as long as he was out there, front and center. "The class will —" he began tautly, and then stopped.

There was a — a *something* on the sill of the open window. He blinked and looked again. It was a translucent, bluish cloud which was almost nothing at all. It was less than a something should be, but it was indeed more than a nothing. If he stretched his imagination just a little, he might make out the outlines of an arched creature with too many legs; but of course that was ridiculous.

He looked away from it and scowled at his class. He had had two unfortunate experiences with stink bombs, and in the back of his mind was the thought of having seen once, in a trick-store window, a product called "itching powder". Could this be it, this terrible itch? He knew better, however, than to accuse anyone yet; if he were wrong, there was no point in giving the little geniuses any extra-curricular notions.

He tried again. "The cl —" He swallowed. This itch was . . . "The class will —" He noticed that one head, then another and another, were turning toward the window. He realized that if the class got too interested in what he thought he saw on the window sill, he'd have a panic on his hands. He fumbled for his ruler and rapped twice on the desk. His control was not what it should have been at the moment; he struck far too hard, and the reports were like gunshots. The class turned to him as one; and behind them the thing on the window sill appeared with great distinctness.

It was blue — a truly beautiful blue. It had a small spherical head and an almost identical knob at the other end. There were four stiff, straight legs, a long sinuous body, and two central limbs with a boneless look about them. On the side of the head were four pairs of eyes, of graduated sizes. It teetered there for perhaps ten seconds, and then, without a sound, leapt through the window and was gone.

Mr. Stott, pale and shaking, closed his eyes. His knees trembled and weakened, and a delicate, dewy mustache of perspiration appeared on his upper lip. He clutched at the desk and forced his eyes open; and then, flooding him with relief, peeling into his terror, swinging his control back to him, the bell rang to end the class and the school day.

"Dismissed," he mumbled, and sat down. The class picked up and left, changing itself from a twittering pattern of rows to a rowdy kaleidoscope around the bottle-necking doorway. Mr. Stott slumped down in his chair, noticing that the dreadful itch was gone, had been gone since he had made that thunderclap with the ruler.

Now, Mr. Stott was a man of method. Mr. Stott prided himself on his ability to teach his charges to use their powers of observation and all the machinery of logic at their command. Perhaps, then, he had more of both at his command — after he recovered himself — than could be expected of an ordinary man.

He sat and stared at the open window, not seeing the sun-swept lawns outside. And after going over these events a half-dozen times, he fixed on two important facts:

First, that the animal he had seen, or thought he had seen, had six legs.

Second, that the animal was of such a nature as to make anyone who had not seen it believe he was out of his mind.

These two thoughts had their corollaries:

First, that every animal he had ever seen which had six legs was an insect, and

Second, that if anything were to be done about this fantastic creature, he had better do it by himself. And whatever action he took must be taken immediately. He imagined the windows being kept shut to keep the thing out — in this heat — and he cowered away from the thought. He imagined the effect of such a monstrosity if it bounded into the midst of a classroom full of children in their early teens, and recoiled. No; there could be no delay in this matter.

He went to the window and examined the sill. Nothing. There was nothing to be seen outside, either. He stood thoughtfully for a moment, pulling on his lower lip and thinking hard. Then he went downstairs to borrow five pounds of DDT powder from the janitor for an "experiment." He got a wide, flat wooden box and an electric fan, and set them up on a table he pushed close to the window, and then he sat down to wait, in case, just in case the blue beast returned.

When the hurkle kitten fell into the flame, it braced itself for a fall at least as far as the floor of the cabinet. Its shock was tremendous, then, when it found itself so braced and already resting on a surface. It looked around, panting with fright, its invisibility reflex in full operation.

The cabinet was gone. The flame was gone. The laboratory with its windows, lit by the orange Lirhtian sky, its ranks of shining equipment, its hulking, complex machine — all were gone.

The hurkle kitten sprawled in an open area, a sort of lawn. No colors were right; everything seemed half-lit, filmy, out-of-focus. There were trees, but not low and flat and bushy like honest Lirhtian trees, but with straight naked trunks and leaves like a portle's tooth. The different atmospheric gases had colors; clouds of fading, changing faint colors obscured and revealed everything. The kitten twitched its cafmors and ruddled its kump, right there where it stood; for no amount of early training could overcome a shock like this.

It gathered itself together and tried to move; and then it got its second shock. Instead of arching over inchworm-wise, it floated into the air and came down three times as far as it had ever jumped in its life.

It cowered on the dreamlike grass, darting glances all about, under, and up. It was lonely and terrified and felt very much put-upon. It saw its shadow through the shifting haze, and the sight terrified it even more; for it had no shadow when it was frightened on Lirht. Everything here was all backwards and wrong way up; it got more visible, instead of less, when it was frightened; its legs didn't work right, it couldn't see properly, and there wasn't a single, solitary malapek to be throdded anywhere. It thought some music; happily, that sounded all right inside its round head, though somehow it didn't resonate as well as it had.

It tried, with extreme caution, to move again. This time its trajectory was shorter and more controlled. It tried a small, grounded pace, and was quite successful. Then it bobbed for a moment, seesawing on its flexing middle pair of legs, and, with utter abandon, flung itself skyward. It went up perhaps fifteen feet, turning end over end, and landed with its stiff forefeet in the turf.

It was completely delighted with this sensation. It gathered itself together, gryting with joy, and leapt up again. This time it made more distance than altitude, and bounced two long, happy bounces as it landed.

Its fears were gone in the exploration of this delicious new freedom of motion. The hurkle, as has been said before, is a happy beast. It curvetted and sailed, soared and somersaulted, and at last brought up against a brick wall with stunning and unpleasant results. It was learning, the hard way, a distinction between weight and mass. The effect was slight but painful. It drew back and stared forlornly at the bricks. Just when it was beginning to feel friendly again. . . .

It looked upward, and saw what appeared to be an opening in the wall some eight feet above the ground. Overcome by a spirit of high adventure, it sprang upward and came to rest on a windowsill — a feat of which it was very proud. It crouched there, preening itself, and looked inside.

It saw a most pleasing vista. More than forty amusingly ugly animals, apparently imprisoned by their lower extremities in individual stalls, bowed and nodded and mumbled. At the far end of the room stood a taller, more slender monster with a naked head — naked compared with those of the trapped ones, which were covered with hair like a mawson's egg. A few moments' study showed the kitten that in reality only one side of the heads was hairy; the tall one turned around and began making tracks in the end wall, and its head proved to be hairy on the other side too.

The hurkle kitten found this vastly entertaining. It began to radiate what was, on Lirht, a purr, or glow. In this fantastic place it was not visible; instead, the trapped animals began to respond with most curious writhings and squirmings and sussurant rubbings of their hides with their claws. This pleased the kitten even more, for it loved to be noticed, and it redoubled the glow. The receptive motions of the animals became almost frantic.

Then the tall one turned around again. It made a curious sound or two. Then it picked up a stick from the platform before it and brought it down with a horrible crash.

The sudden noise frightened the hurkle kitten half out of its wits. It went invisible; but its visibility system was reversed here, and it was suddenly outstandingly evident. It turned and leapt outside, and before it reached the ground, a loud metallic shrilling pursued it. There were gabblings and shufflings from the room which added force to the kitten's consuming terror. It scrambled to a low growth of shrubbery and concealed itself.

Very soon, however, its irrepressible good nature returned. It lay relaxed, watching the slight movement of the stems and leaves — some of them may have been flowers — in a slight breeze.

It turned its attention again to the window, wondering what those racks of animals might be up to now. It seemed very quiet up there. . . . Boldly the kitten came from hiding and launched itself at the window again. It was pleased with itself; it was getting quite proficient at precision leaps in this mad place. Preening itself, it balanced on the window sill and looked inside.

Surprisingly, all the smaller animals were gone. The larger one was hud-

dled behind the shelf at the end of the room. The kitten and the animal watched each other for a long moment. The animal leaned down and stuck something into the wall.

Immediately there was a mechanical humming sound and something on a platform near the window began to revolve. The next thing the kitten knew it was enveloped in a cloud of pungent dust.

It choked and became as visible as it was frightened, which was very. For a long moment it was incapable of motion; gradually, however, it became conscious of a poignant, painfully penetrating sensation which thrilled it to the core.

The hurkle felt strange, transported. It turned and leapt high into the air, out from the building.

Mr. Stott stopped scratching. Disheveled indeed, he went to the window and watched the odd sight of the blue beast, quite invisible now, but coated with dust, so that it was like a bubble in a fog. It bounced across the lawn in huge floating leaps, leaving behind it diminishing patches of white powder in the grass. He smacked his hands, one on the other, and smirking withdrew to straighten up. He had saved the earth from battle, murder and bloodshed, forever, but he did not know that.

And the hurkle kitten?

It bounded off through the long shadows, and vanished in a cove of bushes. There it dug itself a shallow pit, working drowsily, more and more slowly. And at last it sank down and lay motionless, thinking strange thoughts, making strange music, and racked by strange sensations. Soon all its movements ceased, and it stretched out stiffly, motionless.

For about two weeks. At the end of that time, the hurkle, no longer a kitten, was possessed of a fine, healthy litter of just under two hundred young. Perhaps it was the DDT, and perhaps it was the new variety of radiation that the hurkle received from the terrestrial sky, but they were all parthenogenetic females, even as you and I.

And the humans? Oh, we *bred* so! And how happy we were!

But the humans had the slidy itch, and the scratchy itch, and the prickly or tingly or titillative paraesthetic formication. And there wasn't a thing they could do about it.

So they left.

Isn't this a lovely place?

We are assured that Mr. Holmes is no relation to his namesake, that eminent Chicago practitioner who did so much to raise murder to the status of a fine art. But the twentieth century Mr. H. is as worthy a master of evil as his great predecessor . . . literarily speaking, that is! Author of two successful mystery novels, NINE TIMES NINE and ROCKET TO THE MORGUE, he has also written of those more subtle, less easily detected sins, the crimes against the soul. Here is murder indeed most foul, for it is murder supernatural, murder by black magic. And it is, in a way, murder most moral, for Mr. Holmes points up the dreadful futility of practising of the devil's art.

Review Copy

by H. H. HOLMES

THE ONLY LIGHT in the room was the flame burning inside the pentacle.

The man who kept his face in the shadows said, "But why do you want to kill him?"

The customer said, "What's that to you?"

"Let us put it this way," the man said persuasively. "In order to establish the psychic rapport necessary for the success of our . . . experiment, I need a full knowledge of all the emotional factors involved. Only complete knowing can compel the Ab." He hoped it sounded plausible.

The customer said, "Once he gave me a mortal wound. I need to kill him too."

"And why this method? Why not something more direct?"

"I can't cross the continent. I can't leave New York. As soon as I cross the river — I don't know, it's like breath going out of me. . . ."

Compulsion neurosis, the man thought; form of agoraphobia. "But men have been murdered by mail?" he suggested.

"Not this one. He's too smart. He writes mystery novels; you don't think he'll open unexpected parcels, eat chocolates from strangers — why is it always chocolates? — he's too smart, the devil."

"But surely it should be possible to —"

The customer sprang to his feet and his shadow wove wildly in the light from the pentacle. "I'm paying you; isn't that enough? A body'd think you're trying to talk me out of it."

"Nonsense," said the man in the shadows. Though it was true. He knew that he had powers and that he could make good money from their use. But he knew too how unpredictable they were, and he always experienced this momentary desire to talk the customer out of it. "But if you'd tell me your reason. . . ?" There was method to that insistence too. When sometimes things failed and the customer turned nasty, a bit of private knowledge could often keep him from demanding his money back.

The customer settled down again. "All right," he said. "I'll tell you." The light from the pentacle shone on his bared teeth and glistened off the drop of saliva at the corner of his mouth. "He reviewed my book. It was a clever review, a devilish review. It was so damnably wittily phrased that it became famous. Bennett Cerf and I. M. P. quoted it in their columns. It was all anybody heard about the book. And it killed the book and killed me and he has to die."

The man in shadow smiled unseen. One review out of hundreds, and in an out-of-town paper at that. But because it had been distinctively phrased, it was easy to make it a scapegoat, to blame its influence alone for the failure of a book that could never have succeeded. His customer was crazy as a bed-bug. But what did that matter to him, whose customers always were as mad as they were profitable?

"You realize," he said, "that the blood must have fire?"

"I've learned a lot about him. I know his habits and his reactions. There will be fire, and he'll use it." The customer hesitated, and a drop of saliva fell, luminous in the flame from the pentacle. "Will I . . . will I know about it? As though I were there?"

"It's your blood, isn't it?" the man said tersely.

He said nothing more while he arranged the customer inside the pentacle. At his side he set the container of thick black stuff and propped the customer's wrist over it so that the blood dripped in as he made the incision. Then he tossed a handful of powder onto the flame and began to chant.

The book came into the office of the San Francisco *Times* in a normal and unobtrusive manner. It was in a cardboard box wrapped in brown paper and

bore postage at the proper book-rate. The label was plain, bearing no information other than the typed address, which read:

Book department
San Francisco Times
San Francisco, California

Miss Wentz opened the package and discarded the wrappings. She glanced at the oddly figured jacket, opened the book and read the printed slip.

We take pleasure in sending you this book for review and we shall appreciate two clippings of any notice you may give it.

She muttered her opinion of publishers who give neither price nor publication date, and turned to the title page. Her eyes popped a little.

THE BLOOD IS THE DEATH
being a collection of arcane matters
demonstrating
that in the violence of death
lies the future of life
assembled by
Hieronymus Melanchthon

New York
The Chorazin Press
1947

She had never heard of Hieronymus Melanchthon nor The Chorazin Press; but anything comes in to a newspaper. In a book review department, incredulity is a forgotten emotion. Miss Wentz shrugged and soberly set to making out a card for the files, just as though the thing were really a book.

She was interrupted by the arrival of The Great Man, as she (in private) termed The Most Influential Bookpage Editor West of the Mississippi. He breezed in, cast a rapid eye over the pile of new arrivals, and hesitated as he looked at *The Blood Is the Death*.

"What now?" he said. He picked it up, held it in one hand, and let the pages riffle past his thumb. Some people said he could turn out an im-

peccable 250-word review after such a gesture. "Crackpot," he said tersely. "Over on the left." He picked up his mail and headed for the inner office. But he stopped a minute and looked at his thumb, then took out his handkerchief and rubbed at an ink smudge. He looked hurt, as a biologist might if a laboratory guinea-pig turned on him and scratched him.

Miss Wentz put *The Blood* on the left. One wall of the office was a tall double book case. On the right were current books to be reviewed, from which the staff reviewers made their selections. On the left was a hodgepodge of rental romances, volumes of poetry printed by the author, secrets of the Cosmos published in Los Angeles and other opera considered unworthy even of a panning. *The Blood* went in among them, between *Chips of Illusion* and *The Trismegist of the Count St Germain*.

Miss Wentz went back to her typewriter and to her task of explaining to the usual number of eager aspirants that The Great Man did not read unsolicited manuscripts. In a moment she looked up automatically and said "Hello," but there was no one there. Reviewers were always in and out all day Monday; she was sure she had heard, seen, *felt* somebody. . . .

She tried to type and wished the phone would ring or The Great Man would decide to dictate or even a screwball author would wander in. Anything rather than this empty room that was not quite empty. . . .

She was very warm in her welcome of The Reverend, as she mentally labelled him — so warm as thoroughly to disconcert the *Times'* reviewer of religious books. He was a young man still in his diaconate — not a year out of the seminary yet, but already realizing the nets and springes that are set for an unmarried clergyman. He was slowly becoming, not so much a misogynist as a gynophobe, and found himself reading Saint Paul more and more often. He had always thought of the *Times* office as a haven of safety, but if even here — He turned away his face, which was reddening embarrassingly, and devoted himself to serious study of the books on the right.

He took down the letters of a Navy chaplain, a learned thesis on contemplation, and a small book in large type with the peppy title *Prayer is the Payoff*. He set them on the table with a sigh of resignation (at that, there might be a sermon idea in them somewhere) and looked idly at the shelves again. With a half smile he reached for *The Blood Is the Death*.

"Such a sacrilegious title!" he observed, paging through it. "I imagine this might fall into my province at that?"

"What? Oh." Miss Wentz looked at *The Blood*. "That's supposed to be over on the other side. He doesn't want anything on that."

"I found it here," he protested mildly.

"I'd swear I put it over with the rejects." She rose and thrust it in its proper place. "Well, it's there now."

The Reverend frowned at his finger. "What frightful ink in that odd book! Look how it comes off."

Miss Wentz reached in the drawer. "Here's a Kleenex."

But rub though he would, the stain persisted. He was still at it, and rather wishing that he might revert to the vocabulary of his undergraduate days, when Mark Mallow came in.

The word usually used for Mark Mallow was clever, or sometimes even brilliant. People always said how much they admired his work, or how entertaining he was. They were never heard to say anything so simple as "Mallow? Yeah, a swell guy." Mallow wore, among other necessary items, a trim Van Dyke and a jaunty hat and a bright bow tie. You had a feeling that he might have added spats and a cane if that had not been a little too much for San Francisco. There was a spring to his step and a constant smile on his lips, which were thus always parted to show his teeth.

This was fair warning; for though Mark Mallow never barked, his bite was an essential part of his life. Few people ever questioned his judgment in his chosen field of criticism; Starrett and Queen and Sandoe were in constant correspondence with him and respected his taste; but no one had ever accused him of immoderate softheartedness. He was honest, and he wrote a rave review when necessary; but the words sounded forced and compelled. His pannings, on the other hand, were gems of concise assassination, surgically accurate scalpel work that drew life blood.

He had fun.

Mallow nodded to The Reverend, smiled at Miss Wentz, and groaned at the weekly stack of whodunits set aside for him. Then he looked over the general section on the right, picked out a couple of works that bordered on his interests, and paused with a whistle of amazement. He took down a book, stared at its title page, and said, "I'll be damned! If you'll pardon me, Reverend?"

The Reverend, who had long concurred in the opinion, said "Quite."

"Jerome Blackland, or I'll be several things I shouldn't mention here.

Jot me down for this, Miss Wentz, if you please; this ought to be good clean sport."

Miss Wentz looked up automatically and then made a sharp little noise of exasperation. "How did *that* get back there?"

"It was right here," Mallow said.

"I know . . . and I'll take my oath on a stack of Bibles that I put it over on the left not once but twice. Didn't I?"

The Reverend nodded. "I saw you."

"And now it's . . . Oh well. He doesn't want it reviewed, but if it interests you especially . . ."

"Why?" The Reverend asked.

Mallow extended the book open at its mad titlepage. "You see that unbelievable name, Hieronymus Melanchthon?"

"A pseudonym, of course. So much of that quasi-mystical literature is pseudonymous."

"Like the man who wrote under the name of St. John a century or so later?" Mallow asked slyly. "Well, I know who's back of this pseud. Translate it, and what do you get?"

The Reverend summoned up his seminarian Greek. "Jerome Black . . . land, would it be?"

"Exactly. Rich screwball New Yorker. Got all tangled up with black magic and stuff and turned out an amazing opus half-novel, half-autobiography, that made William Seabrook and Montague Summers look like skeptics. I had fun with it. I think I'll have fun with this, too — Damn!" He broke off and stared at his thumb. "I'm bleeding. Did this infernal opus up and take a nip at me? No . . . I'm not bleeding. It's off the book. What the devil kind of ink *is* this?"

The Reverend looked — and was — perplexed. On his own hand the smudge from that strangely printed volume was black. On Mark Mallow's it was blood-red. It seemed perverse. Doubtless some simple explanation — some chemical salt present in Mallow's body secretions and not in his which acted as reagent. . . . Nevertheless he was nervous, and found an occasion promptly to leave the office.

Mallow went on into the inner office to confer with The Great Man, leaving *The Blood* behind him. This time it stayed put, waiting for him. Miss Wentz tried to type again, but still the room was unempty. Not until

Mallow and his book-crammed briefcase had departed did the room feel ordinary again.

Mark Mallow settled himself comfortably on the Bridge train. It was the commuters' hour and the train was packed; but experience and ingenuity always combined to get him a seat. When he had finished a cursory examination of the afternoon newspaper, he spread it over his trouser legs, hoisted his briefcase up onto his lap, and began rummaging among the week's stock. The paunchy businessman occupying the other half of the seat needed more than a half for his bulk; but Mallow's muscles, skilled in this form of civilian commando, unconsciously fended off his encroachment.

The ride over the Bay Bridge, even by train (which operates on a lower and less scenic level than motor traffic), is beautiful and exciting the first time. But habitués never glance out the window unless to attempt to draw deductions from ships in port at the moment. Mark Mallow saw nothing of the splendor of the bay as he selected the latest Craig Rice to enjoy on the trip. (For Mallow did enjoy reading a good whodunit; he merely hated to write about any but the stinkers.)

He read the first page over three times before he realized that the endeavor was vain. Something urged him to replace the Rice in the briefcase and extract another volume, the one with the oddly figured jacket. His hand seemed to move of itself, and at the same time his muscles announced the surprising fact that there was no longer a pressure from the businessman. In fact, he seemed to be edging away.

Mallow smiled as he opened the book. The pretentious absurdity of the title page delighted him, and the text more than lived up to it. (The businessman did not look the type who would give his seat to a lady.) It is, I suppose, inevitable, Mallow reflected, that those who seek to express the inexpressible should have no talent for expression. (The lady did not look the type to refuse a seat either.) Surely worth a choice stabbing little paragraph for the column. A joy, if only it weren't for this damned ink. . . . (The seat remained vacant, in that crowded car, for the whole of the trip. Mallow did not notice it; it seemed as though there were some one there.)

The Reverend was still a trifle perturbed. It was ridiculous that one should worry about such a nothing as a minor chemical oddity. Had he not in

fact prepared a sermon for next Sunday decrying the modern materialists who reduce everything to a series of chemical reactions?

But there was always one source of peace and consolation. The Reverend took down his Bible, intending to turn to the psalms — the ninety-first, probably. But he dropped the Book in astonishment.

It had happened so quickly it could scarcely be believed.

The smudge on his thumb had been black. In the instant that it touched the Bible it turned blood-red, exactly like the stain on Mark Mallow's hand. Then there was a minute hissing noise and an instant of intense heat.

There was no smudge at all on his thumb now.

There was no one in Dr. Halstead's office. The Reverend took up the phone hastily and dialed the number of the *Times*. He said "Book department," and a moment later demanded urgently, "Miss Wentz? Can you give me Mallow's home address?"

Mark Mallow ate well, as he always did when he felt inclined to cook for himself. The dinner was simple: a pair of rex sole, boiled rice (with a pinch of saffron), and a tossed salad; but it could not have been satisfactorily duplicated even in San Francisco, the city of restaurants.

A half bottle of decent Chablis with dinner and a brandy after (both from California vineyards, but nowise despicable) had made Mallow mellow, as he thought to himself with perverse delight in the jarring phrase. Now the warmth of Craig Rice would add pleasurably to his glow.

He settled himself in front of the fireplace. It was quiet up there in the Berkeley hills. No, quiet was too mild a word. It was still — no, stronger yet — it was stilled. Hushed and gently frozen into silence.

There was nothing in the world but the fire and his purring digestive system and the book in his hand. . . . The book was *The Blood Is the Death* and the fire shone on his reddened hand.

Mark Mallow swore to himself, but he was too postprandially lazy to move from the chair. He opened the book and read on a little. His eyes half-closed; high-flown gibberish is one of the finest soporifics. They jerked open and he sat up with a start to greet the unexpected visitor.

The room was empty.

He swore again, in a half-hearted way. He turned his attention to those exquisitely satisfactory digestive processes and noticed that they had reached

a point demanding some attention. He rose from the chair, carried *The Blood* over to the current-review bookcase, replaced it there, and took out the Craig Rice and laid it on the arm of the chair. Then he went to the bathroom, looking, for no good reason, over his shoulder as he left the room.

The Reverend had stout legs. He needed them as he toiled up the hills beyond the end of the streetcar line.

What are you going to say? The Reverend asked himself. What are you going to do? He couldn't answer his questions. He knew only that he had encountered a situation where his duty demanded action.

In the Roman Church, he believed, one of the lower orders of the priesthood was known by the title of Exorcist. He wondered if the Roman clergy were taught the functions of that order, or was the name merely an archaic survival? Shamefacedly he let his fingers steal into his pocket and touch the bottle nestling there — the tiny bottle which he had filled with holy water as he passed a Roman church.

The lights ahead must be those of Mark Mallow's house. From the front window came a glow which seemed to be that of a reading lamp combined with a wood fire. The lighted window was peaceful and of good omen.

The redness came then — the vast redness that filled the room and the window and both The Reverend's eyes.

When Mark Mallow came back from the bathroom, he almost hesitated before entering the room. He felt an absurd impulse to retreat, lock the door, and go to bed. He smiled at himself (a rare phenomenon) and proceeded resolutely to the chair. He sat back, picked up the Craig Rice . . . and its print came off red on his fingers. He stood up in wrath and hurled the crackpot volume into the fire.

In the instant before he hurled it, the room gathered itself up into expectation. The shadows quivered, knowing what manner of light was about to dispel them. The flames of the fireplace shrank back to receive their fierce fresh fuel. For an instant there was no time in this space.

That tick that was eternity passed and time rushed back into the room. The book found the flames and the flames found the blood and the blood found the death that is the life and the life that is death. The shadow went from infra-visibility to blinding sight and it was one with flames and blood

and book and the one thing that was shadow and flames and blood and book leapt.

The room was dark when The Reverend entered. There had been too much light there for an instant; the balance of the sane universe demanded blackness.

The light came on without his touching it when the balance hung even again. He did not blink because it was necessary that he should see this sight. He saw the body of Mark Mallow and he saw the blood of Mark Mallow and another.

The Reverend knew what to do. He opened the phial of holy water and started to pour it on the blood. Instead, the blood ran toward him, but he did not flinch. He stood his ground and watched as the water and the blood commingled and were one, and that one was the water. He recorked the phial, and in it was only water and around the body of Mark Mallow was only the blood of one man.

He left the house. He understood a little. He understood that human reason cannot accept a corpse which sheds twice its amount of blood, and that his presence had enabled him to redress the balance. Now Mallow's death would be only a terrible and unsolved murder, while it might have opened to man a knowledge which he could not bear. He found it harder to understand why he had been permitted to arrive only *after* the . . . happening. He guessed that in some way the small petty comfortable evils of Mark Mallow had made him vulnerable to a larger evil.

He did not know. He did not know if he himself could bear the knowledge which he had shouldered. He knew only that he could pray for Mark Mallow's soul — and probably for that of a man named Blackland.

The man who usually kept his face in the shadow had the decency to attend Jerome Blackland's funeral. He always did this for his clients. It was a sort of professional ethics.

A purist of professional ethics might suggest that he should have warned Blackland of the dangers inherent in bestowing the vital virtues of one's blood to animate printer's ink. But why? Half the time the charms worked imperfectly if at all; and you do not wantonly frighten away customers.

He too said prayers, of his sort, for the souls of Blackland and Mallow.

Mr. Endore is not only a versatile writer — he usually chooses to display at least two facets of his versatility at once. He has combined murder with psychiatry (in Methinks the Lady) and with sociology (in Sleepy Lagoon Mystery). In The Werewolf of Paris he blended lycanthropy with sexual pathology and even with the more rarefied levels of gastronomy. Here, in one of his least known but most fascinating stories, he presents an acute comment on the implications of the machine age in terms of sharply biting fantasy — a story which will leave disturbing misgivings in the mind even as it brings a twisted smile to the lips.

Men of Iron

by GUY ENDORE

“WE no longer trust the human hand,” said the engineer, and waved his roll of blueprints. He was a dwarfish, stocky fellow with dwarfish, stocky fingers that crumpled blueprints with familiar unconcern.

The director frowned, pursed his lips, cocked his head, drew up one side of his face in a wink of unbelief and scratched his chin with a reflective thumbnail. Behind his grotesque contortions, he recalled the days when he was manufacturer in his own right and not simply the nominal head of a manufacturing concern, whose owners extended out into complex and invisible ramifications. In his day the human hand had been trusted.

“Now take that lathe,” said the engineer. He paused dramatically, one hand flung out toward the lathe in question, while his dark eyes, canopied by bristly eyebrows, remained fastened on the director.

“Listen to it!”

“Well?” said the director, somewhat at a loss.

“Hear it?”

“Why, yes, of course.”

The engineer snorted. “Well, you shouldn’t.”

“Why not?”

"Because noise isn't what it is supposed to make. Noise is an indication of loose parts, maladjustments, improper speed of operation. That machine is sick. It is inefficient and its noise destroys the worker's efficiency."

The director laughed. "That worker should be used to it by this time. Why, that fellow is the oldest employee of the firm. Began with my father. See the gold crescent on his chest?"

"What gold crescent?"

"The gold pin on the shoulder strap of his overalls."

"Oh, that."

"Yes. Well, only workers fifty years or longer with our firm are entitled to wear it."

The engineer threw back his head and guffawed.

The director was wounded.

"Got many of them?" the engineer asked, when he had recovered from his outburst.

"Anton is the only one, now. There used to be another."

"How many pins does he spoil?"

"Well," said the director, "I'll admit he's not so good as he used to be . . . But there's one man I'll never see fired," he added stoutly.

"No need to," the engineer agreed. "A good machine is automatic and foolproof; the attendant's skill is beside the point."

For a moment the two men stood watching Anton select a fat pin from a bucket at his feet and fasten it into the chuck. With rule and caliper he brought the pin into correct position before the drill that was to gouge a hole into it.

Anton moved heavily, circumspectly. His body had the girth, but not the solidity of an old tree-trunk: it was shaken by constant tremors. The tools wavered in Anton's hands. Intermittently a slimy cough came out of his chest, tightened the cords of his neck and flushed the taut yellow skin of his cheeks. Then he would stop to spit, and after that he would rub his mustache that was the color of silver laid thinly over brass. His lungs relieved, Anton's frame regained a measure of composure, but for a moment he stood still and squinted at the tools in his hands as if he could not at once recall exactly what he was about, and only after a little delay did he resume his interrupted work, all too soon to be interrupted again. Finally, spindle and tool being correctly aligned, Anton brought the machine into operation.

"Feel it?" the engineer cried out with a note of triumph.

"Feel what?" asked the director.

"Vibration!" the engineer exclaimed with disgust.

"Well what of it?"

"Man, think of the power lost in shaking your building all day long. Any reason why you should want your floors and walls to dance all day long, while you pay the piper?"

He hadn't intended so telling a sentence. The conclusion seemed to him so especially apt that he repeated it: "Your building dances while you pay the piper in increased power expenditure."

And while the director remained silent the engineer forced home his point: "That power should be concentrated at the cutting point of the tool and not leak out all over. What would you think of a plumber who only brought 50% of the water to the nozzle letting the rest flood through the building?"

And as the director still did not speak, the engineer continued: "There's not only loss of power but increased wear on the parts. That machine is afflicted with the aguel!"

When the day's labor was over, the long line of machines stopped all together; the workmen ran for the washrooms and a sudden throbbing silence settled over the great hall. Only Anton, off in a corner by himself, still worked his lathe, oblivious of the emptiness of the factory, until darkness finally forced him to quit. Then from beneath the lathe he dragged forth a heavy tarpaulin and covered his machine.

He stood for a moment beside his lathe, seemingly lost in thought, but perhaps only quietly wrestling with the stubborn torpidity of his limbs, full of an unwanted, incorrect motion, and disobedient to his desires. For he, like the bad machines in the factory, could not prevent his power from spilling over into useless vibration.

The old watchman opened the gate to let Anton out. The two men stood near each other for a moment, separated by the iron grill and exchanged a few comforting grunts, then hobbled off to their separate destinations, the watchman to make his rounds, Anton to his home.

A gray, wooden shack, on a bare lot, was Anton's home. During the day an enthusiastic horde of children trampled the ground to a rubber-like con-

sistency and extinguished every growing thing except a few dusty weeds that clung close to the protection of the house or nestled around the remnants of the porch that had once adorned the front. There the children's feet could not reach them, and they expanded a few scornful coarse leaves, a bitter growth of Ishmaelites.

Within were a number of rooms, but only one inhabitable. The torn and peeling wallpaper in this one revealed the successive designs that had once struck the fancy of the owners. A remnant of ostentatiousness still remained in the marble mantelpiece, and in the stained glass window through which the arc-light from the street cast cold flakes of color.

She did not stir when Anton entered. She lay resting on the bed, not so much from the labor of the day, as from that of years. She heard his shuffling, noisy walk, heard his groans, his coughing, his whistling breath, and smelled, too, the pungent odor of machine oil. She was satisfied that it was he, and allowed herself to fall into a light sleep, through which she could still hear him moving around in the room and feel him when he dropped into bed beside her and settled himself against her for warmth and comfort.

The engineer was not satisfied with the addition of an automatic feeder and an automatic chuck. "The whole business must settle itself into position automatically," he declared, "there's altogether too much waste with hand calibration."

Formerly Anton had selected the pins from a bucket and fastened them correctly into the chuck. Now a hopper fed the pins one by one into a chuck that grasped them at once of itself.

As he sat in a corner, back against the wall and ate his lunch, Anton sighed. His hands fumbled the sandwich and lost the meat or the bread, while his coffee dashed stormily in his cup. His few yellow teeth, worn flat, let the food escape through the interstices. His grinders did not meet. Tired of futile efforts he dropped his bread into his cup and sucked in the resulting mush.

Then he lay resting and dreaming.

To Anton, in his dream, came the engineer and declared that he had a new automatic hopper and chuck for Anton's hands and mouth. They were of shining steel with many rods and wheels moving with assurance through a complicated pattern. And now, though the sandwich was made of pins, of

hard steel pins, Anton's new chuck was equal to it. He grasped the sandwich of pins with no difficulty at all. His new steel teeth bit into the pins, ground them, chewed them and spat them forth again with vehemence. Faster and faster came the pins, and faster and faster the chuck seized them in its perfectly occluding steel dogs, played with them, toyed with them, crunched them, munched them. . . .

A heavy spell of coughing shook Anton awake. For a moment he had a sensation as though he must cough up steel pins, but though his chest was racked as if truly heavy steel pins must come forth, nothing appeared but the usual phlegm and slime.

"We must get rid of this noise and vibration before we can adjust any self-regulating device," said the engineer. "Now this, for example, see? It doesn't move correctly. Hear it click and scrape. That's bad."

Anton stood by, and the engineer and his assistant went to work. From their labors there came forth a sleek mechanism that purred gently as it worked. Scarcely a creak issued from its many moving parts, and a tiny snort was all the sound one heard when the cutting edge came to grips with a pin.

"Can't hear her cough and sputter and creak now, can you?" said the engineer to the director. "And the floor is quiet. Yes, I'm beginning to be proud of that machine, and now I think we can set up an adjustable cam here to make the whole operation automatic.

"Every machine should be completely automatic. A machine that needs an operator," he declared oratorically, "is an invalid."

In a short time the cams were affixed and now the carriage with the cutting tool traveled back and forth of itself and never failed to strike the pin at the correct angle and at the correct speed of rotation.

All Anton had to do now was to stop the machine in case of a hitch. But soon even that task was unnecessary. No hitches were ever to occur again. Electronic tubes at several points operated mechanisms designed to eject faulty pins either before they entered the hopper or else after they emerged from the lathe.

Anton stood by and watched. That was all he had to do, for the machine now performed all the operations that he had used to do. In went the unfinished pins and out they came, each one perfectly drilled. Anton's purblind

eyes could scarcely follow the separate pins of the stream that flowed into the machine. Now and then a pin was pushed remorselessly out of line and plumped sadly into a bucket. Cast out! Anton stooped laboriously and retrieved the pin. "That could have been used," he thought.

"Krr-click, krr-click," went the feeder, while the spindle and the drill went "zzz-sntt, zzz-sntt, zzz-sntt," and the belt that brought the pins from a chattering machine beyond, rolled softly over the idlers with a noise like a breeze in a sail. Already the machine had finished ten good pins while Anton was examining a single bad one.

Late in the afternoon there appeared a number of important men. They surrounded the machine, examined it and admired it.

"That's a beauty," they declared.

Now the meeting took on a more official character. There were several short addresses. Then an imposing man took from a small leather box a golden crescent.

"The Crescent Manufacturing Company," he said, "takes pride and pleasure in awarding this automatic lathe a gold crescent." A place on the side of the machine had been prepared for the affixing of this distinction.

Now the engineer was called upon to speak.

"Gentlemen," he said fiercely, "I understand that formerly the Crescent Company awarded its gold crescent only to workmen who had given fifty years of service to the firm. In giving a gold crescent to a machine, your President has perhaps unconsciously acknowledged a new era. . . ."

While the engineer developed his thesis, the director leaned over to his assistant and whispered, "Did you ever hear of why the sea is salt?"

"Why the sea is salt?" whispered back the assistant. "What do you mean?"

The director continued: "When I was a little kid, I heard the story of 'Why the sea is salt,' many times, but I never thought it important until just a moment ago. It's something like this: Formerly the sea was fresh water and salt was rare and expensive. A miller received from a wizard a wonderful machine that just ground salt out of itself all day long. At first the miller thought himself the most fortunate man in the world, but soon all the villages had salt to last them for centuries and still the machine kept on grinding more salt. The miller had to move out of his house, he had to move off his acres. At last he determined that he would sink the machine

in the sea and be rid of it. But the mill ground so fast that boat and miller and machine were sunk together, and down below, the mill still went on grinding and that's why the sea is salt."

"I don't get you," said the assistant.

Throughout the speeches, Anton had remained seated on the floor, in a dark corner, where his back rested comfortably against the wall. It had begun to darken by the time the company left, but still Anton remained where he was, for the stone floor and wall had never felt quite so restful before. Then, with a great effort, he roused his unwilling frame, hobbled over to his machine and dragged forth the tarpaulin.

Anton had paid little attention to the ceremony; it was, therefore, with surprise that he noticed the gold crescent on his machine. His weak eyes strained to pierce the twilight. He let his fingers play over the medal, and was aware of tears falling from his eyes, and could not divine the reason.

The mystery wearied Anton. His worn and trembling body sought the inviting floor. He stretched out, and sighed, and that sigh was his last.

When the daylight had completely faded, the machine began to hum softly. "Zzz-sntt, zzz-sntt," it went, four times, and each time carefully detached a leg from the floor.

Now it rose erect and stood beside the body of Anton. Then it bent down and covered Anton with the tarpaulin. Out of the hall it stalked on sturdy legs. Its electron eyes saw distinctly through the dark, its iron limbs responded instantly to its every need. No noise racked its interior where its organs functioned smoothly and without a single tremor. To the watchman, who grunted his usual greeting without looking up, it answered never a word but strode on rapidly, confidently, through the windy streets of night — to Anton's house.

Anton's wife lay waiting, half-sleeping on the bed in the room where the arc-light came through the stained-glass window. And it seemed to her that a marvel happened: her Anton come back to her free of coughs and creaks and tremors; her Anton come to her in all the pride and folly of his youth, his breath like wind soughing through tree-tops, the muscles of his arms like steel.

We have always assumed that we knew that amiable gent, Major Stuart Palmer, very well indeed. We weren't surprised when he deserted Hollywood and screen-writing for the second time and reentered the army. We're never surprised when he rolls a four the hard way. (We're often hurt, of course.) But we were amazed when the Major told us that once, during his writing career, he edited a now forgotten ghost-story magazine. And that he's the author of dozens of long-buried weird and terror tales. (Many of which we hope to resurrect — a ghoulish enterprise which should give us all something appetizing to gnaw upon!) So we asked him for this new one. And for others. We can promise more of Palmer, old and new; but, for reasons that will be obvious, there'll be no more of his current heroine . . . unless the devil gets bored with her.

A Bride for the Devil .

by STUART PALMER

"Just as a curiosity," insisted Dr. Baynard, "I assure you that it is a very great bargain, even at the price."

"Perhaps," murmured Emily Parkinson slowly. Her crimson-tipped fingers stroked the yellowed sheet of parchment. "But the price does seem exorbitant, just for some faded old lettering that I can't even read."

"I have every reason to believe," the doctor continued, "that it is made of real human skin."

"How simply terrible!"

Dr. Baynard knew that Mrs. Parkinson was going to buy it, and she knew it also. This hesitation and haggling was a little game that she liked to play before squandering her husband's money on antiques or colored glass or primitive paintings. She was a handsome, Junoesque person, with smooth, suspiciously yellow hair, fine teeth, and the general appearance of a woman ten years her junior. Her record of three husbands and two divorces indicated that she was at the very least somewhere in her forties, but expensive beauty treatments had kept her plump face smooth as a girl's.

Her warm, enfolding smile, her full breasts, her ample femininity, had since her schooldays held out a promise unfulfilled to her husbands or for that matter to anyone else. Her current spouse, Frederic Parkinson, kept himself nowadays almost entirely to his Wall Street office, his club, and to a succession of pretty little secretaries, models, and chorus girls, from whom according to rumor he received whatever warmth and happiness can be purchased for spot-cash. He was represented in Emily Parkinson's life mainly by the large checkbook which now lay before her on the Sheraton desk in the big, heavily-draped library of the Park Avenue apartment.

"I assure you, dear lady," Dr. Baynard was saying, "that this is in all ways a most unusual sheet of parchment. Any collector of *curiosa* —"

"But what is so curious about a page torn from a volume written only three hundred years ago? It's handwritten, too, and most books were set in type by then, weren't they?"

Dr. Baynard, steadying himself by gripping the edge of the desk, bowed creakily. "This page," he explained, "comes from the notorious *Ausgeburten des Menschenwahns* of Benedict Koenig, a factual account of the torments of the inquisition in early Germany. A very grim, almost sadistic work, although supposedly set down for the glory of God and the edification of the public, in very primitive black-letter German. However, it is well-known among students that manuscript paper or parchment was very scarce at certain periods, particularly in the monasteries of Germany and France. The good monks were forced to make inroads, out of pious zeal, upon their own libraries. They carefully bleached out the previous, older writings in order to provide blank space for their own compositions. It was thus, we are told, that almost all of the poems of Sappho were lost."

Mrs. Parkinson toyed with her fountain pen. "Yes, doctor?"

"That is what evidently happened in this case. The writer ran short of paper and used a parchment, a most unusually fine and soft parchment, for the last page of the sixteenth chapter of his manuscript. It is interesting, of course, to conjecture as to the ancient volume from which the sheet was taken, and how such a thing happened to be in a monastery at all. However, I digress. The point is that the advances of modern science, particularly in chemistry and in fluoroscopic and infra-red lighting, can bring back the ancient writings even though they are, as in this case, invisible to the naked eye." Here Dr. Baynard smiled, showing all his yellowed bridgework.

"The original volume was sent to a colleague of mine for appraisal. In assisting him, I chanced to notice the unusual texture of this page, and took the liberty of removing it. Under the magic lights, dear lady, there appeared words, and then complete sentences, set down in a crabbed Latin hand. It must date back another six or seven hundred years, at the least. I happen to have with me a literal translation of the first few paragraphs. Read, dear lady, for yourself."

He offered a typewritten sheet, which Mrs. Parkinson accepted with a gracious bow. She opened a gold case, removed her pince-nez, and began to read. After a moment her mouth began to drop open, and her naturally hyperthyroid eyes bulged even more.

"Good heavens!" she cried. When she had finished there was a marked flush on her face and neck. "It's very specific, isn't it?"

After a moment she put down the sheet and reached for the checkbook. "I really shouldn't," she said. "But I'll make it a birthday present to myself, ahead of time."

Dr. Baynard looked extremely pleased, a smile showing faintly through his wispy Van Dyke. "I am very gratified, dear lady, and not only because of the slight commission involved. It is naturally not at all the sort of thing which could be offered to the regular dealers in the usual way."

"But one must be broad-minded, mustn't one?" Mrs. Parkinson blotted the check carefully. "I think it is perfectly fascinating. You will, of course, continue with the translation for me?"

"It will be a pleasure, madam."

"Because the most wonderful idea has just come to me!"

Dr. Baynard, folding up the check lovingly before tucking it away in his thin leather billfold, suddenly caught his breath. "My dear lady! You're not thinking of trying it?"

She nodded brightly. "Just as an adventure, of course. After all, the thing is really a ritual, is it not — combined with a very clear and detailed recipe?"

"But — some of the ingredients —"

"Yes, of course, doctor. The corpse-fat, and the unicorn's horn, and the blood of still-born babes. We may not be able to get everything, but one can make substitutions. After all, the medical profession used to laugh at the Chinese herb-doctors who prescribed the ground-up heads of toads for heart trouble, until it was discovered that digitalis was contained in them. What

we shall aim at is the spirit, if not the letter, of the list of ingredients. You will help me, doctor?"

Dr. Baynard had had two glasses of excellent sherry, and Mrs. Parkinson's eyes were very large and warm and compelling. "Why, I could hardly refuse, dear lady. One cannot be, however, too hopeful about any possible results —"

"Naturally. But we must not forget that where there is so much smoke, there might be fire. After all, at some of the seances last year I very definitely felt *something*. There are more things in Heaven and earth, you know. Besides, it is really a scientific experiment."

Out of this beginning was born the Satanist Society, with Emily Parkinson as its president and prime-mover, and Dr. Baynard as secretary and master of ceremonies. Mrs. Parkinson felt very daring, devilish even, as she explained to her little group of kindred spirits the adventure that lay before them. There were a dozen or so, almost all wealthy, idle women who had long since passed over to others the care of their homes, their husbands, and their children. Not that many of them had ever cared to risk the travail and responsibility of having children in the first place.

Some of the ladies had been with Mrs. Parkinson through her Vedanta era, through Dr. Coué, the Oxford Movement, Yoga, Christian Science, and a few of the most daring had even followed her into a brief and unsatisfying series of Black Masses under the guidance of a de-frocked Roman Catholic priest.

They had sat through endless seances led by a succession of mediums, including the famous Margery of Boston. They had heard horns blown, tambourines pounded, and had felt the wet touch of ectoplasm — or wet cheese-cloth — in the darkness.

They had tried numerology, during which many of them changed the spelling of their first names. They had for a time trusted themselves to the guidance of the stars, with individual horoscopes prepared by the best and most expensive astrologers, and had shivered with delicious apprehension when their sign was in the wrong house or under a baleful influence.

But there had never been anything like this. The ladies of the group lived in a veritable frenzy of excitement during the weeks — and there were many many weeks — while Dr. Baynard was translating the rest of the invocation, and painstakingly assembling the necessary ingredients.

"Let us take as our slogan that Nothing Is Impossible!" Mrs. Parkinson had said.

It was surprising, really, how much could be done with the lavish backing of the Parkinson checkbook. Of course there were a number of substitutions that had to be made, for the original manuscript had been couched in the most archaic and almost fantastic language that could be imagined. It was Dr. Baynard who secured powdered unicorn's horn by bribing a zoo attendant to supply him with a bit of a rhinoceros' tusk — for what was the fabled beast but the result of garbled tales brought back to Europe from Africa by someone who had met someone who had seen a rhino?

Grave-robbing was avoided by the simple means of making an arrangement with the service staff of a large hospital, where still-born babes were nothing out of the way. And as for the venom of an adder, Dr. Baynard discovered that cobra venom was available in small quantities at most medical supply houses.

So it was that slowly, one by one, the long list of necessaries was at last completed, in the spirit if not completely in the letter of the formula. It was Mrs. Parkinson who insisted upon waiting until St. John's Eve for the actual ceremony. There might be nothing to the ancient tradition, but again there might. "What is most important is to place ourselves as much as is possible in tune, in harmony, with the forces that we hope to evoke."

The day finally arrived, and the ladies gathered at Mrs. Parkinson's big white country house on the north shore of Long Island. The hour had first been set at midnight, but after some research by the doctor it had been changed to moon-rise, which was due to occur shortly after eight in the evening. It was a full, round moon that hung over the Sound like a worn copper coin.

For some time the big house had been closed, which made it all the better. Mrs. Parkinson wanted no servants around to gossip and pry. With the help of the doctor, who was fairly trembling at the weight of his responsibility, the unused ballroom was made ready. There were folding chairs to be set up, lighting to be arranged, and the skylight opened so that the moonlight could enter.

There was a twitter of delighted apprehension among the ladies, as they saw the stage, which had originally been the musicians' stand. It was bare now, covered only with a dark carpet on which had been traced, in various-

colored chalks, a five-sided figure, with beautifully drawn devices in its corners.

This pentacle was illuminated only by one shaded bulb from the side, but a deeper, eerie light was beginning to shine from the brim of an iron pot which hung from a tripod set within the pentacle, and into which Dr. Baynard was from time to time throwing bits of unmentionable material, or pouring little gouts of liquid from an assortment of bottles, all the while referring constantly to a list in his hand.

Mrs. Parkinson stood beside him on the platform, as was her right. She was, the other ladies had to admit, looking her very best, in an evening gown of black and crimson which made the most of her fine shoulders and bust. "Please sit down, ladies," she announced. "In a very few minutes the time will be ripe. I must ask that we all maintain the most rigorous silence during this — this experiment. We must concentrate, and hold the thought!" She glared at one of the guests in the back row. "There will be no smoking please!"

The ladies settled themselves with a hushing, whispering buzz and rustle, and then all was silence. Mrs. Parkinson watched, nodding her approval, as Dr. Baynard tossed in a few more herbs and potions, and the pot flared higher. She then backed away to where a big radio-phonograph stood, and touched a switch. In a moment the room was filled with the powerful though diminished music of the "Danse Macabre."

The house lights were completely dark now, and in that darkness the ladies sat still, and held the thought. It is true that no two of them held the same thought, for their conceptions of His Satanic Majesty were all very different, based upon folklore, dimly remembered religious education, and literature. One lady in the front row, who had once been an avid reader of James Branch Cabell, visioned the Adversary as a neat, respectable tradesman in a brown velveteen jacket. Her neighbor, more in the classical tradition, saw Him as Lucifer, Son of the Morning — a beautiful, proud, fallen angel, a little like Rudolph Valentino only with more character in His face.

To some of the others, He was Mephistopheles, the swaggering Gallic devil with waxed moustaches and a pointed beard, wily yet polite, with a contract ready for signature and a promise of all the riches of this world. Yet again, there were ladies in the audience who confused Him with Pan, thinking of the cloven hoof, the shaggy dancing goat legs, the classic profile

and the pipe of reeds that blew such strange sweet overpowering tunes. . . .

Oddly enough, each one of them had retained an idea of the Prince of Darkness, out of the illustrations seen in childhood, out of folklore and literature, when all the other concepts of religion had been long since eaten away. The villain of the piece is easier to remember, when the curtain has fallen. Who was it who trapped Fagin, who battled with Quasimodo, who sought to drive the stake through Dracula?

Not that anyone was going to let herself be disappointed when nothing happened. The experiment was of course doomed to failure, but even in its failure it would prove something. And it was all terribly terribly thrilling.

Sober and unsmiling, his manner somehow reverent, Dr. Baynard tossed another handful of ingredients into the pot, and then he began to read aloud from the paper he held in his hand. "Belphegor — Asmodeus — Beelzebub —"

The list of names was very long indeed, and the doctor's voice was thin and weak.

One of the ladies began to titter, in pure nervousness, and Mrs. Parkinson glared, with her finger to her lips, until there was silence again. Now the incense was pouring out of the brazier, a pillar of thick brownish smoke streaked with flashes of reddish fire.

"Aeshma Devi!" cried Dr. Baynard, still following his text. "Azazel — Architophel — Zita — Istar — Arcade! Princes, Principalities, Powers, Thrones and Dominions!"

Here he tossed a handful of whitish powder into the fire, which immediately erupted with a blaze of greenish-yellow flame.

Dr. Baynard cleared his throat, and began: "Amen forever glory the and power the is Thine for —"

"It's backwards!" explained a lady in the audience to her next neighbor.

"— forgive and bread daily our day this us give —"

His voice was fading. Mrs. Parkinson peered at him, wondering if they really ought to go any farther. Something had gone wrong with the record, too, for it was going around and around in the same groove.

"Doctor, are you all right?" she whispered.

". . . heaven in is it as even earth on, done be will Thy, come kingdom Thy, name Thy be hallowed —" The doctor was speaking faster and faster now. ". . . heaven-in-art-whoFatherOur!"

Then there was a long and agonizing pause, during which the only sound in the room was Dr. Baynard's labored breathing and the monotonous repetition of the record. Mrs. Parkinson shut it off, and turned to the audience. Her poise had never deserted her, and she was quite evidently prepared for even such an anticlimax as this. "Ladies!" she cried. "I am sure that we all — I mean, I myself felt something, there at the end, a very definite *something* in the room."

Her voice died away in her throat as she saw the faces of the ladies in the audience, the bloated, terror masks that yammered and goggled up at her. She turned, to see Dr. Baynard kneeling within the pentacle.

Then she looked behind her. She shrieked, with all the power of her lungs, "Retro mas, Satanas!"

What happened after that is to some extent a matter for conjecture, as the accounts of eyewitnesses differ. Each of the ladies in the panic-stricken audience carried away with her on her mad flight a vision of a squat, anthropomorphic entity which had taken shape on the platform.

It stood there for a moment, surprised and blinking, crouched on its thick, bowed legs. Its body was toadlike, scabrous, and oily with a glistening, dripping ichor, and the scent which pervaded the room was by no means the comparatively clean reek of sulphur and brimstone.

It turned first toward Dr. Baynard, but halted at the edge of the pentacle. Then its reddish, mad little eyes opened wider and a hellish grin illumined its face.

By that time the room was almost emptied, except for the doctor, now completely collapsed within his chalk-drawn zone of safety. One or two of the ladies, more curious or less agile than the rest, saw in a quick glance over her shoulder a horrifying view of the demon as it seized delightedly upon Emily Parkinson.

With its thick legs clamped about her neck, its clawlike paws tangled in her yellow hair, its heavy hairless tail lashing her across the flanks, the thing rode Mrs. Parkinson as a rodeo performer rides a bucking horse, rode her around and around the platform and then off through the air and out the skylight into the night. Her shrill neighing screams died in the distance.

Nothing further was ever heard of Emily Parkinson, unless it could have been her bright yellow hair which appeared here and there in the fine elms of that part of Long Island, woven neatly into the nests of the robins.

Oliver Onions, the great old Yorkshireman, has a special talent for making the supernatural grimly realistic. Into a commonplace phase of normal human activity he introduces . . . something; then existence gets all out of focus. In The Beckoning Fair One, hailed by such aficionados as Bennett Cerf and William Lyon Phelps as one of the rare absolutely great stories of terror, he does compromise by using an ancient and history-haunted setting; but who else would dare to create unearthly horror in the noisy prosaic world of building construction, where all things can be measured with a slide rule? Footsteps from another world could never be heard above the drumming clatter of riveters. You're sure of that? Then read the story of the craneman Room, the lone wolf of the construction world who was never quite alone.

Room

by OLIVER ONIONS

FOR all I ever knew to the contrary, it was his own name; and something about him, name or man or both, always put me in mind, I can't tell you how, of Negroes. As regards the name, I dare say it was something hugger-mugger in the mere sound — something that I classed, for no particular reason, with the dark and ignorant sort of words, such as "Obi" and "Hoodoo." I only know that after I learned that his name was Room, I couldn't for the life of me have thought of him as being called anything else.

The first impression that you got of his head was that it was a patchwork of black and white — black bushy hair and short white beard, or else the other way about. As a matter of fact, both hair and beard were piebald, so that if you saw him in the gloom a dim patch of white showed down one side of his head, and dark tufts cropped up here and there in his beard. His eyebrows alone were entirely black, with a little sprouting of hair almost joining them. And perhaps his skin helped to make me think of Negroes, for it was very dark, of the dark brown that always seems to have more than a hint of green behind it. His forehead was low, and scored across with deep horizontal furrows.

We never knew when he was going to turn up on a job. We might not have seen him for weeks, but his face was always as likely as not to appear over the edge of a crane-platform just when that marvellous mechanical intuition of his was badly needed. He wasn't certificated. He wasn't even trained, as the rest of us understood training; and he scoffed at the drawing-office, and laughed outright at logarithms and our laborious methods of getting out quantities. But he could set sheers and tackle in a way that made the rest of us look silly. I remember once how, through the parting of a chain, a sixty-foot girder had come down and lay under a ruck of other stuff, as the bottom chip lies under a pile of spellikins — a hopeless-looking smash. Myself, I'm certificated twice or three times over; but I can only assure you that I wanted to kick myself when, after I'd spent a day and a sleepless night over the job, I saw the game of tit-tat-toe that Rooum made of it in an hour or two. Certificated or not, a man isn't a fool who can do that sort of thing. And he was one of these fellows, too, who can "find water" — tell you where water is and what amount of getting it is likely to take, by just walking over the place. We aren't certificated up to that yet.

He was offered good money to stick to us — to stick to our firm — but he always shook his black-and-white piebald head. He'd never be able to keep the bargain if he were to make it, he told us quite fairly. I know there are these chaps who can't endure to be clocked to their work with a patent time-clock in the morning and released of an evening with a whistle — and it's one of the things no master can ever understand. So Rooum came and went erratically, showing up maybe in Leeds or Liverpool, perhaps next on Plymouth Breakwater, and once he turned up in an out-of-the-way place in Glamorganshire just when I was wondering what had become of him.

The way I got to know him (got to know him, I mean, more than just to nod) was that he tacked himself on to me one night down Vauxhall way, where we were setting up some small plant or other. We had knocked off for the day, and I was walking in the direction of the bridge when he came up. We walked along together; and we had not gone far before it appeared that his reason for joining me was that he wanted to know "what a molecule was."

I stared at him a bit.

"What do you want to know that for?" I said. "What does a chap like you, who can do it all backwards, want with molecules?"

Oh, he just wanted to know, he said.

So, on the way across the bridge, I gave it to him more or less from the book — molecular theory and all the rest of it. But, from the childish questions he put, it was plain that he hadn't got the hang of it all. "Did the molecular theory allow things to pass through one another?" he wanted to know; "*could* things pass through one another?" And a lot of ridiculous things like that. I gave it up.

"You're a genius in your own way, Room," I said finally; "you know these things without the books we plodders have to depend on. If I'd luck like that, I think I should be content with it."

But he didn't seem satisfied, though he dropped the matter for that time. But I had his acquaintance, which was more than most of us had. He asked me, rather timidly, if I'd lend him a book or two. I did so, but they didn't seem to contain what he wanted to know, and he soon returned them, without remark.

Now you'd expect a fellow to be specially sensitive, one way or another, who can tell when there's water a hundred feet beneath him; and as you know, the big men are squabbling yet about this water-finding business. But, somehow, the water-finding puzzled me less than it did that Room should be extraordinarily sensitive to something far commoner and easier to understand — ordinary echoes. He couldn't stand echoes. He'd go a mile round rather than pass a place that he knew had an echo; and if he came on one by chance, sometimes he'd hurry through as quick as he could, and sometimes he'd loiter and listen very intently. I rather joked about this at first, till I found it really distressed him; then, of course, I pretended not to notice. We're all cranky somewhere, and for that matter, I can't touch a spider myself.

For the remarkable thing that overtook Room — (That, by the way, is an odd way to put it, as you'll see presently; but the words came that way into my head, so let them stand) — for the remarkable thing that overtook Room, I don't think I can begin better than with the first time, or very soon after the first time, that I noticed this peculiarity about the echoes.

It was early on a particularly dismal November evening, and this time we were somewhere out south-east London way, just beyond what they are pleased to call the building-line — you know these districts of wretched trees and grimy fields and market-gardens that are about the same to real country that a slum is to a town. It rained that night; rain was the most ap-

appropriate weather for the brickfields and sewage-farms and yards of old carts and railway-sleepers we were passing. The rain shone on the black hand-bag that Room always carried; and I sucked at the dottle of a pipe that it was too much trouble to fill and light again. We were walking in the direction of Lewisham (I think it would be), and were still a little way from that eruption of red-brick houses that . . . but you've doubtless seen them.

You know how, when they're laying out new roads, they lay down the narrow strip of kerb first, with neither setts on the one hand nor flagstones on the other? We had come upon one of these. (I had noticed how, as we had come a few minutes before under a tall hollow-ringing railway arch, Room had all at once stopped talking — it was the echo, of course, that bothered him.) The unmade road to which we had come had headless lamp-standards at intervals, and ramparts of grey road-metal ready for use; and save for the strip of kerb, it was a broth of mud and stiff clay. A red light or two showed where the road-barriers were — they were laying the mains; a green railway light showed on an embankment; and the Lewisham lamps made a rusty glare through the rain. Room went first, walking along the narrow strip of kerb.

The lamp-standards were a little difficult to see, and when I heard Room stop suddenly and draw in his breath sharply, I thought he had walked into one of them.

"Hurt yourself?" I said.

He walked on without replying; but half a dozen yards farther on he stopped again. He was listening again. He waited for me to come up.

"I say," he said, in an odd sort of voice, "go a yard or two ahead, will you?"

"What's the matter?" I asked, as I passed ahead. He didn't answer.

Well, I hadn't been leading for more than a minute before he wanted to change again. He was breathing very quick and short.

"Why, what ails you?" I demanded, stopping.

"It's all right. . . . You're not playing any tricks, are you? . . ."

I saw him pass his hand over his brow.

"Come, get on," I said shortly; and we didn't speak again till we struck the pavement with the lighted lamps. Then I happened to glance at him.

"Here," I said brusquely, taking him by the sleeve, "you're not well. We'll call somewhere and get a drink."

"Yes," he said, again wiping his brow. "I say . . . Did you hear?"

"Hear what?"

"Ah, you didn't . . . and, of course, you didn't feel anything . . ."

"Come, you're shaking."

When presently we came to a brightly lighted public-house or hotel, I saw that he was shaking even worse than I had thought. The shirt-sleeved barman noticed it too, and watched us curiously. I made Rooum sit down, and got him some brandy.

"What was the matter?" I asked, as I held the glass to his lips.

But I could get nothing out of him except that it was "All right — all right," with his head twitching over his shoulder almost as if he had a touch of the dance. He began to come round a little. He wasn't the kind of man you'd press for explanations, and presently we set out again. He walked with me as far as my lodgings, refused to come in, but for all that lingered at the gate as if loath to leave. I watched him turn the corner in the rain.

We came home together again the next evening but by a different way, quite half a mile longer. He had waited for me a little pertinaciously. It seemed he wanted to talk about molecules again.

Well, when a man of his age — he'd be near fifty — begins to ask questions, he's rather worse than a child who wants to know where Heaven is or some such thing — for you can't put him off as you can the child. Somewhere or other he'd picked up the word "osmosis," and seemed to have some glimmering of its meaning. He dropped the molecules, and began to ask me about osmosis.

"It means, doesn't it," he demanded, "that liquids will work their way into one another — through a bladder or something? Say a thick fluid and a thin: you'll find some of the thick in the thin, and the thin in the thick?"

"Yes. The thick into the thin is ex-osmosis, and the other end-osmosis. That takes place more quickly. But I don't know a deal about it."

"Does it ever take place with solids?" he next asked.

What was he driving at? I thought; but replied: "I believe that what is commonly called 'adhesion' is something of the sort, under another name."

"A good deal of this bookwork seems to be finding a dozen names for the same thing," he grunted; and continued to ask his questions.

But what it was he really wanted to know I couldn't for the life of me make out.

Well, he was due any time now to disappear again, having worked quite six weeks in one place; and he disappeared. He disappeared for a good many weeks. I think it would be about February before I saw or heard of him again.

It was February weather, anyway, and in an echoing enough place I found him — the subway of one of the Metropolitan stations. He'd probably forgotten the echoes when he'd taken the train; but, of course, the railway folk won't let a man who happens to dislike echoes go wandering across the metals where he likes.

He was twenty yards ahead when I saw him. I recognised him by his patched head and black hand-bag. I ran along the subway after him.

It was very curious. He'd been walking close to the white-tiled wall, and I saw him suddenly stop; but he didn't turn. He didn't even turn when I pulled up close behind him; he put out one hand to the wall, as if to steady himself. But, the moment I touched his shoulder, he just dropped — just dropped, half on his knees against the white tiling. The face he turned round and up to me was transfixed with fright.

There were half a hundred people about — a train was just in — and it isn't a difficult matter in London to get a crowd for much less than a man crouching terrified against a wall, looking over his shoulder as Room looked, at another man almost as terrified. I felt somebody's hand on my own arm. Evidently somebody thought I'd knocked Room down.

The terror went slowly from his face. He stumbled to his feet. I shook myself free of the man who held me and stepped up to Room.

"What the devil's all this about?" I demanded, roughly enough.

"It's all right . . . it's all right, . . ." he stammered.

"Heavens, man, you shouldn't play tricks like that!"

"No . . . no . . . but for the love of God don't do it again! . . ."

"We'll not explain here," I said, still in a good deal of a huff; and the small crowd melted away — disappointed, I dare say, that it wasn't a fight.

"Now," I said, when we were outside in the crowded street, "you might let me know what all this is about, and what it is that for the love of God I'm not to do again."

He was half apologetic, but at the same time half blustering, as if I had committed some sort of an outrage.

"A senseless thing like that!" he mumbled to himself. "But there: you

didn't know. . . . You *don't* know, do you? . . . I tell you, d'you hear, *you're not to run at all when I'm about!* You're a nice fellow and all that, and get your quantities somewhere near right, if you do go a long way round to do it — but I'll not answer for myself if you run, d'you hear? . . . Putting your hand on a man's shoulder like that, just when . . .”

“Certainly I might have spoken,” I agreed, a little stiffly.

“Of course you ought to have spoken! Just you see you don't do it again. It's monstrous!”

I put a curt question.

“Are you sure you're quite right in your head, Room?”

“Ah,” he cried, “don't you think I just fancy it, my lad! Nothing so easy! I thought you guessed that other time, on the new road . . . it's as plain as a pikestaff . . . no, no, no! *I shall be telling you something about molecules one of these days!*”

We walked for a time in silence.

Suddenly he asked: “What are you doing now?”

“I myself, do you mean? Oh, the firm. A railway job, past Pinner. But we've a big contract coming on in the West End soon they might want you for. They call it ‘alterations,’ but it's one of these big shop-rebuildings.”

“I'll come along.”

“Oh, it isn't for a month or two yet.”

“I don't mean that. I mean I'll come along to Pinner with you now, tonight, or whenever you go.”

“Oh!” I said.

I don't know that I specially wanted him. It's a little wearing, the company of a chap like that. You never know what he's going to let you in for next. But, as this didn't seem to occur to him, I didn't say anything. If he really liked catching the last train down, a three-mile walk, and then sharing a double-bedded room at a poor sort of alehouse (which was my own programme), he was welcome. We walked a little farther; then I told him the time of the train and left him.

He turned up at Euston, a little after twelve. We went down together. It was getting on for one when we left the station at the other end, and then we began the tramp across the Weald to the inn. A little to my surprise (for I had begun to expect unaccountable behavior from him) we reached the inn without Room having dodged about changing places with me, or having

fallen cowering under a gorse-bush, or anything of that kind. Our talk, too, was about work, not molecules and osmosis.

The inn was only a roadside beerhouse — I have forgotten its name — and all its sleeping accommodation was the one double-bedded room. Over the head of my own bed the ceiling was cut away, following the roof-line; and the wall paper was perfectly shocking — faded bouquets that made V's and A's, interlacing everywhere. The other bed was made up, and lay across the room.

I think I only spoke once while we were making ready for bed, and that was when Room took from his black hand-bag a brush and a torn night-gown.

“That's what you always carry about, is it?” I remarked; and Room grunted something: Yes . . . never knew where you'd be next . . . no harm, was it? We tumbled into bed.

But, for all the lateness of the hour, I wasn't sleepy; so from my own bag I took a book, set the candle on the end of the mantel, and began to read. Mark you, I don't say I was much better informed for the reading I did, for I was watching the V's on the wallpaper mostly — that, and wondering what was wrong with the man in the other bed who had fallen down at a touch in the subway. He was already asleep.

Now I don't know whether I can make the next clear to you. I'm quite certain he was sound asleep, so that it wasn't just the fact that he spoke. Even that is a little unpleasant, I always think, any sort of sleep-talking; but it's a very queer sort of sensation when a man actually answers a question that's put to him, knowing nothing whatever about it in the morning. Perhaps I ought not to have put that question; having put it, I did the next best thing afterwards, as you'll see in a moment . . . but let me tell you.

He'd been asleep perhaps an hour, and I wool-gathering about the wallpaper, when suddenly, in a far more clear and loud voice than he ever used when awake, he said:

“What the devil is it prevents me seeing him, then?”

That startled me, rather, for the second time that evening; and I really think I had spoken before I had fully realised what was happening.

“From seeing whom?” I said, sitting up in bed.

“Whom? . . . You're not attending. The fellow I'm telling you about, who runs after me,” he answered — answered perfectly plainly.

I could see his head there on the pillow, black and white, and his eyes were closed. He made a slight movement with his arm, but that did not wake him. Then it came to me, with a sort of start, what was happening. I slipped half out of bed. Would he — would he? — answer another question? . . . I risked it, breathlessly.

“Have you any idea who he is?”

Well, that too he answered.

“Who he is? The Runner? . . . Don’t be silly. *Who else should it be?*”

With every nerve in me tingling, I tried again.

“What happens, then, when he catches you?”

This time, I really don’t know whether his words were an answer or not; they were these:

“To hear him catching you up . . . and then padding away ahead again! All right, all right . . . but I guess it’s weakening *him* a bit, too. . . .”

Without noticing it, I had got out of bed, and had advanced quite to the middle of the floor.

“What did you say his name was?” I breathed.

But that was a dead failure. He muttered brokenly for a moment, gave a deep troubled sigh, and then began to snore loudly and regularly.

I made my way back to bed; but I assure you that before I did so I filled my basin with water, dipped my face into it, and then set the candlestick afloat in it, leaving the candle burning. I thought I’d like to have a light. . . . It had burned down by morning. Room, I remember, remarked on the silly practice of reading in bed.

Well, it was a pretty kind of obsession for a man to have, wasn’t it? Somebody running after him all the time, and then . . . running on ahead? And, of course, on a broad pavement there would be plenty of room for this running gentleman to run round; but on an eight- or nine-inch kerb, such as that of the new road out Lewisham way . . . but perhaps he was a jumping gentleman too, and could jump over a man’s head. You’d think he’d have to get past some way, wouldn’t you? . . . I remember vaguely wondering whether the name of that Runner was not Conscience; but Conscience isn’t a matter of molecules and osmosis. . . .

One thing, however, was clear; I’d got to tell Room what I’d learned: for you can’t get hold of a fellow’s secrets in ways like that. I lost no time about it. I told him, in fact, soon after we’d left the inn the next morning.

And — what do you think of this? — he seemed to think I ought to have guessed it! *Guessed* a monstrous thing like that!

“You’re less clever than I thought, with your books and that, if you didn’t,” he grunted.

“But . . . Good God, man!”

“Queer, isn’t it? But you don’t know the queerest . . .”

He pondered for a moment, and then suddenly put his lips to my ear.

“I’ll tell you,” he whispered. “*It gets harder every time!* . . . At first, he just slipped through: a bit of a catch at my heart, like when you nod off to sleep in a chair and jerk up awake again; and away he went. But now it’s getting grinding, sluggish; and the pain. . . . You’d notice, that night on the road, the little check it gave me; that’s past long since; and last night, when I’d just braced myself up stiff to meet it, and you tapped me on the shoulder . . .” He passed the back of his hand over his brow.

“I tell you,” he continued, “it’s an agony each time. I could scream at the thought of it. It’s oftener, too, now, and he’s getting stronger. The end-osmosis is getting to be ex-osmosis — is that right? Just let me tell you one more thing —”

But I’d had enough. I’d asked questions the night before, but now — well, I knew quite as much as, and more than, I wanted.

“Stop, please,” I said. “You’re either off your head, or worse. Let’s call it the first. Don’t tell me any more, please.”

“Frightened, what? Well, I don’t blame you. But what would *you* do?”

“I should see a doctor; I’m only an engineer,” I replied.

“Doctors? . . . Bah!” he said, and spat.

I hope you see how the matter stood with Rooum. What do you make of it? Could you have believed it — *do* you believe it? . . . He’d made a nearish guess when he’d said that much of our knowledge is giving names to things we know nothing about; only rule-of-thumb Physics thinks everything’s explained in the Manual; and you’ve always got to remember one thing: You can call it Force or what you like, but it’s a certainty that things, solid things of wood and iron and stone, would explode, just go off in a puff into space, if it wasn’t for something just as inexplicable as that which Rooum said he felt in his own person. And if you can swallow that, it’s a relatively small matter whether Rooum’s light-footed Familiar slipped through him unperceived, or had to struggle through obstinately.

More: I saw it. This thing, that outrages reason — I saw it happen. That is to say, I saw its effects, and it was in broad daylight, on an ordinary afternoon, in the middle of Oxford Street, of all places. There wasn't a shadow of doubt about it. People were pressing and jostling about him, and suddenly I saw him turn his head and listen, as I'd seen him before. I tell you, an icy creeping ran all over my skin. I fancied I felt it approaching too, nearer and nearer. . . . The next moment he had made a sort of gathering of himself, with his body. He swayed, physically, as a tree sways in a wind; he clutched my arm and gave a loud scream. Then, after seconds — minutes — I don't know how long — he was free again.

And for the colour of his face when by and by I glanced at it . . . well, I once saw a swarthy Italian fall under a sunstroke, and *his* face was much the same colour that Room's Negro face had gone; a cloudy, whitish green.

"Well — you've seen it — what do you think of it?" he gasped presently.

But it was night before the full horror of it had soaked into me.

Soon after that he disappeared again. I wasn't sorry.

Our big contract in the West End came on. It was a time-contract, with all manner of penalty clauses if we didn't get through; and we were busy.

It's a shop now, the place we were working at, or rather one of these huge weldings of fifty shops where you can buy anything; and if you'd seen us there . . . but perhaps you did see us, for people stood up on the tops, of omnibuses as they passed, to look over the mud-splashed hoarding into the great excavation we'd made. It was a sight. Staging rose on staging, tier on tier, with interminable ladders all over the steel structure. Three or four squat Otis lifts crouched like iron turtles on top, and a lattice-crane on a towering three-cornered platform rose a hundred and twenty feet into the air. At one end of the vast quarry was a demolished house, showing flues and fireplaces and a score of thicknesses of old wallpaper; and at night — they might well have stood up on the tops of the buses! A dozen great spluttering violet arc-lights half-blinded you; down below were the watchmen's fires; overhead, the riveters had their fire-baskets; and in odd corners naphtha-lights guttered and flared.

And I ought to say that fifty feet above our great gap, and from end to end across it, there ran a travelling crane on a skeleton line, with platform, engine, and wooden cab all compact in one.

It happened that they had pitched in as one of the foremen some fellow or other, a friend of the firm's, a rank duffer, who pestered me incessantly with his questions. I did half his work and all my own, and it hadn't improved my temper much. On this night that I'm telling about, he'd been playing the fool with his questions as if a time-contract was a sort of summer holiday; and he'd filled me up to that point that I really can't say just when it was that Room put in an appearance again.

Well, our Johnnie Fresh came up to me for the twentieth time that night, this time wanting to know something about the overhead crane.

"What ails the crane?" I cried. "It's doing its work, isn't it?"

But he grabbed my arm.

"Look at it now!" he cried, pointing; and I looked up.

Either Hopkins or somebody was dangerously exceeding the speed-limit. The thing was flying along its thirty yards of rail as fast as a tram, and the heavy fall-blocks swung like a ponderous kite-tail, thirty feet below. As I watched, the engine brought up within a yard of the end of the way, the blocks crashed like a ram into the broken house end, fetching down plaster and brick, and then the mechanism was reversed.

"Who in Hell . . ." I began; but it wasn't a time to talk. "*Hi!*" I yelled, and made a spring for a ladder.

The others had noticed it, too, for there were shouts all over the place. By that time I was halfway up the second stage. Again the crane tore past, with the massive tackle sweeping behind it, and again I heard the crash at the other end.

On the fourth platform, at the end of the way, I found Hopkins. He was white, and seemed to be counting on his fingers.

"What's the matter here?" I cried.

"It's Room," he answered. "I hadn't stepped out of the cab, not a minute, when I heard the lever go. He's running somebody down, he says; he'll run the whole shoot down in a minute — look! . . ."

The crane was coming back again. Half out of the cab I could see Room's mottled hair and beard.

"Now . . . you! . . . *Now*, damn you! . . ." he was shouting.

"Get ready to board him when he reverses!" I shouted to Hopkins.

Just how we scrambled on I don't know. I got one arm over the lifting-gear (which, of course, wasn't going), and heard Hopkins on the other foot-

plate. Room put the brakes down and reversed; again came the thud of the fall-blocks; and we were speeding back again over the gulf of misty orange light. The stagings were thronged with gaping men.

"Ready? Now!" I cried to Hopkins; and we sprang into the cab.

Hopkins hit Room's wrist with a spanner. Then he seized the lever, jammed the brake down and tripped Room, all, as it seemed, in one movement. I fell on top of Room. The crane came to a standstill half-way down the line. I held Room panting.

But either Room was stronger than I, or else he took me very much unawares. All at once he twisted clear from my grasp and stumbled on his knees to the rear door of the cab.

"Keep still, you fool!" I bawled. "Hit him over the head, Hopkins!"

Room screamed in a high voice.

"Run him down — cut him up with the wheels — down, you! *Hal!*"

He sprang clear out from the crane door, wellnigh taking me with him.

I told you it was a skeleton line, two rails and a tie or two. He'd actually jumped to the right-hand rail. And he was running along it — running along that iron tightrope, out over that well of light and watching men. Hopkins had started the travelling-gear, as if with some insane idea of catching him; but there was only one possible end to it. He'd gone fully a dozen yards, while I watched, horribly fascinated; and then I saw the turn of his head. . . .

He didn't meet it this time; he sprang to the other rail, as if to evade it. . . .

Even at the take-off he missed. As far as I could see, he made no attempt to save himself with his hands. He just went down out of the field of my vision. There was an awful silence; then, from far below . . .

They weren't the men on the lower stages who moved first. The men above went a little way down, and then they too stopped. Presently two of them descended, but by a distant way. They returned, with two bottles of brandy, and there was a hasty consultation. Two men drank the brandy off and then they went down, drunk.

I, Hopkins tells me, had got down on my knees in the crane cab, and was jabbering away cheerfully to myself. When I asked him what I said, he hesitated, and then said: "Oh, you don't want to know that, sir."

What do *you* make of it?

Detective story fans know Richard Sale as the author of a handful of agreeably askew novels and many reliable pulp stories; but there is a portion of Sale's pulp product which has always worried the whodunit fan. The narratives of Captain McGrail are unsettling; they exist somewhere on the borderline between logical crime and a world gone mad. As in this story: Did Perseus Smith concoct the cleverest neck-saving yarn on record, or did the magic of Mount Olympus arise to confound the homicide department? The answer is up to you — and you may still not have made up your mind by the time we bring you another of the fabulous yarns of Captain McGrail.

Perseus Had a Helmet

by RICHARD SALE

"FEATURE STORY?" Captain McGrail said, rearing back in his chair and frowning as he puffed on his cigar. "Listen, pencil-pusher, this is the homicide bureau. You know there ain't a feature story for a paper up here. They do the bumping, we nab 'em, they sit in that chair where you're resting it right now, and then they spill or they get a going over. That's all it is. No color, no tricks, no malarkey."

"All right," I said. "So my city editor is nuts and there isn't a feature story to be had by the chief of the homicide bureau. But all that aside, Captain, think. There must have been some poor son-of-a-gun in here once upon a time who'd be worth a feature."

"Naw," said Captain McGrail, looking like a cynic. "They're either hysterical women who've just slipped a bullet in some guy's hide, or they're drunks who didn't know any better, or they're rats who tried to make easy money and ran into murder or they're —" and he stopped, with a look of breaking dawn upon his rugged face.

"Or they're what?" I asked hopefully.

"— or they're screwballs," he said. He sat up and puffed on the cigar and stared at me. "You're a young squirt," he went on, "and you probably

never heard of Perseus Smith. That was a little before your time. About four years ago, I guess. Now there might be a feature in poor old Perseus. No scribe ever did get the inside story. We felt so bad for the coot, we killed the crazy confession he made. That was a queer one."

"All right," I said. "Spill it then."

"Draw up a chair, son, and pour yourself a drink, and I'll see if I can remember the thing as it all happened . . ." And he proceeded to spill it.

Perseus Smith (said Captain McGrail) was a mild little man who'd never hurt a fly in his life. And Perseus was really his first name. His mother had been reading the Greek classics shortly before he was born and when he arrived she gave him the moniker, hoping he'd turn out to be as big and brave and handsome as the original Perseus, who, I understand, was quite a guy.

Well, as it turned out, they couldn't have been more different. Do you remember what the Greek Perseus did? I looked it all up after we had Perseus Smith in the can, just out of personal curiosity. There's quite a yarn about the Greek. A crooked king wanted to marry Perseus' mother but the Greek was always in the way. So he sent Perseus out to knock off a gorgon by the name of Medusa who had a head so bad it turned people into marble, with snakes on the dome instead of hair. This Perseus, he went after Medusa and gave her the axe and brought back the head, let the crooked king take a gander at it, and presto, there was another statue in the castle.

But Perseus Smith! He was an insurance salesman no less, about five feet five inches tall, a little bald, a little waistline, thirty-two years old, wore glasses, looked henpecked without being married, and jumped at the sight of his own shadow. He managed to eke out thirty bucks a week, and how I don't know. As a salesman, he impressed you more like a female impersonator . . . just a run-of-the-mill worm.

Perseus happened to be carrying the torch for a little blonde in the insurance office by the name of Ruby Miller. Ruby didn't happen to be Perseus' type, as we later found out, but he thought she was and he spent most of his weekly stipend sending her candy and flowers and probably dreaming about her.

Ruby Miller was a smart little girl. She had good looks, blonde hair (which she renewed at the hairdresser's from week to week), and a pair of gams that would have put Dietrich to shame. She had better looking guys than Perseus Smith on her trail and she knew it. But she liked candy and

the flowers and so she kept him on the line, playing him against a brawny, brainless guy named Bill Jordan — who also worked at the office — and who in his own estimation was of the same caliber as Clark Gable and Adam.

You know the type.

Ruby Miller really liked this second guy, Jordan, but he was too cocky for her and he didn't flatter her enough. He made out as if it were a privilege for her because he liked her and went out with her.

So she began to give Perseus Smith the works to make Bill jealous.

It worked too but not the right way. Instead of being more humble with Ruby, this Jordan began to pick on Perseus Smith so that poor Perseus was almost afraid to go to work mornings.

About this time, the company decided to throw a costume ball for all its employees. Some sort of celebration of the fact that business had been going on more or less for fifty years. They tossed it at the Brookville Hotel no less and it was going to be quite an affair.

When Perseus Smith heard about the ball, he immediately asked Ruby Miller if she'd go to it with him. And Ruby, who happened to be mad at Bill Jordan at that particular time, said she would. She was going, she informed him, as Juliet and it would be a shame that a guy named Shakespeare couldn't see her because, as Juliet, she was planning on being the real McCoy. (There were prizes, you see, for the best costume.)

Perseus got cold feet then. "I didn't expect to go in costume," he told her. "I feel so doggone silly all dressed up queer."

"Well," said Ruby with that you-know-what look in her eyes, "you wear a costume to the ball or you don't go with *me!* After all, Perseus Smith, it *is* a costume party, you know!"

Perseus knew it but he still didn't like it. "Besides, Ruby," he said, "I wouldn't know what to go as. I'm no Romeo so I can't go teamed up with you. I'd feel so silly."

"Well," said Ruby, "why don't you go like your name then? Wasn't Perseus a Greek hero or something? I remember reading about him when I was in high school. Maybe you've got something there."

So Perseus Smith went home and read up on Perseus, the Greek. And he found out that when Perseus the Greek went to slay the gorgon, the gods helped him out. Minerva loaned him a glittering shield. Mercury loaned him a powerful sword and a pair of winged sandals which allowed him to fly.

A galaxy of wood nymphs gave him a magic pouch and a headgear called "the helmet of darkness."

It seemed like a good idea. Perseus Smith visited a theatrical costumer a couple of days before the ball was to come off and got himself an outfit. He picked up a papier-mâché sword and shield, a Greek tunic, and a helmet. The helmet was really beautiful — a regal thing, all shiny and silvery with a comb of upright white feathers on the back of it. The costume cost Perseus Smith twelve bucks.

That night he tried the outfit on and looked at himself in the mirror. He looked pretty good except that he was aware that his legs were too bony. After all, he only had on a drafty little kirtle and a pair of sandals. You could count the cold-stiffened hairs on his knees. But he was in love with this dame, remember, and love finds a way, they say.

"How is it so far?" asked Captain McGrail, pausing to take a sip of his own wine.

"So far it's all right," I said. "And this is putrid wine. But look, Captain, if it's just that the little guy knocks off the big guy on account of the dame, it's out. The Perseus angle isn't that good all by itself. My city editor said —"

"Keep your ears on," said Captain McGrail. "It's a little more than just the Perseus angle. But remember, this ain't a police version. This is the story, more or less, as we got it out of the guy himself the night he sat in your chair there. Funny little mug. . . . He seemed to take it for granted his goose was cooked and he talked."

"Go on with the story," I said.

The afternoon of the ball (Captain McGrail continued), Bill Jordan, the rival suitor for the fair Ruby's hand, followed Perseus Smith home from the office. By this time, Jordan was ga-ga about the little lady and he knew that she was just trying to taunt him with the Perseus dope, and he was convinced that he wouldn't fall for it.

It doesn't sound like much of a build-up for a murder, does it? Just two guys in love with a girl. But Perseus Smith was funny. He was sensitive and he had an inferiority complex, and anytime you find a guy like that, you can be sure that he hates to be made a fool of more than anything else in the world.

Bill Jordan wanted to stop Ruby's game with Perseus and the only way he could do that was to stop Perseus. So he followed Perseus Smith home that night and got Perseus up in his room alone and said, "Smith, let's settle this thing right now. I'm taking Ruby to the ball tonight."

"Oh no," said Perseus, "I am. I asked her and she said that she would go with me."

"Yeah?" said Bill Jordan, sticking out a jaw that would have been just the thing for the prow of a battleship. "Says you."

"Says," replied Perseus bravely, sticking out a jaw that couldn't manage to dull three razor blades a year, "*me!*"

"Smith," said Bill Jordan ominously, "I'm trying to settle this like a gentleman. I don't care if the girl is mad at me right now, understand? But I still don't want her to make a fool out of herself by showing up at a swank affair like tonight with a horn-rimmed comic scarecrow like you in tow."

"Until Ruby says she prefers other company," said Perseus, "I will accompany her to the ball. And I resent your vulgar remarks, though they do not surprise me."

"Listen," Bill Jordan growled, grabbing Perseus by the vest and lifting him off the ground, "I ain't fooling, mister. Get this and get it straight. You're not going to show up at Ruby's. She's gonna be waiting there for you and you won't show up. Instead, I'll show up when she's beefing about you and calling you names, and I'll take her to the ball. Understand that, punk, or else!"

"Or — else — what?" Perseus faltered, unwilling to retreat from his stand.

"You're asking for it," said Bill Jordan. And then the fun began. He shellacked that Smith lad like he'd never been shellacked before. He bloodied his nose and laid a pair of shiners over his eyes and hurt him in the body. And when he was finished and Perseus Smith was a limp bundle, out cold on the floor, Bill Jordan left, triumphant, contemptuous, and grinning — as he thought of Ruby — from ear to ear.

When Perseus Smith came to, he felt rotten. He didn't mind the beating so much. The pain of that had subsided for the most part, and his nose had stopped bleeding. But the whole thing was humiliating. Ignominiously overwhelmed by a moron like Bill Jordan — and all for the sake of Ruby. What would she think? It hurt. . . .

You've got to say the lad had guts though. He went to the bathroom and washed up. He couldn't do much about the shiners. They were pretty bad. But he powdered them with some after-shaving powder and in the artificial light they looked passable. Perseus got ready then to go to the ball. It had been under way for over two hours now, but he was going anyhow, while he still bore the marks of his beating, and he was going to tell Ruby Miller what kind of a fellow Bill Jordan was and prove it, even if Jordan killed him for it.

He got into his Greek tunic and put on his winged sandals and fixed the fake armor around his chest. Then he picked up his phony sword and shield and put on the helmet. It was chilly out, so he decided to wear a coat. Then he realized that he would have to take a cab anyhow to the ball on account of he couldn't walk in the streets in that kind of a get-up. So he left the coat behind and went out.

In the hall, he met Mrs. Hannigan, the landlady of the house. He felt silly, meeting her in the Greek get-up, and he laughed embarrassedly and said, "I guess you think I'm crazy, Mrs. Hannigan, but it's only that I'm going to a dance —"

Mrs. Hannigan turned around at the sound of his voice, went white, screamed like a madwoman, and ran.

Perseus Smith was disturbed. He couldn't imagine why she'd done that. He thought maybe he looked horrible or something in the Greek get-up with the pair of black eyes. Maybe he'd scared her with the fake sword. He thought he'd better get on his way before she called a cop, so he ran out and got into a cab that was parked at the corner.

When he slammed the door, the driver turned around automatically and said, "Where to?"

"The Brookville Hotel, please," Perseus said, "and make it as fast as you can. I'm late now."

The driver gaped, his eyes nearly popping out of his head. His skin went pea-green and he looked as though he were trying to shriek but couldn't get steam up.

"Don't be alarmed," said Perseus Smith quietly, "it's only a costume for a ball tonight, that's all. I'm not crazy. Just take me to the Brookville Hotel."

And with that the driver emitted a screech you could have heard over

in Brooklyn and got out of that cab and vanished just as fast as he could. You could have knocked Perseus Smith over with a feather.

"You see what I mean?" asked Captain McGrail.

"I see what you mean," I said. "It does get better. It's beginning to take the taste of the wine out of my mouth. Why don't you try Barsac sometime. You'll find it doesn't —"

"Listen, Richard Harding Davis," said Captain McGrail with sarcasm, "do you want to hear the rest of this story or not?"

"Of course I want to hear it," I said. "I'm making notes on it all the time. But your wine *was* bad. Now tell me, why did Mrs. Hannigan fade away, and what made the taxi driver scream?"

"I can see," replied Captain McGrail, "that you ain't up on your Greek myths. We'll be coming to that shortly."

There wasn't any way of bringing that cab driver back (Captain McGrail went on), and Perseus Smith didn't want to take a cab and drive off with it and get pinched for car-heisting. So he got out. There wasn't another cab around. He remembered right then that he hadn't brought his money with him anyhow, and that if he had, he wouldn't have found a place to put it. That outfit he wore didn't have a change pocket.

. . . Anyway, Perseus decided that he'd walk over to the hotel. So he went back to his room and got his coat. And when he came downstairs, he heard Mrs. Hannigan talking on the phone. "Yes, officer, it's the living truth I'm telling you . . ." and so forth. So Perseus got out of there fast.

He had expected people to hoot at him now and then, and at least to stare at him as though he were either a maniac or some sort of ambulating advertisement.

But nobody noticed him at all. Several people bumped into him, turned, stared, then fled in panic. Crossing a street once, a taxi nearly killed him, although the driver must certainly have seen him since he was right in the way. . . .

But finally he reached the Brookville Hotel and went in. He could hear the music coming from the grand ballroom and Perseus could see everyone in costume. He wondered how he was going to find Ruby and Bill Jordan because everyone was wearing masks. He went to the check room and took off his coat and laid it on the counter.

The girl was a little brunette and she was chewing gum but when she saw that coat go on the counter, she gulped, swallowed the gum and began inhaling breath for a scream that would have blown the doors down. "Don't be alarmed," said Perseus. "It's only a costume."

She looked up in stupefaction, and her face was whiter than snow could ever be. She looked like a maniac. Her eyes got bigger and bigger and Perseus had a horrible moment when he thought they would go pop, right out of the sockets.

"For heaven's sake," he said, "get a grip on yourself. If this costume is as terrifying as people seem to think it is, perhaps I'd better —"

And then she screamed. Her face contorted terribly. Perseus Smith felt his heart turn over inside of him. He made out her words just as he grabbed for the topcoat and ran. "*He ain't there! He's talkin' but he ain't there!*" And the girl keeled over neatly backward while Perseus went with the wind.

When he reached Broadway, the kid stopped to consider. He remembered what she said, and although it was asinine, it bothered him. Of course it wasn't true. The hat-check girl had probably been a little high, what with Bacchus supplying the whole shindig with light wines and beer. . . . And then Perseus recalled the cab driver and Mrs. Hannigan, and the people who had bumped into him. . . .

That was the worst moment in his life. Perseus stopped on the corner of 48th and Broadway and he shuddered violently. People swarmed around him, pushing him, bumping into him. He got out of their way inconspicuously and leaned against a lamp post, and took off the "helmet of darkness" to scratch his head.

Instantly a passing wisecre stopped, took a gander at the hysterical get-up and began to roar with laughter. "Get a load of the Greek Scotsman," said the wiseguy. "All set to go out and slay the dragon. Hey, thespian, what picture you advertising, *Ben Hur?*"

Perseus Smith shivered and put his helmet back on and started to get away from the group which, with the native curiosity of New Yorkers, had formed around him. He stepped off the curb, heard shrieks and yells behind him, turned and saw the group blowing up like splinters from a bomb. Two women fainted, the wisecre ran yelling down the street.

Perseus Smith made as quiet an exit as possible. Nobody saw him go — that was the trouble.

The thing seemed to be on the level but he had to test it. He had to test it in such a way as to prove it once and for all and there didn't seem to be any such way without the risk of arrest for disorderly conduct.

Perseus Smith thought it over in front of a hot-dog and orange-juice stand for a long time. Finally he got his nerve up because he began to see enormous possibilities in the thing. He went into the hot-dog stand. He found a man behind the counter, and a customer — all alone and eating a frankfurter and a cup of coffee — at the front. It was fair enough as a test. He reached over and took the man's hat off and set it on the counter.

The man gulped on the hot dog and nearly choked. He wheeled and turned. He stared at the hat, then wet his finger and held it up. "I didn't feel a wind," he said. "Did you see that?"

"No," said the hash-slinger behind the counter. "What?"

The man pointed at his hat.

"Just picked my hat off and laid it down as neat! And I didn't feel anything at all."

Perseus Smith reached over and punched the cash register. It banged open amid many jinglings and registered, "*No Sale.*"

"Cut that out," said the hash-slinger. "You keep your mitts on the other side of this counter."

The wide-eyed man with the hot dog gulped again. "I didn't do it," he said. "I didn't touch the thing. I can't even reach it from here. . . ." He dropped the hot dog and his eyes rolled. "Brother, I'm getting outa here. This joint is haunted!" And he faded fast.

"Good evening," said Perseus Smith quietly.

The counterman gaped around, then asked, "Who's talking?"

"I am," said Perseus. "I'm right here where the other fellow was. Can't you see me?"

"I — can't — see — a — doggone — thing —"

"Hmm," Perseus muttered. "Will you watch this cup of coffee a minute and tell me what happens to it?" He picked up the cup.

The counterman emitted strange gasping sounds. "*It ain't!*"

"And now?" Perseus put it back.

"It — is —"

"Thank you," Perseus said quietly. "I guess that rather proves it. I'm invisible."

The counterman was screaming wildly for a riot squad when Perseus Smith stepped out of the booth and walked quickly east, mulling over his uncanny condition and trying to figure it out.

"If you think," I said dryly, "that I'm going to be able to write this hocus-pocus as a feature story for a newspaper, you're crazy. It was going good until he became invisible."

Captain McGrail sighed and shook the ashes off his cigar. "The trouble with you is you're a cynic, son. Now me, I'd really like to believe this story that Perseus Smith unloaded when we socked him into your chair there and told him to spill. Understand, this is *his* version, not ours. And the funny part of it is he had an awful lot of evidence to prove —"

"Cut it out," I said. "It's a fairy tale."

"In a manner of speaking," said Captain McGrail, "it is. But then the Holy Grail is a fairy story nowadays too. Yet the Grail was supposed to be a healing cup in the olden times. And who's to say whether or not them Greek myths were true or not."

I asked, "What have Greek myths got to do with it?"

"Well, that's how Perseus came to get invisible," said Captain McGrail. "Have some more wine and I'll tell you."

Perseus Smith tried to figure out first what made him visible and invisible. He remembered taking off the helmet on Broadway and how people noticed his costume at once. And the next instant when he put it on, they all scattered. So he said to himself, the secret of invisibility lay in the helmet.

He decided to acquire the helmet at once.

He returned home that night but he couldn't sleep much. Next morning he returned the costume to the man who had rented it to him. But he didn't bring back the helmet.

"Say," he said, "I'm awfully sorry but I lost that helmet last night."

"That'll cost you," said the costumer nastily, "eight bucks."

"Seems like a lot," said Perseus, but he paid it gladly.

Next he walked over to the public library and he sat down with a volume of Greek myths and looked up the adventures of Perseus. He found that the helmet of darkness which the wood nymphs had given to Perseus was such as to render him invisible so that the gorgon Medusa would not be able to see him when he used Mercury's sword to cut her head off and

Minerva's shield to watch her with, so that he did not have to look directly at her and be turned into stone.

"By George!" Perseus muttered. "I'll bet that helmet is the same darn helmet —"

He put the book away and stole quickly home again.

. . . Now Perseus had to get used to the new helmet, so he telephoned the office and told them that he would not be in that day as he was ill. Bill Jordan, when he heard the excuse, grinned from ear to ear. He knew why Perseus Smith was ill. What's more, he had Ruby Miller eating out of his hand.

Perseus Smith could have done a lot of good with the helmet of darkness. He knew that and he considered it. But he kept thinking of Bill Jordan and Ruby Miller. He wanted revenge. He was a worm who had suddenly become an Atlas. The helmet of darkness had made a little man a titan, it had the power to transform a Caspar Milquetoast into an Attila, or a Genghis Khan.

Perseus decided he'd kill Bill Jordan. He hated the man thoroughly now, hated the humiliating beating he had taken, felt the hurt deep down inside of him.

Perseus also decided that he'd marry Ruby Miller. Notice, he *decided*. Before the helmet of darkness, he had only hoped.

But you'll notice too — and it's a commentary on the mind of a man in its way — that the helmet and its power would ultimately have won any women in the world for Perseus. And he still thought only in terms of Ruby Miller.

For Ruby Miller, Perseus Smith knew that he would have to have a lot of money. He'd awe her with gifts and flowers and prestige. And he knew that she'd like him for that — if for no other reason. For Bill Jordan, he decided to arrange a grandiloquent finish with the police sitting right there, baffled, and Perseus would keep them baffled for eternity. It would be a master stroke.

So Perseus set out to try the helmet of darkness and see how good he had to be to work it right.

He began by breaking a window in the jewelry shop not far from his rooms where he had seen a wonderful wristwatch for which he had longed. He took a rock, hurled it through the glass, then pulled out the watch and

stood by as a policeman arrived on the scene. He followed the shop owner and the cop around for awhile until he got bored. The wristwatch disappeared, of course, the moment he wore it. Everything he touched seemed to vanish while he wore it.

Both the cop and the shopkeeper were mystified. Seeing that nothing of interest would be forthcoming from them, Perseus decided to try some bigger game.

He rode downtown to the bank where he often went to deposit checks which the big boss sent him over with. The bank was crowded and there was no way to get into the tellers' cages without opening doors, which would have looked funny. A door opening by itself. So he tried climbing up over the top of the cages and then reaching down into the cash trays. It went very well.

When Perseus returned home that night, it was with some three thousand dollars in cash.

He decided then and there to get to work on Bill Jordan and get him out of the way at once. He sat down and clipped words from an evening newspaper which he had taken from a newsstand before he crawled under the turnstile of the subway on his way home. He pasted them on a sheet of paper and when he was through he read the message aloud:

"I am going to kill you tomorrow night at eight o'clock in your own rooms and would appreciate it if you warned police in advance. Mister X."

It looked pretty good, like kidnapers' notes he had seen in newspapers. He put it in a stamped envelope, printed Jordan's address in pencil on the front, and went out and mailed it.

He stayed away from the office next day, too, but he called a doctor who, when he arrived, found Perseus in bed. The doctor examined him and agreed that he had had a bad beating. Mrs. Hannigan cooked some broth for him and the doctor said for her to be sure and see that Perseus Smith remained in bed another day at least.

"Don't worry, Doctor," said Mrs. Hannigan. "He can't leave the house without me seeing him."

This was fine. Perseus smiled, because it gave him a perfect alibi. He would leave the house invisibly, and Mrs. Hannigan would swear he had never gone out.

At seven-thirty, he got up, put on a bathrobe and shoes, donned the

helmet of darkness, and went out. He broke a window in a gunshop and took out a .32 caliber Colt pistol which was fully loaded, and then he went on to Bill Jordan's apartment.

When he arrived there, he saw the cop down in front and he knew that there were more cops upstairs. He went up anyhow, all the way to the roof. He found a cop on the roof, but he walked right by the flatty without making a sound, then he climbed down the fire-escape on the front of the house until he came to Bill Jordan's living-room.

He looked in.

Bill Jordan was sitting in a chair in the middle of the room in a blue funk, sweating profusely and staring at the clock. There were two cops in there with him and they looked ready for business. Perseus smiled. He eased open the window quietly and stuck his head in and his gun in. He watched the clock and waited.

At precisely eight o'clock, the chimes began to sound. He watched Jordan grow rigid and stare at the hands. When the chimes stopped he fired five shots into Bill Jordan and killed him dead. Then Perseus backed out of the window and took it on the lam.

But that's fate for you. As he jerked his head back, he knocked the helmet off. It fell five stories into the street somewhere. And the cops turned around at the shots and, lo and behold, there was Perseus Smith — in the flesh — still holding the rod, caught red-handed, betrayed by the helmet of darkness which he had knocked off his head himself.

They arrested him. He was as meek and mild a little lamb as you ever saw. They brought him down here and he confessed readily and, son, he sat in the chair you're sitting in now and told me this self-same story, and that's a fact.

"The wine," I said, making a wry face, "is still sad. But you haven't finished, Captain. Did he get the chair?"

"With an imagination like that?" Captain McGrail roared. "Not on your life he didn't. After that story, we checked up and we checked up too well. We saw we didn't have a chance, so the D.A. let the little guy plead insanity and he's up in Matamoras at the asylum. I hear that he seems to be happy up there."

I stared at McGrail. "You mean the little shrimp got away with it? You must be crazy."

"Yeah?" he drawled. "Well, look at the facts. We found three grand in the goop's bedroom. And a bank clerk in Perseus' boss's bank was jailed for embezzling that three grand. Coincidence, maybe? All right. Maybe so. The costumer said yes, Perseus had paid eight bucks for a helmet he said he lost. All right. Mrs. Hannigan swore on the night of the murder that Perseus had not left his room. But just the same, he wasn't in it. The hat-check gal at the Brookville Hotel swore on a stack of Bibles that she'd talked with an invisible man, but that was put down to the liquor which ran free that night at the party. We never found the Broadway wisecracker, nor the cab driver. Perseus did stay away from the office for two days, but that was explained by the fact that he had a pair of shiners and was ashamed of them. . . . All right — that leaves only the hash-slinger in the hot dog joint."

"What about him?" I asked, as Captain McGrail tipped back his chair and put his feet up.

"Why," he said, "he must have seen something awful queer that night. He got so scared at his own shadow, he hanged himself in a closet the same night, so he never would have been good as a witness. Of course, he owed a lot of money, which is one reason why he might have done a Dutch, but just the same it's kind of a coincidence that he should pick just that night —"

"You almost sound as though you believed all the guff that Perseus Smith spilled that night!" I said.

Captain McGrail shrugged. "He had a wonderful imagination," he drawled. "A very wonderful imagination. It saved his neck and put him in an insane asylum. Maybe he *is* crazy, I don't know. Understand, I don't exactly believe poor old Perseus' story, but just the same, I sure wish we could have found that helmet he kept jabbering about when he confessed to us."

"You never found the helmet?" I exclaimed, and dropped the pad I'd been jotting notes on.

"Never saw it again," he said. "One of the cops in Bill Jordan's room saw it fall, so there really *was* a helmet. The theory was that it might have fallen into a passing sanitary truck. You know. But that just seems like the coincidence that broke the camel's back. . . . I dunno, son, I dunno. I often wish we'd found that helmet of darkness. A smart guy would have strapped

it under his chin instead of taking a chance on knocking it off — not that I believe it, of course.”

“But just the same,” I said with sarcasm, “you figure that if Perseus didn’t have a helmet of darkness, he certainly had a wonderful imagination.”

“That’s it,” said Captain McGrail, reaching for the wine. “A wonderful imagination.”



“On the way home from school I noticed a small speck in the sky. It grew larger and larger. It turned out to be an invasion fleet from Mars. They had supersonic jet ships and were armed with cosmic-destructo rays. I had to save our Earth people and I fought them all off single-handed. I guess I got banged up a little, but that’s nothing. You should see that stupid Charlie Keller from down the street — he turned traitor and fought with the Martians.”

Here is a story of the distant scientific future — but it is not science fiction. In fact, like Huxley's Brave New World or Leiber's Gather, Darkness, it might best be described as anti-science fiction. Miss McClintic has already delighted connoisseurs with her imaginative verse in the Atlantic; her first published story brings to the fantasy field a welcome new talent, wedding the subtility of a poet to the ingenuity of a story-teller.

In the Days of Our Fathers

by WINONA MCCLINTIC

MELPH, although an atavistically sensitive child, had had an average childhood. Her parents, thinking she would outgrow this sensitivity, said nothing about it to the Instructors. However, they managed to keep her at home two years longer than the siblings. She was the youngest in the house and the group decided that this caused her backwardness. She was fond of the lyrics that the house-assistant sang to her. The siblings would go to sleep immediately they heard them, but Melph stayed awake listening, and afterward would sing them to herself in bed. Her favorite was the ageless one:

Einstein, Einstein,
Make a diagram
For Baby to blueprint
When he is a man.

Make a new milk-well
Of radiated foam
For Baby to drink
When his plane comes home.

Melph's life was calm and pleasant, in spite of the Preliminary Training which she had to endure like everyone else. During the long, warm days she was taken to the oceanside by the house-assistant, to play in the quiet

waters and run along the sand. Many times she would be found meditating and staring over the ocean, thinking long, long thoughts, as her sire put it.

The house was a comparatively new one, having been built in the last five hundred years, but there was a locked attic with small round windows, where Melph wished she could go. She had asked her parents many times but was never given permission. Then after a silence on the subject for two years she asked again, and watched her parents sharply to learn what mystery was there.

"No, child," said her sire, "and you must not ask again." He turned to her dam and said, "She takes after your brother Bisec." And because they were well-mated Dam said only, "Poor Bisec! Hush, Sire."

"Is that Uncle Bisec who Passed Beyond before I was conceived?" asked Melph.

"Yes, child," answered Dam. "Run out into the sunshine."

Melph went out but she said to herself, "If I am like Uncle Bisec and his mystery is hidden in the attic, I must find the key by stealth, and thus understand myself by applied parallel."

For some months after this Melph was unable to make progress, although she discovered where her parents hid the *Life Readings*, which would be given to her at the age of eleven, and the pictures her sire scrawled when he was uncalm. She had known about the pictures for some time, however, and did not feel the shame about them that the siblings did. She wished she could draw funny little adults and dogs when she was uncalm. Then one day, when her parents had gone to the amphitheatre and the house-assistant was in the cooking-room, Melph found the keyring of the house. Her dam had forgotten to take it along. Melph hid in the closet to pick out the key to the attic. She crept up the stairs like a rodent, and unlocked the door.

As it swung open a strange feeling went over her, an emotion she had not yet experienced in the Preliminary Training. The attic was a small room under the eaves, which sloped almost to the floor. It had been decided ages before that this style was the most pleasing. The dust was so thick it could have been five hundred years since the room had been used, instead of ten or twelve. On the righthand wall was a sign painted in red in a childish hand: "Bisec, his room." The ancient desire for privacy which he had possessed was the terrible secret! Melph thought she too had had this desire

all her life. But wait; that could have been corrected by the Instructors; there must have been something more to the story. The room was unfurnished except for two chairs and a trunk almost hidden in the darkness. Melph went to the trunk and tried to lift the lid. It was locked but the lock was an old one and did not seem strong. She kicked it until it fell off, and then kicked the lid until it was loose. Pasted on the inside of the lid was a sign in red paint: "Bisec, his trunk. Everybody else stay out." The contents were not very unusual — a toy Torpedo Craft, a house-made radio, and other objects commonly dear to the Young. However, under these things was a book, which she found was a manuscript written by Uncle Bisec. He had been older when this was written, but the handwriting was almost the same. On the cover was written in red letters: "Bisec, his book. Everybody else don't read." A loose page fell to the floor. Melph picked it up and read it:

"There was ivy on the wall, an old high wall that had been there for a long time. I was climbing to escape them; they were laughing with malice, yet it was good nature — they did not know. They wanted to pull me down so that they could laugh at me. I was not afraid; I looked at them and I was not afraid but I wanted to climb higher. The sun was shining and I was small with delicate wings that could not lift me in the air, so I climbed to help the delicate wings and to get into the sun. I was small and the sun shone on me and through me, and my suit was made of something soft and with a purple shade. I climbed the ivy and it did not break under me, but it left the wall and hung below me, so that I had always to climb higher to stay on the wall. A power from below was trying to bring me to the ground; not pulling me or pushing me, but bringing me to the ground, and they were laughing and looking up at me with laughs on their faces."

As Melph read this she said to herself, "Why do I not feel shame about this?" A feeling of uncalm suddenly came over her and she closed the trunk, tucking the manuscript under her arm. She locked the door, went down the stairs, and returned the keyring. Melph had what she desired now; she would not try to enter the attic again.

Now the book must be hidden immediately, so that she could read it in secret without fear of being discovered. The idea of hiding it in the Dog House came to her. Under the floor were sliding panels for the bones. No one opened these but the dog; his bones were left in peace, that he might

be possessed of a feeling of calm at all times. However, Melph and the dog were old friends — he surely would not object. After hiding the manuscript and patting the dog, she went in to fodder. The evening passed like any other. As she was being put to bed, Melph said to the house-assistant, "Don't you know any lyrics except those for the Young? Sing me something different."

The house-assistant said, "Come along, child, wash your face, put on your sleep-suit. When you go to the Instructors they will teach you adult songs to sing."

Melph muttered, "Those old things," and got into bed.

The next day Melph should have gone to the ocean, but she asked instead to play in the garden with the dog. There was much shrubbery to crawl into and read in peace. She hid in a thicket with the dog, tying him with a rope so that he could not walk away, and settled down to read. The dog went to sleep, twitching his ears uncalmly. The pages of the manuscript were numbered and did not seem to follow consecutively. Melph turned to a page at random and read:

"page 49.

I was in a huge dark and burned cellar-like building that some people that lived before us had used. There was red on the walls and dark, twisted machinery that had been useless for many years. People had forgotten how to use it, and they let the building stand as it was, because no one went there and all around it was desolation and an empty feeling for the people who would not come there anymore. There were several of us playing there and we were young and excited (only we were scared, too). We knew that the empty feeling was not for us or the people we knew. We were not scared because something would hurt us; it was because there was awe in the air and in the darkness that hung over it more like a cloud than in the air itself, and because there was a mysterious lack that was felt in that place."

"page 50.

We did not know what to do with the little dog. It was alone and it would die in the bitter cold that blew along the shore. We picked it up and went along, wondering what we should do. The walk was beside the cold strip of water. Behind us a woman began rushing toward the water, pushing a baby carriage before her, and she screamed loudly with temper and looked back over her shoulder. He told me to ignore her; she was only trying to get even with some-

one or make someone sorry for her. She ran off the walk into the water and came out dripping with water which iced immediately, and the baby and the carriage were also covered with ice. A man came up and took them away, brushing off the ice covering the woman and the baby. This made us think about the puppy. We came upon a nest where the little dog's brothers were lying, asleep in the cold. The mother was about to leave them and go away in sorrow, but when she saw us she knew everything would be fine and went away happy. Then we had to take all of them. We decided to take them to the place from which people started on journeys. The mother dog had put tags on the puppies' necks, which said in printing that they should be taken to that place. As we walked along the puppies began to sing duets together in beautiful, rising voices. He said that they learned these from records, and that this was the only means they had of learning different songs. We walked from the water over a path in a wooded park, holding them in our arms, and the little fat dogs sang for us with indescribable beauty."

Melph did not understand this — something seemed odd about it — but a feeling of uneasiness — type: immoderate laughter — hit her. Yet there was nothing definitely humorous about these writings. Like all the Young she had wondered about being insane, and like the others she had dismissed it as an immature fantasy. Perhaps this book was insane. Then, flipping the pages, she came upon a lyric that was strange.

"In the days of our fathers the clocks were still;
 No ship had flown where the planets run
 Around the varying rim of the sun.
 The North Pole fathered a wind to chill
 And love would tremble when gentle lips
 Had warmed a man to his finger tips.
 In the days of our fathers the clocks were still.

Chorus: Kets had T.B., Shelly drowned,
 Shekspur lies in the cold, cold ground."

Melph read this over until she knew it by brain. It did not quite fit any music she knew, so she sang it in a monotone several times. The result was a dismal chant, hopeless and weary, that opened her tear ducts and disturbed the dog. "I will keep this book for a guide," she decided. "When I am an adult I shall write a manuscript too. They will never find out and put me away, and if they try to I will jump into the ocean and never come back."

At the end of the book, on the last page, was the sentence: "My ambition is to die in an unsane-house at the age of 78, laughing to myself."

Melph tried to go about her play the next week with no sign of the secret within her. Whenever she was alone she sang the new lyric. The dog was still uncalm when he heard it. One afternoon on the ocean-side the assistant heard her sing the chorus:

"Kets had T.B., Shelly drowned,
Shekspur lies in the cold, cold ground."

She said nothing to Melph but horror grew in her eyes.

That night after fodder her dam and sire took her into the Bookroom and questioned her about the lyric.

"I made it up," said Melph. "I got tired of hearing just the Young lyrics."

"Made it up!" cried her sire. "Such is the fruit of the womb!" Dam sank into a chair murmuring brokenly, "No one must know!"

Sire said with angry uncalmness, "We never should have bred. Bad blood in your family."

"Bisec was an accident!" Dam whispered this with heat. "And at least he was never sent to the Provinces less a man than he had been before."

"Well, all this is beside the point." Sire spoke to Melph, smiling in a pleasant way. "Where have you been playing all day?"

"Outside," said Melph.

Dam and Sire went over to the corner and whispered.

"That sounded almost like the Disturbing Lyrics. She couldn't have —?"

"Certainly not!" said Dam. "I always carry the keys with me! I told you we would have to see what is up there someday, just in case —"

They came back to Melph. "You must not sing it again," said Sire.

"Especially to any of your young consorts," said Dam.

"Very well," said Melph. "I won't sing it again." Inside, to herself, she said, "Aha! Atavism!"

The following day Melph began her courses under the Instructors. Every other afternoon, however, she was free to go to the ocean-side for the sake of her physical requirements. She made a pact with herself that she would sing The Lyric at least once every day so that she would not forget. She would watch the ocean moving restlessly and chant the sad words she did not understand.

