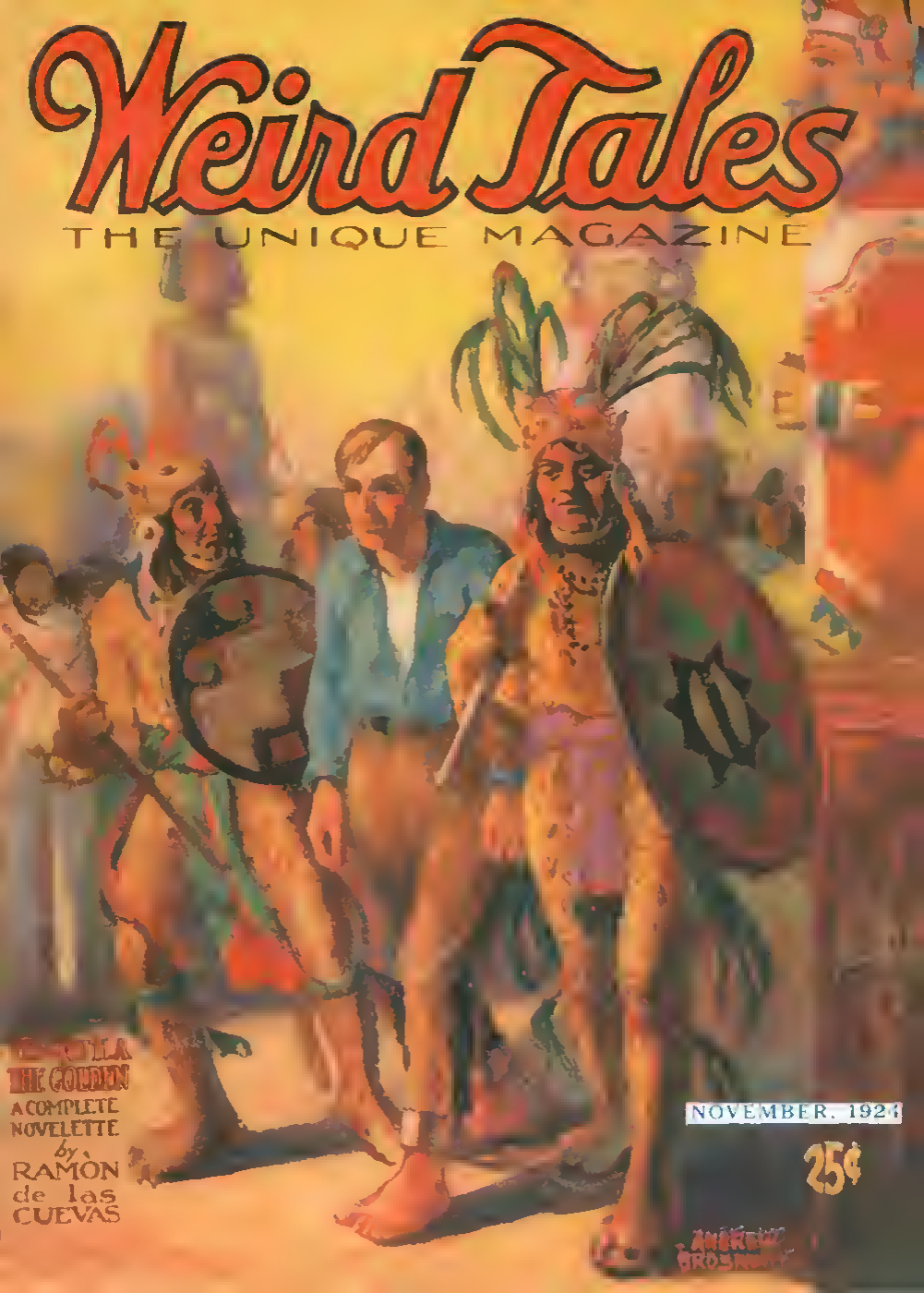
Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE



A COMPLETE NOVELETTE by RAMON de las CUEVAS

NOVEMBER, 1924

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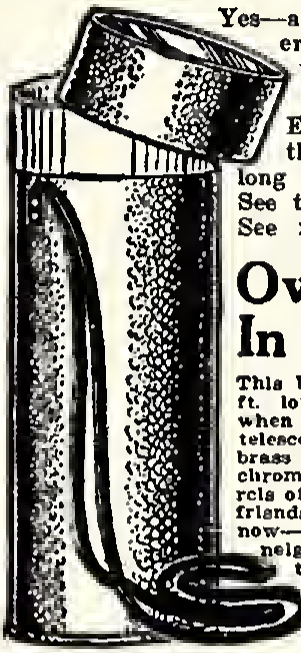

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A MAGAZINE of the BIZARRE and UNUSUAL

VOLUME IV NUMBER 3

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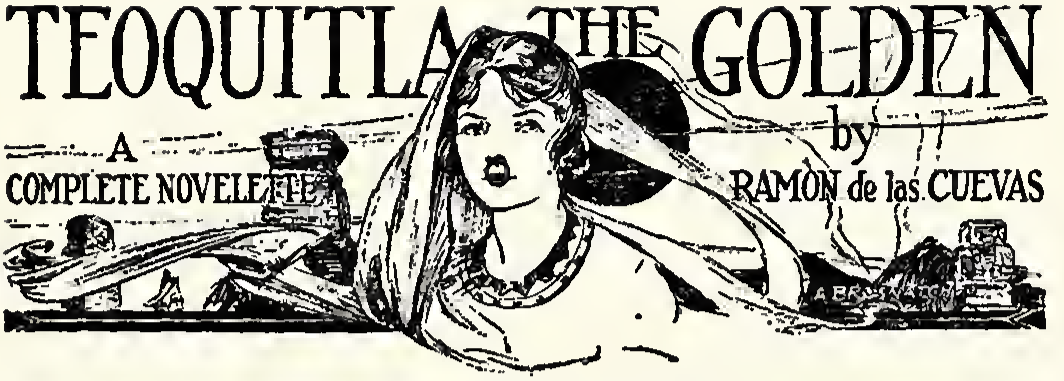
TEOQUITLA THE GOLDEN

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by RAMON de las CUEVAS



THE GOOD ship *Tivives* had rounded the white beaches and whiter lighthouse of Cape Maisi —had passed the stark wreck of the Norwegian fruiter—"*el vapor perdido,*" so many years a landmark of the easternmost point of Cuba—and had definitely turned her prow westward along the southern coast, scheduled to make Santiago at daybreak en route to Guatemala and Honduras. The last rays of a setting sun illumined the great cliffs back of Ovando and Punta Negra, their black cave-mouths showing in sharp contrast, like the eyeholes of a skull.

Dr. Branson turned to his new friend, Lewis, who lolled in a deck-chair beside him. "I'll bet," he suggested, "the old Indians used to have great times up in those caves before Brother Columbus butted in!"

"Yes," agreed his companion, "the Cronistas tell us that the Taino tribes held some of their most important ceremonies in caves."

The doctor stared.

"What do you know about the Cronistas?" he demanded.

"Oh, my work lies along those lines," laughed the other. "I've had to pore over old Las Casas, Oviedo, and the other early Spanish historians of the New World many a time. I'm on my way now to Guatemala to study some of the ruined cities. Yes, I know many have done this before me, but I can assure you there is still lots to learn. I only wish my wife were along, and she would be, but she can't get away. She likes Aztec work better than Maya, however, and her knowledge in that field is simply uncanny. I can't make out where she got it all; in fact, it was our common interest in such things that brought us together in the first place. There is only one thing on which we do not agree—she has too much respect for the old Aztec priests and conjurors. She insists their powers were real, and that they possessed wonderful drugs unknown to the modern world."

"I read a story not long ago," returned the doctor, "about a white man, an explorer in the highlands of Venezuela, who got a taste of Indian 'medicine' that was a little bit too strong for him. It seems he had fooled around with some decolleté Indian lady back there in the hills until she fell in love with him, and then when he proposed to skip the country, she felt naturally peeved and slipped something into his supper that made his skin turn permanently black, and the story says he's there yet, ashamed to come out. I have had no adventures of my own in this line, but I used to know an old Aztec Indian when we lived in Mexico City, who spun me a lot of curious yarns. He claimed that the old priests of his people had wonderful power—could even change men into women. Do you believe that?"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Lewis.

Then, after a moment's thought: "Yet I don't know," he said. "In this age of wonders it isn't safe to say anything is impossible. Why, just a little while before I sailed, the papers carried a story about some doctor, out in Chicago, I think it was, who had actnally changed a female pigeon into a male by injections of some sort, and predicted that human reversals of sex in both directions might someday be expected."

"I know a story that will beat that," rejoined the doctor. "I have the manuscript with me in my suit-case. Let me get it."

He returned in a moment with a package.

"Before I open it," he continued, "let me say I can't vouch for its truth, but you can judge for yourself when you hear it. Let me first tell yon how the manuscript came into my hands.

"My wife and I were living in Vera Cruz at the time—I had quite a practice then. Our home was one of those old-time Spanish houses with great high ceilings and a patio full of palms and flowers, not far from the Paseo—you know the type. One evening we were sitting in the archway, which opened to the street, waiting for supper, when an old beggar-woman (or what we thought was one) limped up—we snpposed to ask for a *limosna*, or to sell us lottery tickets. But instead she inquired in Spanish, "Does the American doctor live here?" When I assured her that I, myself, was the American doctor, the poor creatnre surprised us by slumping down in a faint.

"We carried her into the house and laid her on a couch, and found that her face was covered with a blood-stained mask or bandage made of rags, her head swathed in an old bandana, with a dirty blanket over all. Removing these somewhat gingerly to give her air, we met with a great surprise. Before us lay, instead of the diseased old beggar we expected to see, a young and handsome woman. Her golden hair in a thick braid was coiled about her head; in her ears were beautiful earrings of gold, made in the form of little Aztec idols with turquoise eyes; but most astonishing of all, she wore a large, heavy nose-ring of gold, something I had never seen in Mexico before, and never anywhere on a white woman. Her face and neck were clean, a great contrast to her filthy hands and to her travel-stained, bare ankles and sandal-clad feet.

"We had hardly noticed all this when she opened her eyes and gave us another surprise by asking faintly in English, 'Where am I?'

" 'In Doctor Branson's house.'

"She raised her head, then sat up and looked abont her.

" 'May I ask who yon are?' I continued.

" 'My name,' she hesitated, 'is R—I mean Maria, Teo—that is, Dorada de Rey.'

"Then as an afterthonght, she added, with an air of embarrassment that puzzled us, 'Señora or—Mrs., if you please.'

" 'What is your nationality, Mrs. Rey?' I demanded. 'You are fairer than most Spanish people seen in this part of the world, although I admit there are some *rubias*.'

" 'I am an American!' she announced proudly.

" 'Then, how, please, did yon come by that Spanish name, and where did yon get those most unusual ornaments which are neither Spanish nor American?'

" 'Oh, the nose-ring,' she cried. and put her hand to it: 'I had forgotten. want you to help me take it off, Doctor. Yes, it must come off before we do anything else. Oh, how I used to hate that

thing! Guess you will have to cut it. I'll tell you everything later.'

"I examined the ornament and was puzzled to find it apparently seamless, yet it passed directly through a hole in the septum of the nose. So I cut it with a hack-saw. bent the ends apart, and drew it out.

" 'How did you get this thing on, Mrs. Rey?' I queried. 'It was one solid piece without any seam so far as I can see.'

" 'That is a part of the mystery,' she replied. 'that even I can't explain. But, please, can't you give me just a little bite to eat? I'm starving, and—I'm—afraid I'll faint again if you don't. I—I—can pay you with this gold jewelry if you like. You have a bath-room, of course? Next to food I think I need a bath more than anything else in the world.'

"The maid hrought her coffee and bread, as supper was not yet ready, and she really did eat as if famished.

" 'Now I feel hetter,' she annonnced. 'Oh, don't look at me like that, I'm perfectly all right. Now, how about the bath—may I? And could Mrs. Branson lend me an old wrapper or aomething until I can buy clothes of my own? I'd like to see these rags burned. If yon are afraid I might steal something, Mrs. Branson can watch me in the bath-room and while I'm dressing. In fact, I wish she would.'

"Mrs. Branson went with her.

"My wife came back a few minntes later, however. 'She's all right,' she reported. 'Somehow, I trust her. I have laid out some real pretty things for her to wear.'

'TIME passed, and still more time, plenty for even a woman to hathe and dress. Supper was getting cold, bnt still onr mysterions guest failed to appear. At laat my wife could stand it no longer, and made a dash for the bedroom, where she had left the clothing. She told me later that she had found Mrs. Rey, in tears, sitting on the floor, with the garments piled around her.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Branson,' she sohhed, 'I have lived with people who do not dress this way, for years, and I don't know how to put on these clothes, especially that!' (She pointed to the corset). 'And which is front and which is back of these other things? If I put anything on wrong and anyone noticed it, I think I'd die of mortification. And my hair—I have worn it loose or done up in Indian fashion for so long, I don't know any other style, except the way it is now, which I inveuted myself. Won't you help me, please?'

"After another half-hour or three-quarters, both appeared. Mrs. Rey was really handsome, when properly gowned. She still wore her qnaint earrings and I now noticed a wedding-ring on her finger.

"We were eager, of course, to hear her story, but she avoided the subject until after supper. At last she hegan:

" 'I know you are aching to hear my atory, but I have thought over the whole thing carefully, and I can't—I jnst simply can't—tell you everything, for I know you could not possihly helieve me. I have the whole story written out, though, except the last part—this I will finish and leave the whole thing for you to read after I have gone. I could not stand having you read it while I am here.

" 'I *can* say, though. that I have passed throngh a terrihle experience, which has robbed me, in a way, of my identity; it was a dreadful illness. After that I lived for years among the Indians hack in the mountains, in an isolated village of the Aztecs. That ia where I got the ornamenta you think so curious.

I selected the name, Maria, myself, as my real first name was lost; among the Indians I was known as Tcoquitla; in Spanish, *la Dorada*, the Golden One, on account of my hair; and the name of Rey I got from my poor husband, Juan Rey. He was killed by bandits a few hours after our marriage. I barely escaped from them myself. I put on the disguise you saw me wear and, having heard that an American doctor lived at Vera Cruz, I begged my way here—it must be hundreds of miles—and that's all true, as far as it goes. No, I can't tell you any more, and I could not think of letting you read my full story with me here. You must wait until after I am gone.

" 'Now let me ask you a question or two. Did you ever know a man named Robert Sanderson?'

"I started up.

" 'Sanderson,' I cried, 'the explorer? The American boy who went back into the mountains four years ago to study the Indians, and was never seen again? Of course, I knew Sanderson. Why, the poor fellow stayed a week right in this house. And you! Now that I look at you, you look enough like him to be his twin sister. Where is he?'

"She flushed slightly.

" 'He is dead,' she replied, very softly. 'No, I am not his sister, but we were—somewhat related. So it is four years!'

"She looked at me gravely.

" 'You lived here then, didn't you? And one night after Mrs. Branson had gone to bed Sanderson sat right in that chair smoking one cigarette after another, while he told you about the girl in Chicago, and the girl in Boston, and the girl in New York, the girl in Progreso—yes, and the girl in Mexico City, too, didn't he? Poor fellow, how he despised them all! But yet, he *would* play with them.

" 'And the day before he left he told you: "A fellow never knows what may happen on a trip like this; I am not afraid of the Indians, but there are bandits all through the mountains, and this chronic revolution makes the banks dangerous. Guess I'll cache my gold reserve around here somewhere, so I'll have funds if anything happens. I'll never tell anyone where it is unless I intend them to have it, so don't worry." Didn't he say that?'

" 'That's about what he said,' I replied, wondering.

" 'Well,' she said, 'tomorrow I'll take you two with me for a little walk, and I'll get that gold. It's mine now, and it's going to carry me back to the States.'

"I could not protest, because I knew from what poor Sanderson had said at the time, he never would have told her where it was unless he meant her to have it. Besides, the family resemblance was striking.

"Next morning Mrs. Rey led us straight to the place beyond the outskirts of the city where the little box was hidden, and before she opened it, told us exactly what it would contain.

"That afternoon she and my wife went shopping. Mrs. Branson reported that it fell to her to do all the buying for Mrs. Rey did not even know her sizes, nor the names of many of the garments, and only showed preferences when it came to color. After their return Mrs. Branson spent a long time with our guest, showing her how to wear the different articles, and teaching her their names in English, and in Spanish; also giving her another lesson in hairdressing, and initiating her into the mysteries of hats and veils.

"Mrs. Rey looked stunning that evening at supper, for her fair skin, blue eyes, and yellow hair, not to mention the golden earrings, made a striking contrast with the black gown she had chosen, out of respect, we supposed, for the late Señor Rey.

"She asked about conditions in the States and was astonished to learn that America was at war, no word of which had reached her mountain retreat. This led to a conference as to how we could get her back into the States without a passport, especially as she could give no clear account of her past, nor her exact birthplace. Finally we decided to give to the authorities practically the story she had told us. She had suffered a severe illness which had destroyed most of her memories of previous events, but she still remembered that she was born and raised in the United States. She had married a Señor Juan Rey, later killed by bandits, leaving her alone. She had made her escape from the interior of Mexico, and only wanted to get back to the land of her birth. On this basis, with a certificate from me that she was now of sound mind, we succeeded in fixing up her papers so that the American Consul thought she would pass.

"While all this was in progress she spent her leisure hours in writing the rest of her story 'to put with the first part,' she said.

"Finally she sailed, after trying (in vain) to induce us to accept money for our hospitality. She left me the package with her story, and you can well imagine how we rushed back to the house to open the package before her ship was out of sight."

By this time the gorgeous Cuban sunset had faded, so the pair withdrew their chairs to a place near one of the ship's electric lights where it was possible to read. The doctor opened his package.

"The first part," he said, "is, you see, written on long folded strips of native maguey paper, the same as the old Aztecs used. I say written, but it is really printed, with paint, not ink, laid on with a fine brush. Look at the date in Aztec hieroglyphics! The second part is written on sheets of paper furnished to Mrs. Rey by Mrs. Branson. Well, here goes!"

He began to read.

THE STORY OF TEOQUITLA

THIS is written in a quiet corner of the Great House of the temple-women where I shall come every day for the purpose when I am not on duty. The house stands behind the temple-pyramid of Centeotl in the City of Nahuatlan, in the Hidden Valley, the last stand of the Aztec nation. I could tell exactly where it lies, but I dare not, for fear that this manuscript may find its way outside someday, and might lead strangers into the happy valley to the destruction of this splendid people, whose only outstanding fault, so far as I can discover, is their addiction to human sacrifice. As for myself, I expect to spend the rest of my life here, and contentedly enough, and I am writing these lines merely to leave a record of my strange history after I am dead. If the whites ever do penetrate this valley and read its records, they may learn from this one the fate of Robert Sanderson, the young American explorer, who journeyed into the mountains of Mexico, never to return.

For I am, or I was, Robert Sanderson. Who I am now I hardly know. Here they call me "Teoquitla" or "Golden," on account of my hair, and this is the only name I have any title to at present.

All my life, before I came here, I despised women, but I loved to play with them, and when I got sick of them, which

always happened sooner or later, I simply quit them and never gave the matter another thought. When I was little more than a boy I could already boast of five or six affairs of this sort. Something about me seemed to attract women. Perhaps I was not to blame altogether, for my mother eloped with a German waiter when I was six years old, leaving my father three young children to bring up alone. My mother's sisters would have none of us, and the less said of my stepmother, the better. So much for that.

Somehow I managed to get a college education, starting off in agriculture, intending to become a teacher in this line. But I was finally drawn into the study of ancient America, through my reading while gathering material for a paper on the "Origin of Indian Corn," and after my graduation I was lucky enough to find a job on the staff of a well-known museum—I won't name it. Those who knew Sanderson know which it was.

One day a report was brought to us of an isolated settlement of Nahua or Aztec Indians far back in the mountains of Mexico, a settlement where, it was said, some of the ancient ceremonies were still enacted, and where the people probably used more native utensils and knew more of the "old road" than in any other Aztec community. The museum decided to investigate, and to this end I spent one winter in Mexico City studying the Aztec language (I was already familiar with Spanish), returning to the States in the spring. Back to Mexico I came the following September, ready to live among the Indians, to put on record all the ancient knowledge they had to offer, and to collect examples of their native handiwork. I spent months among them, recording everything they would tell me, but I always felt that they were holding something back. Once in a while I heard guarded references to "the city" or "the valley," and somehow grasped the fact that somewhere, not far away, lived a colony of Aztecs who followed the old customs even more closely. Sometimes the village would be almost empty for days. I felt the people had gone somewhere to take part in some ancient rite or other, but not one of them, friendly though they were, would tell me a word about where they had gone.

Still I filled a dozen notebooks with information they gave me. It breaks my heart even yet to think those books are lost forever. Finally I finished my work and made my preparations to leave the country. All would have been well if I had followed the advice my friend, Dr. Branson, gave me (he is an American I met in Vera Cruz): "Let their women alone, Bob. *Adios!*"

Well I remember those parting words. But I didn't heed them. The young daughter of the Aztec couple at whose house I boarded had been away to school and could talk good Spanish, and this singled her out from all the rest for me. It was the same old story. She called herself Conchita in Spanish—a handsome creature, taller and more buxom than most of those mountain women. I suppose I jollied her along as I had done the others before her, let her think I intended to marry her, and all that—oh, how can I write it? I had been tired of her sometime before I left, but took good care not to show it. I wanted to get away without a scene, but somehow she got wind of my plans. The day before I intended to leave she greeted me with joy as I came into the house.

"Oh, my beloved!" she cried, "isn't it wonderful? They say we are starting tomorrow for the United States! Why didn't you tell me, *mi corazòn*, so I could get my things ready? As it is, I'll have to go just as I am. But you can buy me

some pretty dresses in Mexico City, can't you, dear?"

I disengaged her arms from my neck—a scene after all! I was tired of her anybow.

"You're not going!" I said shortly.

Her brigbt face fell.

"Then when are you coming back to me, my heart?" she quavered.

Annoyed, I started to leave tbe bouse.

"I'm not coming back!" I replied.

She grasped my arm, ber eyes were streaming.

"But—but what of me, Señor—your betrothed, your *prometida*? What of—yon know what I whispered to you only yesterday."

"Oh, go to Hell!" I shouted in a rage, and burst out of the door, leaving ber alone in tbe bouse.

Perhaps I was as angry at myself as I wss at her. I made arrangements that afternoon for mules to carry my baggage, my manuscripts, my specimens, and myself down to the railroad, and by tbe time I returned to the house some bours had passed. To my astonishment, as I approached, I saw that someone bad set all my things on the ground ontside. I tried to enter the bouse that had been my bome so long, but Conchita's father blocked me at the door.

"Conchita," he said, "has hanged herself! Just now we found her, already she is cold!" and he pushed me outside.

That appalled even me. I gathered my mannscripts, and a few more valuable things, leaving the rest, and burried back to the mule-owner's home, begging him to start with me at once. Darkness had fallen, and something told me not to let tbe dawn of another day find me up in those hills. I did not get far, however. In the middle of a dark canyon my mule suddenly fell over some unseen obstruction; I was thrown sprawling; and before I could get to my feet or draw my weapon, I was set upon from all sides.

Bound, gagged, blindfolded in an instant—all I knew was that I was being carried somewhere, none too tenderly, over rongh and rocky ground, it seemed, for hours. Then a rope was tied about my body and I was lowered down, down, bow far I knew not, but finally I brought up sharply against the bottom. Rough bands seized me and tore off rope, blindfold, and gag.

In tbe ligbt of flaring torches I saw that a crowd of Indians stood around me. My beart almost stopped beating wben I saw that they carried spears and sbields, and were dressed ss warriors of ancient Mexico in the days of Montezuma. My first act was to call for belp at tbe top of my voice. This drew a sbout of laugbter from my audience.

"Yell all you wish," said one whom I judged to be the leader from his great headdress of swaying green feathers. "Yell until you are tired. You are ours now and none but Aztec ears shall ever hear your voice again."

"What are you going to do witb me?" I queried.

No answer.

"Take him to the House of Chains," said the leader. "We will fix him there."

"Fix him?" I thought.

They dragged me along through the busbes for a way, tben into a stone walled, thatched hut. In one end I could dimly see a great brown wooden chest decked with hieroglyphic carvings of ancient Aztec style, in itself an archeological treasure, which aroused my interest, in spite of my desperate plight.

An Indian opened the cbest and drew forth two pairs of heavy iron shackles with long chains, of old Spanisb make, the kind that had to be riveted and not locked.

"We will chain his legs first," he said.

"Don't put those things on me," I cried in panic. "I'll promise you I won't try to get away!"

The leader laughed.

"We know you won't get away," he assured me, "with or without these chains. But you will wear them nevertheless. The first white men that came to this country bound our chiefs with such things; and we give every white man who falls a prisoner in our hands a dose of his own medicine. But these chains are the only works of the invader you will see in this valley, for here we live our own life, free in the last unconquered domain of the Montezumas."

After some discussion as to whether it would be best to leave my leather putties on, they finally decided to remove them. While four or five jovial young ruffians sat on me to hold me down, my legs were first untied, the leggings taken off, and then the shackles were riveted fast upon my ankles. My wrists they fettered then in similar manner.

"Now!" said the leader, as they finished, "you will find water in the brook out there. Wander where you will, try to escape to your heart's content, but always come back to this house when you want something to eat."

The torches vanished, and there I was, alone and manacled, in the dark. For a while I lay thinking it all over, shivering in the chill night air, my chains rattling at every movement. Still I did not realize, even then, just how serious a scrape I was in. Finally, tired beyond words, I fell asleep.

IT WAS broad daylight when I awoke. I got up and found that, although my fetters were heavy, the long chain between the circlets allowed me considerable freedom of movement. Then I thanked God they were not like modern handcuffs with only two or three links between, and I hobbled out of the house, feeling better, but still stiff with cold. The hut stood on a knoll overlooking a wild and beautiful valley, now partly hidden by morning mists, above which mountains raised their dim blue peaks in every direction; but I noticed that those to the west seemed farther away, and decided that the valley must extend in that direction.

I went down to the brook and drank. The water was cool and clear. Looking back of the hut toward the north I saw, perhaps a quarter of a mile away, a sheer cliff several hundred feet high, which seemed to extend as an unbroken wall east and west, as far as I could see.

"Here," I thought, "is where I was let down last night."

I tried to reach the base of the cliff, but the dragging chain caught so much in the bushes and rocks, that I could make no headway. So I adjourned to the hut and found that meantime someone had kindly brought me an earthen bowl of *atole* or corn mush, for my breakfast, plus a wooden spoon. Having consumed the food, I found a piece of native rope with which I fastened my shackle chain loosely to my belt; this kept it from dragging and catching, and so I made better progress in trying to walk. I must say, though, that even with this rope, I found exploring in irons to be slow and grilling work.

To make a long story short, I followed the brook downstream to the eastward, hoping to find a cleft, or at least, a cave in the cliff, through which it escaped from the valley; but instead, I discovered that it merely lost itself in a pile of huge rocks at the base of the precipice, sinking down into some subterranean channel without leaving an opening big enough for a rat to crawl through. Then

I followed the cliffs in both directions as far as I could. They were all the same, without a break.

My food was brought to me every day, just enough to keep me going; but every night, in that mountain country, without a rag of bedding, I nearly perished from the cold, and was always astonished when daylight came to find no ice or snow outside. I think the month was March or April.

After a few days I discovered that I must give up my explorations, for an unexpected reason: my ankles and wrists became so sore from the rubbing of the iron circlets that they were positively raw, and it was agony to try to travel. I did my best to get my fetters off, but without the slightest success. In my search for some tool with which to cut the rivets, I opened the great brown chest, but found nothing there but eight or ten more sets of chains, a few rivets, and some rags.

I took these rags and two handkerchiefs I found in my pockets, washed them in the brook, and dried them, and wrapped strips torn from them about the wristlets and anklets to form a sort of padding. This made the chains more endurable while I remained quiet, but the rags stuck to the scabs that soon formed, and very little movement was needed to tear the sores open again.

I was thus obliged by my fetters to lie in the hut, and the time passed very slowly and miserably for a number of days. The man who brought my rations would answer no questions, and there was nothing to do all day but eat, sleep, and watch the little lizards playing on the wall. Never in the North have I suffered from cold as I did at night in that hut. I could not sleep then, and the dark hours were endless and full of misery.

AT LAST came a welcome relief: one morning I was aroused from a doze by the shuffle of sandaled feet, and peered out of the door just as a band of warriors drew up in front of the hut. My trained eye marked their feathered shields, and their jaguar-skin clothing, for all the world like fur union-suits, with tails hanging down behind, and their hoods, made of skins from the animals' heads—ears, teeth, and all, so arranged that each man seemed to be peering out from between the jaws of a jaguar. The leader was similarly equipped, except for his nodding plume of green feathers, and his handsomer shield, which bore in addition to the patterns worked in small bright-colored feathers, several half-moons of beaten gold. He poked me in the ribs with his war-club and delivered a set speech, the gist of which was that I was commanded to appear before Montezuma without delay.

"Where?" I demanded. "In the Aztec Land of Spirits? Montezuma has only been dead three or four hundred years, I believe."

Green Feathers scowled, and the scowl did not improve the appearance of his painted features, glaring out from between the jaws of his jaguar hood.

"You will find that our Montezuma is very much alive," he brawled. "As far as the hereafter is concerned, you are likely to visit that unknown country very soon."

I looked at his war-club. It was long and flat, with a row of razor-sharp flakes of volcanic glass set along each edge. I cast my eye upon his companions' weapons. The long flint-headed spears had a nasty look. I decided to go along and to keep a civil tongue in my head.

I had gone but a few steps before the sores on my wrists and ankles were all raw again, and the trip along that trail

westward was so miserable that I took little notice of my surroundings. I dimly remember passing occasional huts and patches of cultivated ground, but recall nothing distinctly until we paused in the brow of a declivity.

"Look!" commanded the leader, "Nahuatlan!"

I raised my eyes, and beheld, spread out before me, what I later learned was indeed Nahuatlan, the last city of the Aztec nation. The plain below seemed covered with little white-walled, thatched houses, but in the midst of them rose a cluster of great flat-topped pyramids crowned with stately buildings, glaring white in the brilliant mountain sunlight. As I stood, the faint and distant boom of a great *teponazti* drum caught my ear, and the far-away notes of a wild chant. I had barely time to notice that there were other large buildings clustering about the base of the pyramids, when we were marched forward again, down the hill.

Soon we entered the city, and threaded our way through its narrow streets, where never a horse had set foot, nor a wheeled vehicle been seen. People stared as I was marched along, chains clanking, and many followed us, until by the time we reached a sort of public square, there was quite a crowd. Then I saw the pyramids at close range. There were four of them, one on each side of the great plaza. The lowest pyramid, which at the same time seemed to support the largest edifice, lay toward the west, and to this we marched, the crowd at our heels.

They did not follow us up the broad steps to the flat summit, however, and soon I found myself entering a magnificent building, which I thought must be the palace itself.

I have confused impressions of brilliantly frescoed walls—elaborate carvings—glimpses of rich hangings—the glint of silver and gold; but my only clear remembrance is the moment when I met face to face the arbiter of my fate, Montezuma himself.

He sat on his richly carved throne under a gorgeous canopy, surrounded by his officials, who were gaudy in embroidered robes, in fantastic headdresses, in paint and quetzal feathers. Montezuma's own visible dress was very simple, merely a finely woven mantle of blue and white, with a narrow red border, knotted at his right shoulder, and his only insignia of royal rank was a plain headband of thin beaten gold, rising to a little peak in front, and his gold-trimmed sandals. He seemed just a kindly, handsome, light complexioned, intelligent Indian in his late thirties.

Briefly the captain of guard related the story of Conchita, saying in conclusion, "And so, oh Chieftain, I accuse this man of dishonoring an Aztec woman, and of causing the death of an Aztec. Here he stands, a white man, in chains before you, waiting your judgment, just as some of our ancient leaders were compelled to stand before their white conquerors."

Montezuma looked at me. His eyes bored into my soul, and for the first time I began to realize my responsibility for Conchita's fate, and to appreciate my present dreadful predicament.

"Do you deny this?" he asked.

I shook my head dumbly.

At last he spoke again, and coldly: "The punishment for dishonoring an Aztec women is, that you shall be offered up as a human sacrifice to the goddess Centeotl, the All-mother. For causing the death of an Aztec the penalty is that you shall be offered as a human sacrifice to the god of war, Huitzilopochtli."

My legs gave way beneath me, and only the guards saved me from falling.

After I had recovered somewhat he continued:

"You would naturally suffer the second penalty, which is the greater; but as the unfortunate girl really met death by her own hand, although you were the cause, we can allow you to choose. You may pick the lesser penalty if you like, yet, many men prefer Huitzilipochtli."

"What—happens," I gasped, "with Huitzil-o-pochtli?" although from my reading of Aztec history I thought I knew only too well.

My worst fears were confirmed when he replied, "To make it short, you will be first dressed in the garb of the god for a certain time; then you will be laid on an altar, and your heart will be cut out with a flint knife, and, still throbbing, laid at the feet of Huitzilopochtli's image."

I controlled myself with an effort.

"And—and—Centeotl?" I faltered, for I had never heard that human sacrifice was made to her.

"You will be first dressed in the garb of the goddess for a while," was the answer, "then you will be laid on an altar and certain substances will be injected into your blood, which will give you great pain, and which will cause a great change to come over you. You will suffer many days."

"But—but—will—I, will I live?"

"Yes, you will live."

"Will the pain last always?"

"No, you will get well."

"And I shall not be crazy?"

"No, mind and body will be perfectly healthy."

"Then offer me to the goddess Centeotl!"

I felt in my heart that while there was life there was hope. "A great change" sounded ominous, but not so much so as stark death.

MONTEZUMA looked at me again, a curious interest growing in his eyes. Then he commanded: "Remove his chains! Dress and mask him to represent the goddess Centeotl, keep him in her temple, feed him, honor him, address him as the goddess herself, until the Day of Sacrifice. When he is properly prepared, let me know, and I will give orders for the ceremony."

In a daze I was led down the steps of the pyramid, and, chains clanking, across the plaza and up the steeper steps of another higher one, to the south, and finally into what seemed to be a temple. At the back of the main chamber stood the carved figure of a goddess, with ears of corn in her hands.

Eight women, dressed all alike, in white, with flowing hair, were decorating the temple with fresh green corn leaves. They finished as we entered, and as they were leaving I observed that in the nose of each was a large heavy gold ring, much like those I had noticed worn by the women of the San Blas Indians near Panama; but never before had I seen a Nahua wearing such a thing.

These women looked at me and seemed to be suppressing smiles with difficulty. As they passed out I heard them whisper and titter. Personally, I did not see anything funny in the sight of a man being prepared for human sacrifice.

Eight men, evidently priests, marched out from some inner room at this juncture, carrying vestments which they deposited on the floor about me. In the meantime my guards laid aside their weapons, and with rude chisels cut or forced apart the copper rivets and removed my shackles—a wonderful relief, for the sores on my wrists and ankles were worse than ever, and were steadily dripping blood.

Like many another prisoner, by this time, I had resolved to placate my captors as much as possible by good behavior, so I stood meekly while the busy priests stripped off my garments, shaved off hair and beard with razors of volcanic glass, and after washing me carefully, anointed me with some clinging perfume. This done, a man whom I took to be the chief priest, appeared, clad in a splendid feather mantle, and wearing an elaborate headdress. In his hand he bore a long poniard of bone, carved on the handle with a figure of the goddess. Suddenly two priests seized my ears, and before I knew what was happening, the poniard had been thrust through both lobes, one after the other, and the holes stopped with what, later, felt like greasy cotton strings.

But the greatest ordeal was when they dressed me in the garments of the goddess, which, I remember, were pale salmon color, with red trimming. Well I recall the square of red on the front of the blouse, on which a flower with four petals was embroidered in white. Most boys have masqueraded in their sister's petticoats, at some time or other, but I had always so disliked women that this kind of fun never appealed to me. To be obliged to wear woman's dress was a bitter pill. Still, I was thankful that the vestments were not those of Huitzilopochtli, for those would have meant death. Finally they fitted on me a wig of black hair arranged in three little clubs, one in back and one at each temple, sticking it fast upon my head with some messy sort of glue or gum, and tied over my face a light wooden mask carved to represent the kindly features of the goddess. Next came her cylindrical cap of heavy, stiff cotton cloth. Well I remember it! It looked like a white, brimless stovepipe hat, with a border of embroidered red triangles around the bottom, pointing upward. After they had hung about my neck a long necklace of large beads, each carved to represent an ear of corn, the chief priest addressed me.

"Never remove the mask," he admonished, "except after dark, and not then, except when alone in your sleeping quarters. You now represent the goddess; her spirit is in you. Your word, to a great extent, is law here in the temple, but, of course, you must follow the rules laid down for you, and there are some changes that cannot be made, even for you. Your food, for instance, is prepared especially for you, and you must eat no other.

"Every day before the sun has reached the meridian, you must sit a while on your throne and receive the people. Whatever they ask you, answer from your heart, as well as you can. After the sun has passed the middle and starts down toward the west, your bearers will wait upon you, and will carry you anywhere you wish to go. As you travel, look the crops over and bless them; but always come back to your temple to sleep where your priests may guard you. The under dress—the white slip—of the goddess has been sewed upon you. Do not try to take it off. When it is soiled your priests will remove it, will bathe you, and will sew a fresh undergarment upon you. These rules shall hold good until you are laid upon the altar. What happens afterward will depend on your conduct now. Remember! Eat no food except what is furnished you here. Never remove the mask in daylight. Answer to your best ability the questions your worshipers may ask you—and may the goddess truly inspire you! I have spoken."

A fire blazed before the idol—I later learned it was never allowed to go out. On this, while I watched, the priests

burned my familiar khaki clothing, piece by piece. Aa the last disappeared the chief priest chanted, "Here vanishes —the last tie—with the outside world— from this moment he—belongs ahsolutely —to the goddess—and to Nahuatlan."

I watched and listened sadly.

While the priests were showing me around my new home, several young men, neophytes I suppose, hung a curtain in front of the statue of the goddess, before which they erected a platform, and placed a throne upon it. Here the next morning I seated myself, a living idol, and here my worshipers came to bow down before me. That night I slept warm, at any rate.

I WILL pass over rapidly the twenty or thirty days that followed. They were bnsy ones for me, and I had little time to think of my tronhles. Sometimes I really enjoyed my power, brief though I knew it to be. Every morning I sat on my throne and advised the people ahout their crops, thanking fortune for my agricultural conrses in college and my knowledge of the Aztec language. Questions on children I had to answer on a hasis of common sense only, but I think I did pretty well, on the whole.

Every afternoon, if I wished it, I was carried forth in my litter, decked with fresh green corn leaves and bean vines, decorated with artificial squash flowers. On these rides I soon found, as I had before suspected, that the valley, the last stand of the Montezumas, was entirely surrounded by perpendicnlar cliffs hundreds of feet high. It was an *hoyo,* such as I had seen in the mountains of Pinar del Rio, in Cuba, hut on a much larger scale. I also noted that it was a little terrestrial paradise, and I blessed the crops faithfully, using a regular formula I invented myself.

My powers in the temple were great, but occasionally my orders struck an obstruction. One day I asked the chief priest, "Who are those women, dressed all alike in white, who clean and decorate my temple every day?"

"They are the noble temple-women, oh, goddess," was the reply. "They live in that great huilding back of your temple-pyramid."

"Why do different women come every day?" I persisted.

"There are many in the Great House where they live together, a house no man may enter, so many that each day a fresh eight take their turn until all have served. Then they begin again."

"Well, I do not admire their nose-rings. Tell the women who are to work here tomorrow to leave their nose-rings behind in their Great House and appear here without them."

"Ah, goddess, that is one thing we cannot do, even for you. The rings are the badges of the noble temple-women of Centeotl. They are fastened in their noses, and could never be removed without cutting. I shall tell the women to serve the temple no more while you are with us if you wish; hut the nose-rings may never be removed while they live and remain temple-women."

"Never mind, then," I answered, "let them continue to serve the temple."

Nevertheless I looked at the women as little as possible. The sight of those glistening nose-rings irritated me. I hated them! Little I knew what was coming.

There was one horrible experience which will linger long in my memory. I shudder today at the thought of it. The weather had become warmer, and some of the days were really hot. It was after a day of this kind that I slipped out of the stuffy temple to sit on the top step of the pyramid with the priests, who

were enjoying the cool evening breeze, sweet with the perfume of the forest, which had begun to sweep down the valley after sunset. As we sat we noticed that someone was building a fire on the summit of the pyramid to the north, on the opposite side of the square from us; soon it burned brightly and illumined the whole plaza; then we heard a loud voice shouting some sort of announcement. It was too far off to catch the words, but immediately after we heard shrill whoops, and the sound of drumming, and the wild, fierce notes of a war song, which kept up with little interruption until daylight. In the morning I took my place on the throne as usual, but no worshipers came to my temple, and I began to realize that something out of the ordinary must be in the wind.

In the afternoon I directed my bearers to carry me about the city, while I tried to fathom what it was all about. I dared not ask outright, for fear of losing my reputation as an oracle.

I noticed especially that many fully armed warriors were wandering about, some in jaguar-skins, such as my guard had worn, some in other dress, but all carried shields, and all were provided with spears, war-clubs, or bows and arrows. Many were merely painted, like Sioux, but others wore wooden helmets or masks representing the heads of jaguars, rattlesnakes, or nameless but terrifying monsters. It was easy to distinguish the chiefs by their towering headdresses, rich with turquoise and gold, bright with quetzal feathers, and by the special beauty of their wooden shields incrusted with artistic patterns in turquoise. Some even carried their magnificent feather standards strapped to their backs.

Later I noticed something that aroused my curiosity more than ever. This was a number of countrymen, carrying bulky burdens, working their way through the crowds toward the north pyramid. I made my bearers carry me closer, and found that the burdens were wicker cages, and that the cages were full of live partridges.

That night my priests told me the truth—that a victim was to be sacrificed to Huitzilopochtli on the morrow. Little I slept for the drumming, and when morning came I had hardly eaten my breakfast in my quarters, dressed and put on my mask, when I was called forth and informed that I had to take part in the ceremony.

Next thing I knew I was being carried on my litter through a crowd of people, across the plaza to the north temple-pyramid, dedicated to Huitzilopochtli, the war god, and his companion, Tlaloc, the god of waters. Here my priests assisted me up the steps and posted me on the flat top of the pyramid, facing the temple, between the head of the stairs and a stone altar of ominous aspect, black with what looked to be dried blood.

After I had taken my post I had just time to notice that blue wisps of incense-smoke were drifting out of the temple door, and that the whole top of the pyramid was dotted with the pitiful little bodies of the partridges, headless and bleeding, when a thunder of drums burst from the temple, and a chorus of blood-curdling screams; then from the door came rushing eight nearly naked men painted solid black, their heads concealed in horrible skull-masks, while from their shoulders fluttered mantles made of human skins, complete even to fingers and toes. They dragged among them a poor unfortunate dressed in the finery of Huitzilopochtli.

Arriving at the altar, in one dreadful instant they had torn his vestments from

his body and flung them in rags to the winds; in another they had thrown the poor fellow, apparently a Mexican, breast up, spread-eagled, upon the altar. The priests seized his hands and feet, and grasped them firmly; one clapped a heavy horseshoe-shaped collar of stone across his throat, which held his head immovable.

At this moment I remembered my part and began to wail and protest in as woman-like manner as I could master, taking the part of Centeotl, who was supposed to hate bloodshed. Again the drums roared. From the temple door sprang another horrible skull-headed figure, painted a glaring red, who swooped toward the victim on the altar like an eagle out of the sky. In his hand he gripped a huge flint knife. Again, remembering my cue, I stepped forward as if to protect the victim, but the red horror threw me violently aside. I had barely recovered my balance when he sprang upon his prey, slashed open his breast, and with a few swift movements tore out his heart, which he raised heavenward with a triumphant scream.

The world swam round before me. I dimly remember that the bleeding body was hurled down the steps of the pyramid, while the shrieking demons rushed to lay the still palpitating heart at the feet of the idol in the temple.

I made my way, trembling, down the steps, slipping and sliding in the pools of blood, down to my litter, and I did not breathe freely again until I was back on my couch in my own temple, weak and sick at heart.

TIME passed. One day the chief priest examined my ears, and finding the holes healed, drew forth the greasy strings. Retiring for a moment, he came back with an exquisite little box incrusted with turquoise.

"It's for you, oh, goddess," he told me, bowing low. "Open it."

Inside lay a pair of beautifully wrought earrings of gold, each a little image of Centeotl, with eyes of turquoise.

"Aren't they beautiful?" he asked.

I said nothing, for I knew he meant to please me, and I let him fix them in my ears, although my heart was rebellious, as he tapped away with a little hammer.

"They are your reward," he said, "and will show forever that you most faithfully performed your duties while impersonating the goddess. That is the most beautiful pair I ever saw bestowed. Montezuma ordered them made especially for you, when he heard how well you had acted the part."

I thanked him as graciously as I could, but as the heavy pendants tugged at my ears with every movement, I wondered, "What next?" Later I essayed to remove one to look at it, but it was firmly fastened. The little riveting hammer had done its work well.

Next day the chief priest addressed me again.

"Goddess," he said, "your time among us is nearly ended—and we are sorry to see you go. I told Montezuma yesterday that you are ready. So prepare your soul for the sacrifice tomorrow."

"Must I die?" I quavered, thinking of the horrible scene I had witnessed on the pyramid of Huitzilopochtli.

"No," was the answer; "many times you have been told, 'no.' Not if you are brave and can endure pain. Your conduct in office as the goddess has been the best anyone remembers."

In the morning a great bustle and dragging of heavy objects outside the temple aroused me. I put on my mask and looked out. An altar of wood was being erected between the temple door

and the steps. It was covered with carvings of ears of corn, squashes, and pods of beans, but alas! it curved upward in the middle and was shaped like the fatal altar of Huitzilopochtli! It was evidently meant for a human victim. My heart sank. Had I been deceived, after all?

Sick in soul and body I went back to my couch and lay there in a sort of stupor, unable even to think, awaiting the end. After a while the priests, their bodies and faces painted green, with headdresses of nodding corn-leaves, and sashes of bean vines, came to get me. Gently they led me forth, and I noted that the chief priest carried an instrument shaped like a miniature hoe, with a sharp little blade of black obsidian.

We took our stand between the new altar and the temple, our back to the door. When I ventured to raise my eyes I was shocked to see, standing on the other side of the altar, a man clad and masked to represent Huitzilopochtli, the blood-thirsty war god, while behind him stood his demon skull-headed priests. The red one caught me looking at him and fiendishly brandished his great flint knife at me. I gave myself up for lost as the hideous crew set up again their blood-curdling yell. But as their outcry died down, sweet singing sounded from our temple, and out danced a line of temple-women, clad in white, wreathed in bean vines and carrying green stalks of corn, except the first eight, who were armed with tubes of cane, terminating in gourds painted green. From each gourd protruded a little spike (I learned afterward that it was a quill, always kept turned upward). As these eight danced past, between us and the altar, I thought I heard some liquid splashing about in the gourds. Suddenly the eight women made a pretended attack on the impersonator of Huitzilopochtli and his skull-headed demons, who fled before them, running shrieking down the steps of our pyramid, across the plaza, through the crowd, and up the steps to their own temple. I loved these women at that moment, for I felt that now, for the present at least, my heart was safe from that flint knife. As the women continued singing the priests gently stripped the outer garments of the goddess from me, cut loose the underslip, and removed the cap, the mask, and the wig, which had been previously loosened. Finally I stood stark naked before them all, the only remnant of my former glory being the earrings, which were not disturbed.

They laid me on the altar, spread-eagled on my back, as had been the other victim. priests held my limbs and head with a grip like steel.

The chief priest approached then with his little obsidian-pointed hoe, and, standing by my side, began to speak. My feelings were such that I did not grasp his meaning at the time, but from hearing the same speech repeated a year or so later over another victim, I learned it almost word for word.

"The goddess Centeotl," he began, "whom we also call Tonacayowa, the nourisher, is the Mother Spirit of all the world. She makes our crops prosper she makes our families grow, she stands for peace, for life, for happiness, for increase.

"In the bodies of men and women alike she has set out two kinds of plants, as in a garden; but in men one sort of plants has been permitted to grow, while the other sort is dormant; and in women the first sort is sleeping, the second growing. What man can look at his own naked breast and deny that he himself has the seeds of womankind dormant within him?

"In sacrificing to Centeotl a man who has dishonored an Aztec woman and has thus degraded his manhood, we do not take his life. That would offend the goddess.

"Such a man has misused and degraded the plants in his garden. What do we do? With the aid of a secret preparation handed down to us from past ages, originally from the goddess herself, we destroy all these worse than useless plants, and coax the other kind of plants, now dormant in his body, to grow in their place. But we do not destroy the garden itself, we do not take his life."

He began to sing and march around the altar, at the end of every verse stopping to cut through my quivering skin with the obsidian hoe, until eight punctures had been made in limbs and body, four on a side; then into these bleeding cuts the eight temple-women thrust the quills of their instruments. At a signal they all began to blow into their cane tubes, forcing the fluid from the gourds into my body. In an instant my veins seemed full of liquid fire—worse and worse the torment grew—I was burning up! Then came the pains darting through my body, worse and worse, and worse. It was too much for mortal to endure. I found myself whirling down, down into blackness and oblivion.

I HAVE dim memories of weeks, perhaps months, of burning fevers, awful pains, apparently unending backaches, and through it all—women, women everywhere. Finally my brain cleared a little, and I found myself lying on a couch, in a great hall full of similar couches. At first I thought it was a hospital.

Women were indeed everywhere, resting on the couches, dressing, moving about. With a sinking feeling of the heart, I noticed that all wore the hated nose-ring. Then it dawned on me that I must be in the Great House of the temple-women, where, I had been told, no man might enter.

I beckoned one of the women to me and asked her, "Why am I here in the house of the women?"

My voice seemed unnaturally high-pitched as I spoke. She laid a gentle hand on my head.

"Haven't you learned that you are now one of us?"

I struggled to rise, but fell back from weakness.

"What do you mean?" I gasped.

"Just this," she answered gently, "you have been very sick and a great change has come over you. You will find out just what it is after a while."

She started to move off, but I detained her with a weak hand.

"Tell me what happened to me," I begged.

"Well, for one thing, sores broke out all over you, then you were covered with scabs. Oh, you were very sick, and, ugh! how you smelt! Then the scabs came off and with them came every hair on your head, your face, and your body, and I think, every bit of your old skin. Your new skin looks fine and nice; the hair on your head has begun to come back; it will be very pretty, I think, but it is different in color from ours."

"What color is it?" I asked.

"Yellow. Already we have named you Teoquitla, the Golden."

My original hair had been light brown. I lay still for a while, trying to digest all this information, then felt of my head. It was covered with a silky short hair. I passed my hand over my cheek. It was as smooth as a baby's, without a trace of beard.

As the days passed and I grew stronger and could attend more and more to my own wants, I found, indeed, that a great change had come over me, and I learned the nature of that change. The shock almost robbed me of reason. I was dazed. It seemed impossible that I, who had always despised women, should become—should come to this! I was desperate, like a wild animal in a cage, dashing himself against the bars. Oh, if I could only burst out of this hateful body! Awaking in the morning I would hope that it was only a dream, only to find, perhaps, some new evidence, overlooked before, confirming the bitter fact. The full force of my punishment, however, did not strike me until a week or so later, when I was able to walk about without difficulty, and one day Montezuma sent for me.

Before, I had wrapped a blanket about me as I moved about the building; but now the women washed me, and dressed me in the white slip, the long skirt, and the loose, short-sleeved blouse, the regulation costume of a Nahua woman. I had worn women's dress before while impersonating the goddess; then, however, I knew I was only man masquerading, but this! It was my worst moment. I wanted to protest, but, knowing what I had discovered, I could find no ground for complaint. Almost as hard for me was the moment I stepped out of the building and faced the public gaze for the first time, unmasked, in such a garb, and knowing what I knew.

All the temple-women went with me into Montezuma's presence, and when he commanded, "Let the new sister stand forth!" they pushed me forward. I heard him laugh, but I could not raise my eyes from the floor, from shame.

"Well," he chuckled. "I hardly recognized you! Look at me, woman!"

I wanted to shout "I am not a woman!" but remembered certain things and desisted. Anyhow, I raised my eyes, and gave his smiling face a fleeting glance. He laughed again and said:

"Crime has been punished; the same offense can never be repeated. Centeotl is great, for here, instead of a rotting corpse we have a useful and good-looking human being as ready to take full part in life as before, although in a different capacity. Perhaps now, my friend, you will realize a woman's point of view, and despise her no more! Priests, who watched over this person, taking the part of the goddess, was the work well done?"

"It was, oh, chieftain," came the answer like a chorus. "Never was it done better!"

"Noble temple-women, wearers of the golden badge of service, what has her conduct been since this woman came among you?"

"The best," chorused the women.

"Is she worthy to become a noble temple-woman?"

"She is!" was the enthusiastic reply.

"Bring out the golden badge of service," was the command.

The chief priest, whom I well remembered, stepped forward, with the same old carved bone poniard in one hand, and in the other, a large thick nose-ring of gold.

"No, no!" I cried, and looked about desperately for some avenue of escape. "Not that! Not to me! I hate them!"

Willing hands held me, but the chief priest hesitated.

"This is a much sought honor," he began.

"Go ahead and put it on her by force," commanded Montezuma. "She may not appreciate it now, but she will later."

I struggled, but they were too many for me. To my own surprise I burst out crying. Again the chief priest hesitated, moved perhaps hy my tears, for he had been a friend of mine.

"Go ahead, what are you wsiting for?" demanded the now impatient chieftain.

Two women held my head, others my limbs; at the first touch of the poniard the pain was so exquisite that I must have fainted, for a moment later it seemed I was being helped to my feet and the hateful ring was in place, my poor nose throbbing painfully. They must have soldered the ends together somehow while I lay there, because after the hole had healed I turned it round and round before my obsidian mirror and could find no seam in it.

"Now you look better," laughed Montezuma.

My shawl had fallen from my head in my struggles, and he saw my hair.

"What a beautiful color!" he exclaimed, then to the sisters: "When her hair grows long bring her to me again. What happens then, sister, will depend on your conduct meantime. Go, Teoquitla, work, and be happy, nohle temple-woman!"

We filed out, but I covered my face and the awful ring with my shawl all the way home, and the instant I got into the house I carried my hedding to a little storeroom, where I could be alone and nurse my poor sore nose, which for a while hecame so swollen I could not hreathe through it. Some of the girls took pity on me and brought me my food, but I had to raise the ring with one hand while I fed myself with the other, and every movement of it was painful.

In time the hole healed, the swelling abated, and the ring swung free without sorenes. Finally I ventured out of my cuhhy-hole, but alwsys I kept my face and the ring hidden, and stayed apart from the others.

The sisters stood this for a while, but at last one of them snatched the shawl from my head.

"What is the matter with you?" she cried. "You are not better than any of us, even if your hair is yellow and your skin pink and white! ('Pink and white—good lord!' I thought). Perhaps you are ashamed because you used to be a man. What for? There are two or three others here, but I'll bet you can't pick them out now. Most of us always were women, and worked hard for the honor of joining this sisterhood. I know I did. Or perhaps you are ashamed of your nose-ring. What a silly woman! When you go out among our Nahua people you will find that everyone, when they see you wear it, will give you all respect and honor."

And so I found it in time—the ring was useful as a hadge, and often I even forgot I had it on. Nevertheless in my heart I have always hated it.

FOR POLICY'S sake I strove to do what was expected of me at all times, however hitter and resentful I felt at heart, but many an hour I spent, when alone, hrooding miserahly, searching for some way out. At one time I thought I saw a ray of hope. If the priests could change me into—this—with their secret drugs, why could they not change me back again to what I was before? Perhaps some day I might persuade them.

But this was a vain hope. By carefully worded questions I learned that, while certain natural women had been, for punishment, transformed into men, the process was much more dangerous and difficult, and was seldom attempted, and a "sacrificed woman," such as I, could not be changed at all. Why? The priests believe thst a natural woman

has the "planta" of manhood dormant within her, which can be called into life when her feminine qualities are destroyed; but a "sacrificed" woman has no such sleeping masculine "plants" to fall back on—all that was masculine in her was demolished at the sacrifice. Finally I gave up, and settled down into a condition of dumb despair. For months I felt like a prisoner sentenced for life.

Yet I was well in body! Conditions about me were pleasant, and after a while I began to notice a change in my outlook, a sort of renewal of hope. But not for a return of things as they had been—that I abandoned forever. Finally I began to think: why should I not live out a contented and useful life in my new capacity? Others were doing it all around me. I was not handicaped in any way as compared to them.

For, while I had lost the benefit of Robert Sanderson's identity and his worldly connections, I still possessed his mind, his education, his memories of past events, his experience, all of which, I felt, might, some day, prove of benefit. I studied my new gifts and how to make the best of them, and as the months grew into years, I learned to accommodate myself to my new life. And I have at last even come to realize myself that my punishment has been a just one, and has fitted my offense in a most appropriate fashion, although, if anything, it is too light, for I am alive and well, while poor Conchita is dead. I cannot help wondering if science will some day re-discover this old Aztec secret, and then, perhaps, the penalty I suffered will become the rule in cases like mine. If that day ever comes, one great cause of human misery will be nearly, if not quite, cleared away.

Now, I can truthfully say, I really enjoy our life here. We are well fed, and are always treated with the highest respect. Our duties are light. Each day eight of us serve the temple; eight grind corn, cook, and wash dishes for the rest; eight sweep and care for our Great House; the others, off duty, are free to do as they please. But, of course, each of us washes her own clothing. In my spare time I have studied many of the old Aztec manuscripts stored in the several temples and in Montezuma's palace; the priests have helped me; and some of the old writing I have turned into English for my own amusement; also I have written this story of my life.

Many things I have learned by asking questions—among them what would have become of me if I had not acted the part of the goddess so well. They say I would have been sold as a slave after the sacrifice and the change, either inside the valley, or through the hands of Aztecs outside, to the white-slave trade of Mexico City. I must say I shuddered when they told me, but gave thanks in my heart that I had chosen to act as I did. Of necessity I have learned to grind corn on a metate, to cook in Aztec style, to spin, to weave, to sew, to embroider, and even to make pottery. Now I am trying to master the difficult art of featherwork, of fastening tiny colored feathers in patterns on a fabric, to make the gorgeous robes worn here by priests and nobles.

We take part in the three great ceremonies of Centeotl that take place every year, which are really beautiful; we bless the fields at planting time and at harvest; and we give thanks to the goddess for its bounty.

Sometimes we are given part in the rites of Tezcatlipoca, chief of all the gods, in his great temple on the highest pyramid of all, which raises its lofty summit to the east of the plaza. In front of the temple is an altar plainly intended for human sacrifice, but never

have I seen a victim laid upon it, and both altar and pyramid are free from stains of blood. Perhaps the priests have found that bloodshed is not pleasing to the chief of all the gods.

Many other things, of which I have read in the chronicles of the conquest of Mexico, seem to have died out too—there is no temple here to Quetzalcoatl, the god of the air, who was once so popular, and the many minor gods seem now to live only in the legends of the past. Even the ceremonies that remain seem to have changed with the centuries, and now differ somewhat from those described by the Spanish conquerors in the days of Cortez.

Occasionally we visit the blood-stained pyramid to the north, and its temple, where stand side by side, the idols of my old enemy Huitzilopochtli, the war god, and his grim companion, the god of waters, Tlaloc. I don't mind old Tlaloc; he looks rather stupid, with his dense expression and his great round eyes. Judging from his statue, he either has enormous misshapen teeth, or is carrying something in his mouth—I never could make out which. But I can't stand his partner. Old Huitzil's bloodthirsty face glares at you from between the jaws of a helmet carved to represent the head of a monster, and his hands are full of painful-looking weapons. And—and the stone at his feet is black with caked, dried blood, where the dripping hearts have quivered out their last beats.

We are never called upon to take part in any ceremonies here, for our goddess, Centeotl, and Huitzilopochtli are opposites and enemies. She represents peace and increase; he, war and destruction. Anyhow, Huitzilopochtli has his own white-clad temple-women. They wear no nose-rings, however, and only serve for a year. I doubt if any woman could stand such service longer.

I never go to this temple alone, for I think if I should meet one of those skull-headed priests in a lonely corridor, I'd die of fright. My blood runs cold when I think of the red one and his great, dripping flint knife.

I HAVE been looking in my obsidian mirror again. Do you know, I have grown quite plump? Rounded paddings of flesh have hidden the harsh outlines of a skeleton built for a man, and some changes may have taken place in my very bones—I know they ached terribly enough when I was sick. But my hands and feet will always be a little too large, I suppose, and there are probably other proportions that are not what they should be. Yet I must admit that my skin is fine, my complexion bright, my lips red, and my hair long and golden. I must be quite good looking, or I would be if it were not for this awful nose-ring. I'm disgustingly healthy, and my appetite is positively piggish. All this, I think, is helping reconcile me to my fate, although at first I resented bitterly the appearance of each new feminine charm. I laugh now, recalling my disgust when someone informed me, for the first time, that my skin was "pink and white." Now, other things being equal, I'm glad it is, and I'm thankful, if the change had to come, that they made a good job of it.

Montezuma told me, the last time he caught me poring over the old Aztec books in his library, that I should be also thankful for the chance to start life anew, with a clean slate. One thing I know: my interest in present events is crowding out the memories of the past, and I'm too healthy to spend much time in brooding.

A little while ago I asked one of the sisters if temple-women ever marry.

"Yes," she replied, "but our chance is slight. You see, the only man considered

good enough for us is Montezuma himself. It was better in the old days when it was the custom for the chieftain to have many wives; but our Montezuma is already almost in middle age, and he is still unmarried."

She looked me over.

"You, sister, have the best chance of any of us, I think. You are the prettiest, and besides, your coloring is so different that you stand out from the rest of us. And I overheard Montezuma telling someone just the other day how smart you are, and how much you know of the ancient writings. Yes, and now that I think of it, I've noticed that he has eyes only for you when we dance before him."

I'll admit that I have noticed something like that myself, and it worries me. I have a premonition that my peaceful life here in the Great House will not last much longer. As for Montezuma, although I have seen a great deal of him lately, he makes me—oh, nervous, I guess I should call it—or embarrassed, or something. I can hardly get up nerve to look at him.

With this refuge, I have never thought of escape, not since the change, no matter how much I raged, or how I resented my fate. At first it was shame for my new status in life. I would have committed suicide if anyone had suggested sending me out of the valley. Later it has been, aside from my contentment and my interests here, because I know that my identity is lost and that outside I would be just a girl alone, without family, without standing, without even a past, for nobody could believe such a story.

Later. Montezuma has just sent for me to come to his palace—alone! I don't know what to think. I can't see how I could marry Montezuma, although I respect and admire him. I don't know why, but I just can't think of it! Perhaps I shall have to. Oh, I must go.

(This ends the manuscript printed by hand on Aztec maguey paper. The remaining pages are written in ink on ordinary paper furnished by Mrs. Branson, at our home.)

WELL! Before I start for the States I must finish my story for Dr. Branson:

When Montezuma saw me enter the audience hall he sent away all his attendants, and himself let down the door-curtains. We were alone. With his own hands he took the shawl from my head and loosed my yellow hair, which was now long, and pretty enough, I admit.

"Like gold!" he cried, "my Teoquitla!"

He clasped me in his arms; I knew not what to say or do. Fear of the unknown—shame—a lingering distaste for taking a woman's part in so full a measure—were being swallowed up in a strange wild exultation of spirit I had never felt before.

He held me out at arm's length and looked at me.

"Woman!" he cried, "you are beautiful! You are worthy! I love you! Will you marry me?"

In a weak voice I ventured, "Chieftain, you are lord of Nahuatlan. You know you can do with me what you will."

"No, no," he almost shouted, "Listen! Don't you *want* to marry me?"

"Chief," I whispered, "I would rather remain a simple temple-woman."

I got no farther. Before I knew it I was in his arms again, smothered with kisses. In a moment, in spite of myself, all opposition was swept away. I was won.

A thought came to me through a confusion of mind and sense—where from I knew not; perhaps, now that I con-

sider it, it was an instinctive precaution to save myself from the fate I had, in past years, dealt out to others.

"My chief," I faltered, "you respect me because I have lived uprightly since —since I became a temple-woman?"

"Yes, my own."

"Among my people," I continued. "an upright woman is always married by the ceremonies of our religion. If I consent, my chief, will you wed me by the white man's law?"

"How can I?" he cried. "I am not supposed to leave this valley, the last bit left of my ancestors' domain, and we have sworn that no white priest can enter here and live."

I said nothing.

He pondered a while.

"My own," he said at last, "you know we are in touch with Nahua people outside this valley. By their aid we might slip out, you and I, in disguise, of course, be married, come back here, and nobody will be the wiser. Our Nahua ceremony can come later. I must admit I've been outside before, several times. Once I even went as far as Mexico City, to behold the wonders brought in by the invader. I can trust the men at the ropes not to give us away. We shall start tonight. Better get your things together now!"

Again he kissed me.

But when I brought my armful of belongings from the Great House he told me to leave them in a certain chest in the palace.

"For," he said, "this will be your home when we get back, and we had best carry as little as possible."

"My chief," I replied, "there is one little roll of papers I should like to take with me. Among them is the story of my life, and if anything should happen—"

He stopped my mouth with a kiss.

"Take it, of course!" he said.

Thus encouraged, I ventured, "Dear chief, will you take this ring out of my nose? It will attract a great deal of attention outside, for nobody wears them there; and as you know, I have never liked it. Besides," I added in a whisper, "it gets in the way when you kiss me."

"No, dear one!" was the prompt and firm response, "I love to see you wear it, for it makes me realize that you really can be mine; that you really belong to the Nahua nation, in spite of your foreign beauty, you glorious creature of seashell and coral, of turquoise eyes beneath a crown of golden hair!"

And he proceeded to demonstrate that after all, a nose-ring is not such a serious obstacle. I surely loved this man, for at his words I resigned myself to wear the nose-ring forever, without another thought. Indeed, when Dr. Branson took it off me the other evening, it made me heartsick to see it go. But poor dear Montezuma was wrong about my looks I am not, and never was, half as good-looking as he thought.

We reached the brink of the cliff in safety and made our way to the home of one of the "outside" Nahuas, where we stayed until suitable clothes of more modern style could be found for us. Montezuma was easily provided for, but I, being taller and larger than most Nahua women, was hard to fit. Finally a costume was found for me.

"We had to go to the Aztec settlement for these clothes," I was told. "They belonged to a young woman who died some years ago. Her parents had kept them."

The garments looked strangely familiar. Could they have been Conchita's? As the women helped me on with them I recalled that she, too, had been taller and larger than the average. An inde-

scribable fear gripped my heart. But no other clothes could be found for me; time was pressing, snd I was obliged to wear them.

Someone offered Montezuma a revolver.

"Better take it, chieftain. The conntry is in turmoil; there is killing, robhing and bnrning everywhere."

Montezuma made a wry face.

"I never learned to use the things," he said. "The throwing stick and its spears, the weapons of our ancestors, have always been good enough for me. I'll take a knife, though, if you have one."

As there were no Christisn ministers of any kind in that remote district, we set out for the lowlands on borrowed mules, riding through the very canyon where I had been captured. The thonght of being ontside the valley roused neither embarrassment nor enthusiasm in me, for I wss too absorbed in our errand, and too anxious for Montezuma's safety to pay much attention to anything else.

At last we reached a good sized town, which, of conrse, mnst be nameless, and were fortunate enough to find a Protestant minister who was willing to marry us in real American style, ring and all, although I sdmit a Catholic would have done about as well.

THE CEREMONY, the start homeward, seem like a dream to me now. Poor Montezuma! All traces in me of my old self had vanished, for, prond and happy, bnt acutely conscious of my wedding ring and my new dignity, I rode along beside my husband. Rohert Sanderson and Conchita's clothing were alike forgotten. We had been married under the names, assumed on a moment's notiee, of Juan Rey and Maria Dorada, so as I rode my heart was singing, "Now I am Señora Maria Dorada de Rey! Or, if I only dared tell it, I am Roberta de Montezuma, Queen of Nahuatlan and rightful Queen of Mexico!"

I stole a look at Montezuma, at his dear, strong face, his clear skin, warm with the ruddy copper of ancient America, at his bright brown eyes, his glossy black hair, at his head, carried so proudly. He looked every inch a ruler, and he was mine!

By nightfall we had reached a little town in the foothills and put up at an old-fashioned inn. I can see the sign now: "La Msscota-Fonday Posada," painted on the wall above the doorway. We were given a good room, unnsually comfortable and homelike for a country inn, and peaceful. I looked up at the stars as we crossed the patio. How brilliant and beautiful they looked against the black velvet of the heavens!

Once inside our room, the door closed and locked, my husband lifted the shawl from my head and loosed my hair. He folded me in his arms.

"My Golden Queen!" he murmured.

I glanced at our image in the mirror. A pretty picture we made. As I looked, I caught the gleam of my wedding ring. I cuddled a little closer.

Suddenly we were shocked by yells—shrieks—shots! Somebody shouted.

"Run! Bandits! El Lobo the Killer!"

The patio echoed to the clatter of a hundred hoofs! Montezuma whisked out his knife and stepped forward, just as our door was burst open, disclosing burly figures, pistols in hand.

"Shoot that damn Indian—he looks dangerous," growled a gruff voice in Spanish. "Then get their money and come on—we'll catch the woman later!"

Montezuma sprang toward them, but shots rang out. I saw him tottering, falling down through the smoke. With reeling senses I hid my face in my hands to shut out the dreadful sight. A quick

search for our money, a curse at finding so little, and the fienda had gone—but my king lay stretched on the floor, before me. An instant later his dear head waa on my lap—I was smoothing his hair—calling on him by name—beggiug him to open his eyes. At last the lids parted slightly. He spoke in a husky whisper: "Go, dear one! Go to your own people. I—I am dying."

"No, my chieftain," I answered between sobs—"you *must* live! But whatever happens I shall go back to our valley, where I belong!"

This roused him. He tried to raise himself.

"No, no," he cried; "they will say you lured me outside to my death. They will kill you! Run, my treasure—get away before those wolves come back!"

"Oh," I wept, "it is all my fault—"

"There, there—" his voice was fainter again. "How could you know? Farewell my—"

His head fell back as a gush of blood burst from his mouth.

In a panic I screamed for help—for a doctor—but no one answered. I looked again at his face—it was changing. Tearing open his ahirt, I listened for his brave heart. It beat no more.

I stepped to the door. The patio was empty, still as the grave. I rushed out to the archway opening on the street and found it alight with the glare of burning buildings. Far up toward the other end of town I heard shots and a woman's scream.

Back to the room I ran, resolved to atay with him, whatever happened. Then I remembered his last wish, and thought of the return of —the Wolves. I knelt a moment beside his dear body—and took my farewell. A moment later I was running down the street, away from the shots, keeping in the ahadows. Reaching the open country I slackened my speed. I was not used to running—not in akirts.

A light ahead caused me to pause, ready to seek a hiding place in the bushes, but I heard no sound. Creeping forward I found the light came from the smoldering ruins of a farmhouse. I looked around and saw a fodder stack with a fence around it. This had not caught fire, and in it I hid myself. Before I covered my head I looked at the atars. There they atill shone, bright and beautiful, in a sky of black velvet.

At daybreak I emerged, of course, sleepless, and found a path that had led from the house to a spring—this I followed, and drank deep. Near the spring, out of sight of the road. I tried to get my faculties together. to study the situation. I looked down at myself, clad in what must have been poor Conchita's best. The front of the dress was covered with blood—my husband's.

An idea atruck ue. Could this be part of my punishment, meted out by a greater and sterner judge than Montezuma? Like Conchita, I had been robbed of my heart's desire, just as it seemed within reach; but unlike Conchita, I was not brave enough to die. But why should poor Montezuma have met such a fate?

My thoughts were brought back to earth by the sound of hoof-beats out on the road. I crouched until they had passed, and then I made my plans.

On the bushes about the spring hung various ragged feminine garments, left to dry by some poor woman after she had washed them the day before. Perhaps even now her pitiful corpse was roasting in that smoldering ruin. I put on the shapeless rags, leaving my own clothing or Conchita'a, on the bushes in payment, in case the woman should come back. With a razor-sharp flake struck from a piece of flint, a trick I had

learned in the Hidden Valley, I cut other rags into the form of a bandage or mask to hide my face, with its conspicuous nose-ring. The ring I knew I could not get off without mutilating my nose. This I could hardly afford to do. On second thought, I smeared the bandage with blood drawn from a finger by the aid of the same flint. My hair I braided and coiled around my head, hiding it and the earrings with a faded bandana handkerchief tied under my chin, then covered everything with a ragged blanket. Sadly pulling off my wedding ring, I strung it on a strip of rag around my neck. The next step was to get my hands and ankles as dirty as possible, then to tie on my feet an old pair of sandals, that I had found hanging on the fence about the fodder stack.

Making sure that the manuscripts were safely ensconced in the bosom of the tattered dress, I picked up a stick to serve as a cane, and after a little practice I managed to bend my back and hobble along very much like an old beggar-woman.

And so I came to you, begging my way, and praying that you still lived in Vera Cruz. Instead of avoiding notice, I appeared to seek it, pushing myself in wherever I could, and telling everyone that I was old Maria Perez, that I had a dreadful sore on my face, that the Virgin had told me in a vision that an American doctor at Vera Cruz could cure me. Would the *senores* help me along with *una limosna, por la santissima Virgen?* Oh, no, I could not possibly show the sore—it was most disgusting to look upon. And besides, I had vowed to the Virgin never to stop traveling and never to show the sore until I reached the American doctor. People believed me, and here I am!

Later. What my future will be in the States, Lord only knows; but with the "loss of memory" excuse to cover my tracks, and with the credentials you have given me, I may be able to fit in somewhere, especially on account of the war, which should make jobs enough for everyone. But think of our country sending an army overseas, and me, young and strong, out of soldiering forever! I wonder how New York will look through my new eyes, or rather, from my new point of view. I'll bet the Fifth Avenue shops will be more entertaining to me now than the burlesque shows which amused Robert Sanderson, deceased!

Anyhow, whatever success I may win I shall owe entirely to you, dear friend. Who but you and your good wife could have started me on the new road? You have my deepest gratitude, and I shall be always,

Most Thankfully Yours,
Maria Dorada de Rey,
alias Teoquitla.

P. S. I wish I dared call myself Roberta Sanderson de Montezuma, but I haven't the nerve! M. D. R.

AS THE good doctor finished reading he looked up at his friend, and was startled to note that Lewis' face was set and pale as death, as he stared off across the moonlit Caribbean.

"Why!" cried the doctor, "do *you* know Mrs. Rey?"

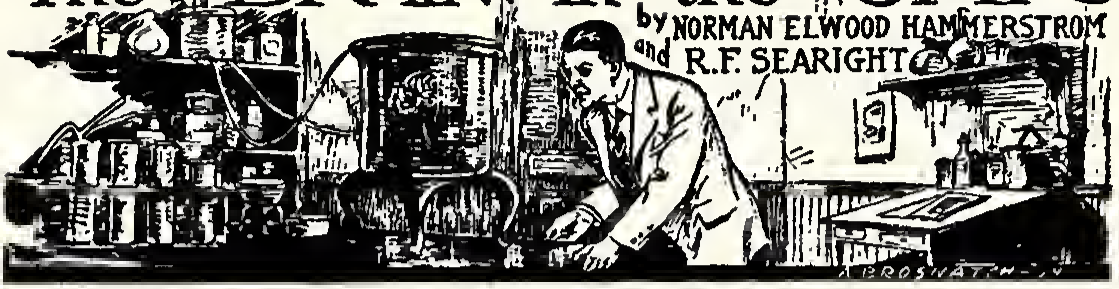
"Well," the American gulped, "I do—or rather I thought I did. You see, she's my wife!"

After a long silence, the doctor said softly, "I carried that manuscript up to the States on this last trip, to return it to Mrs. Rey, if I could find her, but I could get no trace of her. I reckon it belongs to you."

Lewis took the package, regarded it a minute, and, rising, stepped to the rail. A second later it was floating sternward, dancing on the waves in the moonlight. The two men clasped hands silently.

The BRAIN in the JAR

by NORMAN ELWOOD HAMMERSTROM and R.F. SEARIGHT



FOR the fifth time in less than an hour the call bell clanged noisily. Automatically Verne Eldridge, the orderly, rose from his chair and slipped silently down the dimly lit corridor of the old Berlin hospital. Merely another fretful patient demanding attention. Eldridge sighed. He possessed an adventure-loving soul and a capacity for daring which, during the war, had helped to make him one of the most trusted and efficient members of the American intelligence department, and which naturally enough chafed mightily under the monotony of his present forced inaction.

Not but that his position even now was sufficiently dangerous. Eldridge was well aware that he had escaped the Wilhelmstrasse agents by what seemed a miracle. He knew that as long as they believed him to be in Germany, and thus far there had been absolutely no opportunity for escape, they would be constantly on the alert for his capture and arrest. Though the armistice had been signed, Eldridge well knew that one who had done so much as himself towards the downfall of the Kaiser's forces would have earned the private vengeance of the imperialists. Even now he was convinced from certain veiled remarks that Doctor Jaeger, the physician in charge, suspected his secret. Eldridge was treading on very thin ice and was fully aware of the fact. He had been employed as orderly in the hospital for nearly two months now, posing as a wounded German soldier of whose papers he had possessed himself, and he knew that it was only a matter of time before the ruse would be discovered.

It was well into March of 1919. The night was cold and foggy, and fitful gusts of rain were dashed against the windows by the high wind which had come up at sunset. The gale moaned and shrieked among the towers and turrets of the ancient pile, which trembled slightly under the heavier shocks. A fitting night for murder and crime of all sorts, thought the impressionable Eldridge, as he sleepily made his way back to his room.

As he approached the stairs leading to the basement, he perceived Dr. Jaeger himself standing beside them in a rather listless attitude. Although it was three o'clock in the morning, it was nothing unusual for the famous scientist and research worker to keep even later hours in his private laboratory. At present he was standing relaxed, smoking a cigaret, and no doubt planning his next day's research program. A slender, erect man of medium height was the doctor, with sharp, strong features accentuated by a neatly trimmed black beard. Rumors were afloat in scientific circles regarding certain experiments successfully carried out by Jaeger in the preservation of living tissues in special liquids, although as yet he had given out nothing to the world. The doctor had previously come into renown from several chemical innovations pertain-

ing to the composition of some of the poison gases used by the German armies which he had perfected during the war. At present his position at the hospital was a sinecure, to aid him in carrying on extensive investigations in tissue preservation. So much Eldridge knew from the report of a fellow operative, since deceased. From his own observation be knew Jaeger to be a cold, hard man, utterly without scruples and having a deep vein of cruelty in his nature which manifested itself from time to time in various characteristic acts.

As Eldridge passed, the doctor gave him a short "good morning" and turned to descend the stairs. Doubtless, thought Eldridge, he was going to the basement for chemicals, having perhaps run out of some compound needed to complete the experiment which had kept him working so late.

Eldridge passed on and was turning down the corridor leading to his own room when, above the roar of the wind and steady beat of the rain, a door slammed loudly. For a moment he failed to perceive its significance. Then he pulled up sharply and listened, for it dawned upon his sleepy mind that the noise had come from behind a door which he had always supposed to open on a fire escape. This was curious indeed, and his mind became instantly alert as he realized the possible significance of his discovery. His professional training and natural curiosity overcoming his caution, Eldridge stepped to the door and turned the knob.

The door proved to be unlocked and he entered quickly, closing it behind him. He found himself in a narrow hallway lit dimly by a single bulb in the ceiling. Fully resolved now to investigate the mystery of this part of the building, Eldridge passed quickly to the end of the corridor, where he found it turned sharply to the left. A few yards further on he arrived at a second door, doubtless, he thought, the one which had slammed. He opened it cautiously and slipped in, the draft closing it after him.

He found himself in a fairly large room fitted up as a laboratory. A drop-light on one of the two large tables cast a circle of bright light over the table, leaving the rest of the room in deep shadow. As his eyes became accustomed to the shaded light, he saw that the place was lined with shelves holding row above row of chemical supplies as well as numerous glass containers of various sizes and shapes. These latter were filled with liquids in which floated, in perfect preservation, various parts of the human anatomy. The tables were littered with retorts, test tubes, bunsen burners, microscopes, surgical and dissecting instruments, in fact all the varied paraphernalia of the research chemist and physiologist. On the left was a small anteroom, and beside it and projecting partly in front of its doorway, was a large cage containing several full grown guinea pigs. An expensive X-ray outfit and various photographic apparatus stood in one corner.

It flashed on Eldridge's mind that he had stumbled on the private laboratory of Dr. Jaeger. He had never known the exact location of this room, as the doctor always entered it from his private office, which he invariably kept locked during his absence. No doubt, thought the spy, the anteroom led to the office. He quickly realized that his presence here was not without considerable danger, for the scientist would hardly have taken such elaborate precautions in regard to the privacy of his laboratory had he not had something to conceal. Eldridge began to feel decidedly nervous. The violently raging elements without did not help to dispel this feeling.

HE HAD almost decided to retire and leave his investigation for a more favorable time when his attention was arrested by a large glass jar, resting on a shelf above the rows of drugs and chemicals on the right wall. It caught his eye first through the elaborate apparatus connected with it —then by its contents.

The jar was spherical in shape with a large circular mouth fitted with a ground glass stopper, having a German cross for a knob. Above was a large nickel-plated tank and extending from it to the jar a slender glass tube controlled by a system of valves. Another tube, also fitted with valves, projected from the jar close to the base, disappearing into the wall. Both tubes were fitted with delicate thermometers.

Eldridge observed most of these details later. At present his attention was riveted upon the contents of the jar, which seemed to consist of a purple black fluid. As he stared, the hue gradually changed to a deep red and slowly became clear. Then, in the depths of the jar, the amazed spy beheld two glowing red spots, gleaming through the murky liquid like the eyes of a wolf in the dark. Then, as the fluid became perfectly transparent, he saw what appeared to be two naked human eyes glaring down at him with ferocious intensity. He fell back aghast, staring in amazement at this phenomenon, and as he looked, the liquid slowly resumed its former opacity till it had regained the original purple black hue. Then it again grew transparent and the whole phenomenon was repeated.

Three times Eldridge witnessed this curious change. Then, gathering his courage, he climbed up on the table nearer to the jar so that he was but a few feet from it, with his eyes on the same level. As the liquid cleared once more, he saw a human brain in perfect preservation, resting on a soft membranous cushion. The cushion lay on a glass pedestal which projected about halfway up from the bottom of the jar. Extending from the brain were two cords, which crossed each other and dropped to the bottom of the jar, terminating in the two human eyes that Eldridge had first seen in the semi-darkness of the laboratory. The entire hideous spectacle resembled a huge snail.

Eldridge had lost track of the passage of time since entering the strange and sinister laboratory of Dr. Jaeger, but now his subconsciously alert senses detected the sound of a door slamming far down the outer corridor. It must be the doctor returning from the basement, Eldridge thought, and he hastily slipped from the table and out into the narrow hallway, being careful this time that the door did not slam. As he reached the door opening into the outer corridor, he heard footsteps rapidly approaching and slipped behind the door just as the doctor entered. Jaeger closed the door without a backward glance and hurried down the corridor. He passed the corner without turning his head, but Eldridge waited until he heard the sound of the laboratory door closing, and then hurried to his room.

WHAT he had witnessed in Dr. Jaeger's secret laboratory had made a deep impression upon Eldridge, but it was some time before he had another opportunity to visit the weird room. The doctor always kept both doors locked, and doubtless only the late hour and his intention to return at once had caused him to relax his vigilance on the night Eldridge made his first visit. Furthermore he was nearly always there in person, working on his endless experiments. But finally after nearly three weeks Jaeger was called to Carlsbad for a consultation, and Eldridge realized that his chance for closer investigation had come.

He waited until after midnight. Then, making sure that he was not ob-

served, he unlocked the doors with skeleton keys and entered the laboratory. He found it very much as he had left it on his previous visit except that the place was in total darkness. He located the switch by means of his pocket flash and turned on the table drop-light. He had ascertained after his first visit that the room contained no windows that might show the illumination to any one passing by outside, and in view of the doctor's absence, he thought himself fairly safe from interruption. He had brought a pad of paper and a pencil, and now seated himself on the table in order to bring his eyes nearer to the level of the jar, and proceeded to make a rapid sketch of the jar and its contents.

As Eldridge was putting the final touches to the drawing, he had a distinct and vivid impression that his name had been called. His auditory nerves had registered nothing; of that he was certain, but the impression was too real to be lightly dismissed. He glanced nervously about, but no other living thing was present aside from the guinea pigs in their cage.

Again came that vivid impression of his name being pronounced. He looked up to see the glaring eyes of the brain fading gradually from sight as the liquid in the jar grew opaque. As he stared the fluid again regained its transparency and the glowing eyes seemed to be boring through his very brain. His head swam, he clutched at the table for support and then lost consciousness.

He returned to his senses as from a black void, with all the mental sensations of emerging from ether. He had no means of telling the length of time that had passed during his trance, but glancing at his watch he saw that it was only a little after one o'clock, so he concluded that it must have been brief.

Then, looking down at his sketch, he saw a line in French written across the bottom in his own handwriting. He was considerably surprized, not to say alarmed, and with a final glance at the eyes, now disappearing into the liquid, he turned to the door. Suddenly he stopped with a gasp of terror. Suspended motionless in thin air, before his eyes, hung an empty test tube. As he shrank back the tube dropped and crashed to pieces on the floor. Retaining only enough presence of mind to switch out the light, Eldridge ran from the laboratory, more frightened by this than by any other of the phenomena which he had witnessed.

Translated, the message on his sketch proved to read: "Be in the laboratory tomorrow at midnight." Brief and to the point, thought Eldridge, and he gave much thought during the day to the curious communication.

He saw Dr. Jaeger returning from his consultation late in the afternoon, and with some misgivings he repaired to the laboratory at midnight armed with an automatic. He found the room empty. Jaeger, tired by his journey, had retired early.

Seated again before the brain, the spy soon passed into a hypnotic trance precisely similar to the one he had undergone the night before. He emerged as on the previous occasion, as if from a black void, and looking down at his tablet, found that several sheets were closely covered with his handwriting in French. He hastened to his room and began to translate the script.

As he proceeded, horror and amazement at the gruesome tale halted him again and again, but he finally completed the task and the whole weird story lay before him. In the name of the dictator he recognized that of a famous French spy who had disappeared just before the signing of the armistice.

"MY NAME is Jean Perrin" (read the script). "Possibly you have heard of me, Mr. Eldridge, for, with all modesty, I may say that my work did a great deal toward the downfall of the German forces. When I was finally captured and exposed on November fifth of last year, the Wilhelmstrasse officials swore vengeance upon me, peace or no peace. But I knew that my work was well done and that the end of the war could be but a few days off.

"Col. Von Uhlman, head of the secret service, had me brought before him for a private interview in which he tried to extract from me full details regarding the extent of the information I had managed to furnish our leaders. Col. Von Uhlman failed utterly in his purpose, and it enraged him to such an extent that he swore I should die on the day the war ended. I bowed mockingly as I left his presence, but though I never saw him again, he kept his word.

"All was bustle and confusion preceding the Great Day, but when it dawned it brought with it a dead quiet, which told me, in solitary confinement, better than any words could have done, that the thing we had waited and worked and died for during more than four long years had at last been accomplished.

"For safer keeping I was confined, not in the Berlin prison, but in a small room in a turret of the old castle of Prince Otto Von Machstein just outside Berlin. Two armed guards stood without my door day and night and my food was passed to me through a small slide window in the door. They were taking no chances with Jean Perrin. It is with a little pardonable pride that I recall how carefully they watched me and their conversation outside my door, which showed how they feared my escape. And it was to good purpose—for them. Much as I plotted, carefully as I searched my mind, there was no possible chance for freedom in the limited time given me. The Great Day of the armistice found me still a prisoner.

"Late that night a guard of eight came clanking down the corridor, their heavy boots raising echoes throughout the old castle. Their leader, a heavy-set, brutal-faced sergeant, unlocked the door for the first time in nearly a week and confronted me with an evil grin on his seared countenance. Perhaps he knew of the fate in store for me. I think so now I made no resistance as they handcuffed my wrists and led me from the castle. In silence we entered an armored car, and after an hour or more of rapid driving arrived at this hospital.

"Through the long, dimly lit corridors the clanking guard preceded and followed me, and finally we reached the operating room. The light was poor here, as elsewhere in the building, but in the center of the room stood the operating table, illumined by a cold blue cone of light from the powerful electric lamp overhead. The room seemed filled with doctors and nurses, shrouded in white, and at the head of the table stood an instrument-tray covered with the glittering paraphernalia of the surgeon. Ah, I shudder as I recall those fearful moments! I was seized and overpowered, for, handcuffed as I was, my resistance was feeble. Stripped of my clothes and attired in an antiseptic white gown, I was thrown upon the table and my hands and feet strapped to its legs. My head was strapped down, and then Dr. Jaeger, a cruel smile on his face (he had not yet donned his operating mask like the others, though otherwise in full operating attire), stepped up and addressed me.

"*Mon Dieu*, the horror of what that snake-blooded demon told me! It rings in my ears even now when I am past all caring. He told me of his successful experiments in keeping

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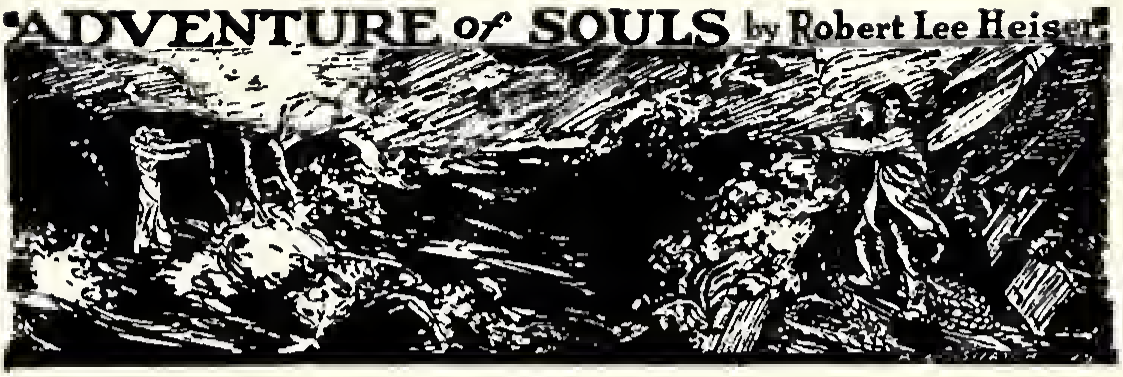
ADVENTURE of SOULS by Robert Lee Heiser



IT IS a weird tale of love, mystery and sudden death which was told in the Red Lantern Cafe, hard by the waterfront, at the foot of our street, where red-blooded men from the four quarters of the earth come up from the sea in search of wine, woman and song, to bathe in the glare of the white lights and throw their money to the dogs.

Mathew Laucks, second in the black gang, aboard the steamer *Catawac,* just in with a cargo of tinsel and toys from China, his hairy breast exposed to the gaze of other patrons of the place, arms akimbo on a sloppy table, listened to the loose tongues of his companions wagging over a weighty subject.

"Aye, I'm tellin' you, when a man's dead, he's dead!" ahouted one of the sailormen whose head was crowned with a skull-cap fashioned from the end of a stocking—a striped stocking, red and yellow, picked up in some far-away port.

Patrons of the Red Lantern, seated about other tables, heard, turned their heads, and some moved nearer that they might hear better.

"Oh, ho, he is, is he? Then, how about th' skipper o' th' *Silver Bell?* Didn't I see him, with my own two eyes, near a month after a lascar had knocked him from the bridge with a marline spike!" roared Chips, pounding the table with a heavy fist.

"A man's body goes back to the dust from which it came," spoke up a man who stood behind the skull-capped sailor's chair. This was the sky pilot from the Mission House around the corner. He wore a long, black robe and continually fingered a huge cross that dangled from a chain about his neck. His business on the waterfront was to intercept the souls that drifted in on the harbor of missing men.

"But," he continued, his candid eyes centering steadily on the hairy breast of Matt Laucks, "the real man, the unseen soul, never dies—"

"Bah!" broke in a big, broad-shouldered seaman who had looked often down the neck of a bottle since coming to the Red Lantern. "Souls? Men have no souls! I know, I do, for I have not always been mate in the *Catawac.* Once, it has been so long, long ago, I was master of surgery. My great ambition waa to find that thing men call their souls. I have opened the breast of a living, breathing, human being and found him ninety per cent belly.

"It is true, I found a wonderful engine inside of man. But, for that matter, there is also a wonderful engine inside the *Catawac.* Feed either one of them fuel and they'll move. Neglect the fires and either one will stop. Bah! Man has no soul! He's mostly belly! And that settles that."

"It does. eh?" blurted Mathew Laucks. "Perbaps you overlooked something—While you were about it, did you see anything of his con-

science? Did you see the thing that loves music? Me, I have not always followed the sea for the slum they feed in the dirty, stinking hookers. I've studied too, and I'm just fool enough to believe that a man has a soul. Listen! Let me tell you an adventure of men and souls—a body with a cowardly soul and a brain that feared nothing, and a cowardly brain with a soul heroic. How I came to the sea at the bidding of the woman I loved, so that I might banish the cowardice of the man she loved—Don't look at me that way! I tell you it was to banish his cowardliness—I didn't kill him, I tell you—"

The sky pilot from the Mission House did not move except to allow his eyes to travel from the hairy, ape-like breast to the upraised fists with which Mathew Laucks threatened him.

"Go on, my man, tell your story; I have said nothing," said the minister, smiling upon the infuriated sailor.

"I thought you did," Matt answered, glaring at the huge cross that dangled from the chain about the minister's neck. His arms relaxed and he lowered himself in his chair again—"Oh, yes, the story, well—

"MARDEL HAUGH was in love with Edwin Carll in spite of the fact that he was only twenty-two while she was thirty-three. Who can say why, or what made her love him? He, with his silken hair, pink flesh and manicured fingernails, and—and—and his cowardly yellow streak. She knew he was a coward and it hurt her.

" 'Matt,' she said to me, once, when we both stood on the pavement before her home—me with a longing to snatch her into my arms and call her mine; for, mind you, Mardel was a beautiful woman. I was more nearly her age, and, surely, I was no coward like the pink-faced boy. But, she knew that—'Matt,' she said, 'you have said you loved me?'

" 'Yes, yes, Mardel'—

"I took a step toward her. She stopped me. For the moment I had misunderstood her meaning.

" 'Then you wish to see me happy. Prove it. It will not be news to your ears when I confess to loving Edwin, but oh, how I hate a coward! Do you think we could break him of his one weakness? I have a plan to test him. You must help. Down in Maugin's Hollow, as you know, they once quarried stone. Now there is nothing left of the quarry except a deep, deep hole partially filled with water—how deep do they say it is? Some stories make it without a bottom. If we three are together and I should slip over the edge of the cliff—'

"Really, it was funny. I laughed—Edwin to the rescue! Ho, ho, what a joke! But I saw the pained look on her face and my merriment changed to concern.

" 'Then you will surely drown, unless I come in after you. If you hope to stir Edwin's courage in that manner—'

"Suddenly I remembered that Edwin could not swim. Suppose he did go to her rescue—Don't look at me that way, you—"

"Come, come, my good man, I have not interfered—Most surely you would go to Edwin's assistance in that case. On with the story, I'm interested."

And the minister moved away from the story teller's claws.

" 'No,' I told her, 'Edwin will leave you to drown.'

" 'No, no! He loves me and would never leave me to drown like a rat in a cistern. Then, besides, I can swim and you will be there.'

"So that is how we three happened to be on the edge of the quarry hole down in Maugin's Hollow a few days later.

" 'Oh, look, Edwin! What pretty wild flowers!' exclaimed Mardel, reaching far out, to where the blos-

soms hung recklessly over tbe black water.

"Even I, and I am no coward, tremhled a bit and my lips went dry as I watched tbe daring woman.

" 'Mardel! Come away! You'll—'

"But Edwin was too late witb his warning. He covered his ears with his soft white bands to keep out the woman's screams. For an instant be stood there as though petrified—eyes tightly closed, lips quivering, sweat trickling down at his temples, while the pink of his face gave place to ghastly white.

"Did Edwin rush to the rescue of the woman he loved? Did be? He did not. Tbe young man even forgot that Matt Laucks was there. He became panic-stricken and ran. It is hard to tell wbo yelled for help tbe louder, Mardel or ber weak-kneed lover.

"To enter the waters of the quarry-hole was simply a repetition of what I had often done as a boy. To me there was no danger. I even knew a footpath that led down the face of the cliff. In this manner I picked my way to tbe edge of the waters of the quarry.

"Altbougb Mardel conld swim sbe needed help. She was more dead than alive when I bronght her out. Sbe did not even thank me before hurrying home.

"Several hours later I came npon her, seated on the front steps, down in our street, and her greetings were: 'Oh, how I hate a coward.' Then, as an afterthought: 'All cowards except —except Edwin.'

" 'Edwin? The fool was so frightened he forgot my presence,' I told her, 'and he believes you were drowned. He fears to comc back to learn the truth. I have been told he is milling about among the jobless, down in the shipping office, trying to buck up courage enongh to sign on some ship's articles. Sometimes I believe the man is insane. Why not forget him, Mardel? Me, I am no coward and I love you—'

" 'Then, if you really love me, you will do my bidding. Go, follow Edwin—Go to sea with him! Make a man of him, and bring him back to me.'

"And, because there were tears in her eyes, because I did love her, I followed Edwin Carll to the shipping office. From there I followed him down to the sea, always my soul singing to my brain, 'He'll never come back! He'll never come back! Then there will be nothing between you and Mardel!' My brain screamed back, 'No, no! You are going to bring him back! You wish to make Mardel happy.'

"WHEN I entered the shipping office, where the riff-raff of the waterfront crowded before the window of the shipping master's official cubby-hole, I saw Edwin Carll, apparently asleep, chin on breast, legs dangling from a pile of sea cbests and dunnage bags.

"I, Matt Laucks, me, who never dreamed of following the sea, asked what ship the pink-faced boy had picked his berth in, and learning, asked to bc signed on as fireman.

" 'My man will take you ont to the *Golden Harp* in our launch,' said the shipping master.

"Then followed a discourse, by each and every seaman in the plaee, as to the rotten food aboard the vessel.

"The next second every sailorman lowered his voice. Johnny, the dope, cook for the *Golden Harp,* held his hand above his head, batting his eyes and biting a curse off close to his lips. The shipping master leaned from his window, month hanging open, eyes wide with wonderment. Each man caught unspoken questions from the eye of his neighbor.

"Me, I was dnmfounded, but like the others I stood there listening to someone singing, clear and beautiful

like the tones of a glass bell. 'Aloha Oe' was the song and I recognized the voice. It was Mardel Haugh. I wondered how, and why, Mardel had come to this place.

"My head turned, slowly, slowly, as though I feared the movement would stop the singing, and—it was Edwin Carll, the pink-faced boy, singing the song. I never knew he could sing like that, and wondered why I should mistake it for Mardel's voice.

"Just as suddenly as the song had broken forth it stopped, and Edwin Carll slid from his perch, reached for his dunnage bag, heaved it to his shoulder and started for the door.

"'God,' whimpered the dope, drawing the back of his hand across his eyes, '"Aloha Oe"—it always makes me homesick. When a ship is bound out for the home port and you hear the strum of stringed instruments wailing that tune, it's just like saying good-bye when you know you'll never be back. Who'd a thought you could sing that way!'

"'Whom are you talking to?' muttered Edwin in an irritable manner, brushing the dope's trembling fingers from his arm and scowling on the other sailors who jostled him.

"'You, he means you, Edwin,' I told him. 'What a wonderful songster you are, why, that song you—'

"'You fool!' he screamed, shaking a fist in my face, a soft, pink bunch of knuckles that would never frighten anyone, 'I can't sing! I was asleep!'

"Was Edwin Carll insane? I wondered. I did not ponder long on the thought because it was necessary to hurry, and we, four of us. Edwin, myself, the cook and a sailor who dangled heavy, brass rings from the lobes of his dark ears, went out to the *Golden Harp* in the shipping master's launch.

"'Matt! Matt!' suddenly whimpered the pink-faced boy, 'Do you see her! She's coaxing me to my death! God! I want to go back—Take me back, Matt, I'm terribly frightened!'

"'Terribly frightened, eh? You're crazy, that's what you are, and, damn me, you can bawl all you want; we're going aboard that big iron wagon, and you'll not be a coward when you come back. You hear me? Don't hug my legs that way!'

"I'm sorry, but I kicked him, and he took it like a whipped dog groveling at my feet.

"'But, Matt,' he whined, 'I can see her, out there, smiling, holding her arms out to me! She knows how frightened I am. She sees you mistreating me and there is a tear in her eye—Matt, Matt! I remember now, you were there, why did you not save her? Can you see her, Matt? She's coaxing—But I dare not step into the water; if I try to go to her I'll drown!'

"'Crazy, I teenk, like ze marmoset,' opined the half-breed, showing his teeth and causing his brass rings to tinkle musically as he shook his head in wonderment.

"'No, I'm not insane,' answered Edwin. 'I'm simply terrified in my heart and brain. I know that I am going into the arms of death and I'm doubtful as to what I shall find there.'

"From then until long after the *Golden Harp* had gone plowing down the bay for the open sea I lost track of Edwin. It may have been because of the much work in preparation of starting. I know, now, that had the crew known what the ill-fated vessel was headed for, every last one of them would have plunged overboard. It was when we were three nights outbound that things started to happen.

"'QUEER sort of a chap, that mess boy who came aboard with you,' said the second engineer as I passed him on the winding stairs on my way up from the bowels of the ship. 'He's made friends with the mascot dog. The deck force is crowded before sailors' quarters listening to

the addlepated fool sing the dog to sleep.'

"'I guess he's a bit queer about singing,' I answered. 'But who can blame a seaman for singing, even though his audience be only a dog, on the long, lonesome nights at sea?'

"The second was too far down the stairs to make reply. His voice was drowned by the clatter from below.

"I hurried to the deck to see what was going on. Just outside the iron swinging doors of the galley, on a pile of ashes that had come up from the engine room, Edwin was seated. At his feet was a dog, his head between his paws, tail thumping the deck, jowls twitching. In the upper half of the galley doorway the light from a smoking lantern lit up the face of the cook. Cookey stood there, looking at nothing, a pan in one hand and a dirty rag in the other, his mouth hanging open—and Edwin Carll was strumming a mandolin. I never knew the pink-faced boy could play a musical instrument of any kind. He was singing and his very soul was in the song.

"As I approached him he leaped to his feet. The song was hushed. The pink-faced boy spread his arms and took three steps toward the rail. The dog, too, twitched his ears and barked furiously at something he seemed to see far out there under the moonlight.

"Suddenly, just as I was about to catch him before he went overboard, Edwin looked at the mandolin in a puzzled sort of way, glanced at the dog, frowned, then turning his face to me, a face now deathly white, he shouted:

"'Matt, she came very near getting me! I awakened just in time to save myself.'

"He seemed to have remembered something.

"'You were with us when Mardel fell into the quarry hole! Did you save her?'

"'Do you think I am as yellow as you are? I promised her, half an hour before I found you in the shipping office, that I would break you of your cowardliness. That is why I'm signed on in the black gang—that I might be near you.'

"'Yes, you think I'm crazy, eh?' Edwin laughed, and his laugh was not pleasant to hear. 'Always, all of my life, I have been able to see and hear things. I did not tell others—they would have only laughed, and, like the sailors back aft, called me a fool. I am just a bit doubtful, myself, sometimes. If I were sure that what I see was not simply the imaginings of a disordered brain, I'd accept Mardel's challenge and walk into the sea. But I'm afraid, Matt — I'm terribly afraid!'

"Even as we talked, the moonlight was blotted out and a light gust of wind, burdened with dampness, snatched up a loose corner of the canvas hatch-cover and snapped it loudly. Had I been more experienced there is no doubt that I could have read the warning of an approaching storm.

"'Now, if I were just sure—'

"Edwin had taken a step toward the rail. I grasped him by the slack of his shirt, hard up under the throat, shook him and gave him a staggering start aft toward his bunk. I had hoped that this would anger him to the point of fight. But no, Edwin took it.

"Sparks came from his cabin, looked toward the sky where the moon was drifting in and out among the clouds, glanced down, saw me and called:

"'Static's sure bad. Storm brewin' and th' air'll be full o' S O S before long. Picked up warnings from Arlington and passed 'em along to th' old man. Reckon I'll be slidin' back and forth th' length o' my table tryin' to find something to hold on to in a few hours.'

"Even as he talked I saw the clouds racing before the wind, rolling and tumbling like smoke from a factory chimney. The wireless antennae began to whine as the wind used the wires as strings for nature's guitar.

"Some one called from the bridge an order that put the signal bells, down in the engine room, to work. I saw the first mate come down from the bridge, brace himself against the wind and start aft, walking unsteadily with the sway of the ship.

" 'Oh ho!' I thought, 'here's where Edwin is put to the test.'

"I followed the first back to sailors' quarters. The deck force was tumbling from their bunks; shirts were being drawn over naked shoulders and belts pulled fast to the tune of many a curse from leather throats.

" 'Hi don't blame anyone but myself. It's me own bloody fault for comin' to th' sea for my bread and butter when I should o' known bloomin' well right that th' only thing the ocean is fit for is—fish! Hif I ever make th' port o' Liverpool again that's where I stay—swipe me pink hif I don't!' grumbled a big, light-haired Englishman as he ducked into the companionway.

" 'Aye, I teenk we're in for some weather,' joined the half-breed, lurching toward the door to follow the Englishman.

"Orders had gone forth to stretch the life lines. Who knew but that they would be needed before the *Golden Harp* poked her nose into the sunshine again?

"I LOOKED about among the hurrying seamen for some sign of my charge. Eventually I located him. He was in his bunk with the one dirty blanket pulled up over his face. He was unable to stand because of the trembling of his legs when I pulled him from his hiding place. His tongue was thick with the fear that was upon him and he would only grunt in reply to the first officer's commands. He was a thing, not a man.

" 'Come, damn you!' I shouted into his ear. It was necessary to scream now, for the wind was howling like a million vengeful demons. 'Come, brace up, you're going on deck to help make things fast. Within half an hour the seas will be smashing about your ears. What are you doing?'

"Edwin was down on his knees, his arms across an old sea chest, his face buried from sight, so terrified that he could not regain his feet. The mate's face went purple with rage as he looked upon the coward.

" 'Aye, it's no time to say your prayers, you fellow skunk!' howled the mate, twining his fingers in the hapless man's neckband.

"Jerking Edwin to his feet, the mate drew back a heavy ham of a fist and sent it smashing against the coward's face. He heaped vile oaths, oaths that only the lips of a hard man, in hard places, can utter, upon the trembling wretch, called him names that make all white men fight, even though they see quick and sudden death as a result. But Edwin simply allowed his trembling body to slump to the floor and covered his face with his arms.

"We could not wait longer. The mate and I fought our way through the wind and water to the open deck. The big ship was climbing to the top of towering waves and sliding down into valleys where she seemed to stand still, momentarily, to allow nature's sledge-hammer of tons of water to crash down on her decks and about the seamen clinging to the life lines.

" 'Aye, I teenk she be gonna storm,' grunted the half-breed as he brought up against the starboard rail where the mate and I held on grimly, awaiting the vessel's arrival at the top of a wave.

"The mate, hugging the rail, hard by my side, laughed — actually laughed at the words of the dark-

skinned, beringed sailor. I wondered at these men who could laugh in the face of death. They knew much that I, with my inexperience, did not know.

"'Not only does she storm, Pete,' yelled the mate as the ship went crasbing, hroadside, against a wall of water, 'but we've lost our rudder.'

"'Mehhe so we rig a jury, eh, what?'

"Our three heads were close together. Otherwise the words would have been carried away hefore they reached our ears. Now and then lightning cut the darkness and the thunder seemed to he drumming just over our heads.

"'Rig hell!' roared the mate. 'She's sprung a leak and the hlack gang is flonndering about in water. The engine room will be flooded within the next few minutes—besides, we are hard by a rock-pile of a coast and if we don't go sliding to Davy Jones we're bound to be smashed to kindling and twisted steel on the rocks. Say yonr prayers, Pete!'

"'Bah!' yelled Pete, the halfbreed, making a dash for the lifeline.

"We followed and managed to make our way to where the most of the seamen were congregated on the second deck close under the bridge, where the only life boat was being cared for. The otbers had gone when the smasbing seas carried away the ventilators and tore the metal doors from the cahins in the officers' quarters.

"'Is there no chance of some other vessel coming to our rescue?' I asked, somewhat timidly. I had heard tales of other ships coming to the rescue when called to the scene hy wireless.

"'The water's put me out of business,' came a voice at my elbow, and I turned to find the operator talking. 'Th' engine-room's a steamin' hell and th' hlack gang's swarmin' up out o' th' bowels o' th' old hooker like rats scamperin' for safety. Before the water reacbed the engines I spoke the government cutters and they are coming. We'll all he in Davy Jones' locker when they arrive.'

"DURING the excitement that followed I forgot Edwin entirely. It hecame each man for himself. Many went to a wet grave that night. A white streak of lightning went zigzagging through the blackness, lighting the face of the storm-lashed coast for a moment, and in that moment the lookout, lashed to the hridge, saw and realized that the end had come.

"'Rocks!' he screamed. 'Rocks, dead ahead!'

"He might as well not have called the warning for all the good that conld come of it. Crash! There was a terrific shock, a grinding and groaning of crushed steel and splintering wood.

"Me? I believed none of us would live longer than the few moments it takes for water to snuff out a man's life. It is strange, but fully five minutes later I found myself wondering if, when the arms of death emhraced me, I should continue to exist in a new life and whether I would still have Edwin Carll, the coward, as a charge. Then I decided that it was taking the reaper a long while to collect toll—perhaps he would not get me, after all.

"My thoughts were interrupted by the skipper's voice.

"'She's poked her nose into a mountain of rock, a scant quarter of a mile off a rocky coast. Before morning she will be tugged off hy her shifting cargo of pig iron to go scooting for—for—'

"'Look! Look!' yelled someone.

"Raising my head above the iron railing, just beneath the hridge, where I had been clinging while the seas raised and lowered the ship in their wash, I looked aft from eyes that must have showed as much terror as tbe heart of Edwin Carll ever felt.

"The repeated flashes of lightning, playing over the heaving deck below, showed me Edwin Carll, the coward, working his way toward us along a life line, the water breaking over the deck threatening to wash him overboard.

"I thought this had brought the exclamation. But no—the voice of the half-breed indicated otherwise.

" 'The vampire of the sea! She lures ze poor sailorman to hees death, I teenk!'

"Following the direction in which those near me were looking, toward the coast, where a huge, flat-surfaced rock projected, I saw, when the lightning flashed, a woman—aye, grin, you fools! I saw her with my own eyes, arms outstretched, her long hair streaming over her shoulders. I could not see her features, simply her form, in a white gown that was all too thin for the flare of the penetrating lightning. Every member of the *Golden Harp's* crew, all left clinging to the wreckage, saw her.

" 'Men,' said the skipper, 'if we could get a light line to that rock, then draw a heavy hawser ashore with the lighter line, make it fast—'

" 'Oh, ho! That would be fine! But who's going to take the light line ashore?' said the mate.

" 'I know,' answered the old man. 'There is not one chance in a million of a human being weathering that water—still I have seen worse—'

"It was not that the men were afraid to try. It was the simple fact that each one realized that it was sure suicide with nothing to be gained. The suggestion was foolish. The lifeboat had slithered out of its blocks and was bobbing over the side to reappear and go crashing inboard. Chains had been made fast to the boat when the storm first broke.

" 'Matt! Matt! Where are you?'

"It was Edwin Carll, his clothing in rags, a smear of red across one cheek, working his way along the iron railing of the stairs.

" 'Will we sink?' he asked when he reached my side.

" 'Probably will, unless a miracle is performed. Now, if you had nerve enough to fight your way to that rock with a line—'

"At that moment the lightning flashed and Edwin Carll, looking in the direction my trembling finger pointed, saw the woman on the rock.

" 'Mardel!' he shrieked. 'Mardel!'

" 'Look out!' came a shout from the skipper, which was joined by the curses of shipwrecked sailors who saw their last lifeboat going to destruction. The chain had either broken or become unhooked from the small boat. The little craft was slithering inboard—now the wash of the seas was bringing it back.

" 'Some one take a chance—our last chance!' called the captain. 'Some one take the line, leap in as the boat washes past and either sink with it or save the crew.'

"Even as he said it the lifeboat slid close by him. The half-breed reached out for the line but changed his mind and the boat passed him—Now, I'm no coward, I tell you! I'm no coward! Don't you dare laugh! It was because I could not make up my mind quick enough—the boat swept by me and was gone—no!

" 'Mardel! Mardel!' called Edwin. 'I'm coming, Mardel, I'm coming!'

"And as the boat passed him, the last chance, Edwin Carll, the coward, leaped in and the darkness swallowed him.

"For a long while the rattle of the small line paying out behind the lifeboat could be heard. As it went out, the skipper, realizing what Edwin was doing, hoping against hope that the daredevil would succeed in reaching the rock, made the end fast to the splintered bridge.

"Suddenly the line drew taut. It twanged and sang under a terrific

strain. It was hours later when the lightning flares showed us Edwin Carll on the rock. The heavier line was sent ashore and then we waited.

"From time to time the flat rock was lighted to show us Edwin Carll motioning, beckoning us to come ashore. I do not know how it was possible. We toiled, each man for himself, along the hawser. At times I thought my lungs would burst my breast when the water buried me too long, but always I came gasping to the top.

"Before we had managed to reach the rock the storm died away, although it left the thrashing waters behind. Daylight broke as the last man, the captain, came over the edge of the rock to safety. As he crawled out of reach of the sea's tongue, which lapped greedily at the rock, there was a loud snap. The hawser had broken!

"Looking out toward where the *Golden Harp* was being battered we saw nothing but the foam-capped cones of the waves. The *Golden Harp* had slid off for the floor of the ocean.

" 'Who said that chap was a coward? Where is he?' shouted the captain, looking about for Edwin.

" 'Gone—I teenk, mebbe so, the vampire of the sea she take him to Davy Jones,' answered the half-breed, shaking his head and causing the metal rings to clank merrily on the lobes of his ears. 'On ship he always chatter like ze fool marmoset and teenk he see ghosts. But, aye, I talk wiz him, flowers, books, poetry, music, politics. On ze long dark nights on watch and in ze bunk, I learn mebbe he—aye, I learn surely he no crazy. Also, I learn he no got ze guts to do ze teeng he did.'

" 'But he did it,' replied the skipper angrily.

"Pete only shook his head. Me, I was all mixed up in my thoughts. I was thankful that I still lived. I was both sorry and glad that Edwin had gone to his death so bravely—glad because he was no coward and sorry because — because — because a dead coward was not going to be of much use to the woman I loved. Then a warm flush came over my body as I remembered that nothing stood between myself and Mardel.

"I was glad that it was dark and that my companions could not see the look in my eyes when I clung to the wreckage, out there with the seas smashing about my ears, when I looked aft and saw Edwin coming along the lifeline. . . . Don't look at me that way, you fools! I tell you I'm no coward! I simply could not think fast enough and let the boat go by so that—so that—so that Edwin could have his chance!"

THE sky pilot, from the mission house around the corner, still fingered the huge cross that dangled from the chain about his neck. He looked about him at the interested faces of the Red Lantern's patrons, who formed Matt Lauck's audience.

"This proves what I have always taught in the mission; a man might kill his brother man and escape the law, but he cannot escape his own conscience."

"Do you mean to say that I murdered Edwin Carll?" screamed Matt, leaping to his feet to face the black-gowned minister.

Half a dozen men caught Matt's upraised arms before he could strike.

"You know best, my man. Perhaps you can find comfort in the thought that you did not shove him overboard, that you did not shoot him. Were you afraid to do it that way? Of course not, you were no coward. But, in that case, the law would have to be reckoned with, eh? You probably forgot that higher law—your conscience.

"You called Edwin Carll a coward? You told yourself, always, that Edwin must risk his life to prove that

he was not a coward, and always your heart sang to your brain that it would be well for you if Edwin would lose his life. Your brother man could not blame you for murder. You can fool your brother man but you cannot fool your conscience."

"What has that to do with proof of a future life? The thing men call their souls? It tends to disprove the whole theory," interrupted the first mate of the *Catawac*. "Edwin, and the whole ship's crew, saw the spirit of Mardel, who was still on this side of the border. Edwin was simply crazy—insane with brooding over the fact that he had deserted Mardel and the belief that she was dead."

"Shut up! Let the man finish his story. Go ahead, Matt, let's have the rest," urged Chips. "Did you collect your reward when you returned? How did Mardel take it?"

"It's about done," continued Matt when he had gained control over his feelings. "A cutter gathered us up from the rock, several days later, and brought us back, here, to the foot of our street, where the *Catawac* now tugs at her lines.

"I felt much better. In fact I was almost happy, for now Mardel was mine. Of course I dreaded telling her that Edwin was dead, but—

"I walked up our street, stopped at Mardel's door, eased my dunnage bag to the steps and knocked—a bit timidly, I'll admit.

"Her brother, Jack Haugh, opened the door. He was puzzled to place me immediately, then suddenly he grasped my hand.

"'Well, well, of all things, it's Mathew Laucks. How's the world been treating you, Matt?'

"'Not so well, Jack, not so well. Where's Mardel?'

"The smile on the lips of Jack Haugh disappeared. He looked at me in a thoughtful manner.

"'I had forgotten, you do not get the local newspapers aboard ship. Certainly you could not have known. Ten minutes after you left Mardel, on your way to the shipping office, she was run down and killed by an automobile.'

"Aye, laugh, damn you! Laugh!"

Well, I'll Tell You, Ma

By W. McKEOWN

"'TAKE it easy, kid; croak him if you have to,' said 'Dago' Polsky. 'Dago' was my cell-mate, ma," I said. "But old Simpkins, our all-night guard, was sleepin', an' I had no trouble gettin' past him. There was a fast freight just goin' by, so I hopped it and was soon in Chicago. I flipped a truck in front of the station, ma, and here I am!"

"Well," said ma, "how did you happen to get in that hick-town jail, a hundred miles away from Chicago?"

"Well, I'll tell you, ma," I said, "it was like this: You know that I have been going to the Underground Inn for the last few nights, jus' like you told me not to, but I guess I got what you might call an adventurous spirit or somethin' in me that wants excitement. I got to talkin' with the leadin' lady of the chorus that's playin' there this week, an' I asts to take her home las' night and she consented.

"Well, I waits for her at the side entrance where they always come out, and pretty soon she comes out, an' we steps into a Yellow taxi, which I had arranged to be there—you know I wanted to make a big showin', ma, and so we stepped in an' I told the driver her address and we soon were there.

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, I didn't like the looks of the neighborhood but I says to myself, 'Oh, shucks, I wanted excitement,' and kinda let it go at that.

"She invites me up to her flat, an' I goes up. Right there is where I made my biggest mistake, ma. Well, she takes off her coat an' she still had on the ballay dress that she had on at the Inn.

"She went over by the radiator and warmed her hands because it was pretty cold out las' night, ma. Then she says that she is going to change her dress and that I should excuse her for a few minutes.

"Oh, boy, when she came out she sure did look swell. She had on kind of a silvery dress, with beads and tossels on it. She went over and laid down on a davenport and I goes over and sits down on a chair and starts talkin' to her. She leans over without sayin' a word and puts her arm around my neck an' starts pullin' me toward her. Of course, ma, I didn't put up any struggle or nothin' an' before I knew I was kissin' her.

"Just then I heard kind of a low whistle an' I looks up to see a great big guy with a map on him that would of scared an angel. Well, of course, I jumps up and asts him what he wanted, but he didn't say nothin', but jus' kept walkin' slowly over to me an' lookin' me straight in the eyes. I looks to her for some kind of an explanation or somethin' but she seemed jus' as scared as I was.

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, when he was about half-way across the room, I sees an automatic layin' on a table within reach so I looks at it and then looks at her and she looks at me an' then looks at the gun, so I kinda thought that she wanted me to get the gun. So I grabs it and points it at him. But he jus' kept comin' towards me kinda slow-like. So I shoots over his head.

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, I didn't mean to hit him or nothin' like that, but I thought that I'd scare him a

little bit, you know. But I must have hit him because he fell to the floor right where he was. Gee, I didn't know what to do. I looks over at her and she was lookin' at him layin' on the floor. We heard somebody comin' up the stairs an' so I ran over and locked the door.

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, if I ever was in a predicament I sure was in one there. I came back and she says, 'Quick, the trap-door!' She pointed to a trap-door leading on to the dark roof. I pulled a stepladder from a corner and we went up on the roof. All she said when we got there was: 'Follow me,' which I did. We went through area-ways, down ropes, up alleys, across bad-smelling yards, an' climbed fences until we got out into a dim-lighted street. She called an old hack driver, and we were driven to an old wharf. In the semi-darkness we jumped into a freshly painted motor-boat, bearing the name 'Shatty.' We went along for about a half hour and finally alighted.

"WE WALKED along silently for about five minutes until we came to a big palatial residence all dark inside—you know, ma, one of those houses that rich millionaires live in. Then we sat down on a big piece of stone and she said to me: 'That man that we just shot was my brother. He is, although I am ashamed to say it, a burglar. Not just a common burglar, but one who plans his next coup with the utmost intelligence. The smallest detail does not escape his careful scrutiny. But this time I was in the next room sleeping, and I heard every bit of his plan. Do you see that house with the big flag out on the front lawn? That is the home of Henry Bilse, the great German theater man. His is the next to be burglarized by my brother. My brother is not present at the robbery any more. He stays behind and directs the proceedings. So his being shot will have nothing to do with his confederates carrying out his wishes. Now the idea is this: You get in there as quietly as you can and warn the servants and then go into old Bilse's room and tell him about it. He has a night watchman on duty every night but there has been nothing doing for so long that he goes to sleep about three o'clock. It is now three forty-five, so he is snoring by this time. He keeps guard in the back so you go in the front way. But Monahan, the copper on this beat, is due about now so wait until he goes by. There he is now! See him over by that lamp-post?'

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, I says to her: 'But why should I do all this? What do I get out of it?' Then she says to me: 'What do you get out of it? You shot a man, didn't you? What excuse are you going to give when they catch you?'

"Well, I'll tell you, ma, I was a little bit leery about going in that big house unannounced, but then there was some work to be done and I was the one to do it. To my complete surprise the front door was open! Could it be that the burglars were already there? But no; they would not come in by the front door, anyway, I reasoned. So I went ahead and the first thing I did was to stumble over a big rug they had as you come in. I thought sure that some one heard, and my heart was racing like a pump. But I guess they were all sound asleep. Gee, ma, compared to our little home, that house was like a great big castle like you read about in the olden times.

"Well, to tell the truth, ma, I didn't know which was the servants' rooms and which was the old man's rooms. So I goes and opens one of the doors. I sees an old man laying in the bed but I didn't know if it was a servant or Bilse himself. I gently closed the door and went to another room and peeped in. A swell jane

was sleepin' in there, so gee, I closed the door quick. Then I went upstairs and opened one of the doors and there in one of the beds lay a man with gray hair and with a knife stabbed in his stomach! Gee, there was blood all around him, ma, and some of it was drippin' on the floor.

"There were twin beds in the room, ma, an' I guess that the lady in the other bed was his wife. But she was sound sleeping away as if nothin' had happened. Gee, I wonder what she thought when she woke up in the morning! Anyway, I started to go out, and who was standin' in the doorway but two big dicks, with their guns coverin' me!

"I sure was in an awful predicament, ma, because, gosh, I didn't have no excuse for being there or nothin'. One of the detectives grabbed me by the arm and said to me: 'Thought you'd come back; they always do!' Gee, then I thought that I better not say anything or I'd get myself in a jam, so I was as tight as a clam from then on, ma.

"All the time that I was sitting in the paddy wagon, I was thinkin' of some way to get away from these guys. They didn't handcuff me, or anything, I guess because they thought that I was a kid or something. Finally I got up a desperate plan. I knew that the B. & O. would be along any minute and I could make one break for that. Still, I thought that they might shoot at me, or somethin'. Then again, on second thought, I was desperate enough to try it. I guess it was about five minutes before we came to the tracks. I was cold with sweat and fear. The beads of cold sweat were running down my forehead. As soon as I felt the wagon going up the incline that leads to the tracks, I jumped. I don't know how I got up enough nerve to do it, but I did. I hopped on a fast passenger that was just going by, and I hid in the observation car until I was discovered by a porter, who told the rest of the trainmen, who questioned me as to how I happened to flip the train at this hour of the morning. I guess it was nearly five-thirty then, ma, 'cause it was just getting light. Well, I couldn't very well explain, so one of 'em said: 'We better hold him; maybe he's wanted in the city.' So the first town that we came to was the little hick town that I told you about. They called a fellow from the telegraph station and told him all about it and he went and got a gun and took me to the little jail that I escaped from after making friends with 'Dago' Polsky."

"And all this happened early this morning?" asked ma.

"Yeh, ma, an' buhlieve me, I'm tired, too. But let me ask you, ma, what are you up so late for? Where's pa? Has he gone to bed?"

"Yes; you know he's got to get up and go to work tomorrow. The only reason that I'm up is because you didn't come in at your regular time and so I thought that I'd wait up for you. I was just going to bed when you came in."

"Well, you just trot off to bed and get your rest, ma, and don't worry about me."

WHEN ma got into her room, pa was waiting there. Ma said: "Well, I'll tell you, pa, I guess he sure is cured of adventure and excitement, all right: I thought that he'd run right home after I had Bill Bibling go up and scare him and Mame."

"And who is Mame, maw?"

"Mame? Why, she is old Charley Stebbins' daughter that we got to work up there at the Underground Inn this week so she could help us cure Jimmy of his craving for excitement. They fixed up a dummy like it was murdered, and had some fake cops nab him. They sure scared him good."

The DESERT LICH

by FRANK BELKNAP LONG JR.

"HE HAS killed his wife, master! He is below, and he has killed his wife! All night he walked back and forth, beating upon the gate. With his bare hands, master! With his bare hands! All night upon the gate with his hands! Pound! pound! pound! It was like the desert drums, master. You have heard them? All night—and in the cold!"

Yes, I had expected him. I put my head out of the window and looked down upon him. Poor fellow! He was standing there in the cold, shivering and cursing. And whose fault was it? I had sold him a good wife, an excellent wife. He demanded too much of women; it was not in them to wear veils forever. I had warned him; I had said to him, "See here! You buy of me a woman! And she will betray you; it is to be expected. Why do you not shrug, why do you not philosophize, as do the English? Are not wives cheap; is it well to have them faithful too long? Would not anybody tire of an over-faithful woman? Faugh! I will get you another one!"

But no, he must kill his wife. It was to be expected. I descended the stairs, and let him in.

"Why is it," I demanded, "that you come here in the cold and disturb me? It is early, and I have had no coffee. The fumes of coffee go to our heads; when we have coffee we are happy, we smile, we furnish you with wives. That is the custom. But if you come here so early, what can you expect?"

He was bitter; he stormed. His shirt was open and I could see the long red hairs bristling on his chest.

"You must come with me! I shall show you what I have done, and then you will be happy. Come, it is not long. My camel is waiting."

What could I do? The wrath was in him and I had given him an unfaithful wife, and was in a measure to blame.

I gave directions and followed him. It was a pity. The camels had suffered too, and nuzzled my hand. I dissolved in sympathy; these fine beasts had suffered because a fool had murdered his wife. The sands whistled between our legs. There were drums all over the desert. I was so cold that my beard froze. But I was determined. I had made a bargain, and I would keep it.

"You do not mind?"

He was riding with his face turned toward Mecca. Poor fool! He was sentimental, and believed in devils! A bleak, freezing moment! We crossed dunes. the wind whistled through our beards. The silence of the morning drew in upon us. My teeth began to chatter, but I bit my tongue and urged my camel forward. Even then repentance might have come. I am not a fool and I have

a conscicnce. It is not a pleasant thing to sell a man an unfaithful wife. Men have been buricd in the sand for less! Once I saw a man's ears cut off for less! But what would you have? Assume that I dccided to confess the fault mine. He would tnrn on me; I should have a knifc in my side. It is not pleasant to anger a man who has red hairs on his chest. So I replied nothing, and we went on. The wind rose and lifted our saddlcs. It takes a trcmendous wind to lift saddles. My lips began to freeze together. Would we never dismonnt?

What a cave! How can men live in such places? Eerily above the aands it rose, white, like a sepulcher. What madness drives men to bury themselves iu such places? It roae high on each side, and slanted down in the middle. A camel's back rising out of the sand! And as white as clean-picked bones! Therc were bonc in front, long rows of smooth, white bones. Human? Ah, yes, they were human. But no one wonders at it in the descrt. For onc thing, there are many lepers, and they die anywhere; like leavcs they fall, and who is there to pick them up?

"For six years I have lived here!"

Poor fellow! I pitied him. To awake at night with your teeth on edge; to feel the cold in your bones; to know that you live in a tomb! And he had taken a wife to help him bear it! But is it any wonder that she rebelled?

We slid down from our poor, tired camels. We sidled across the sands. The wind licked furiously about the sepulcher! We stumbled over the bones; I groaned as a sharp point pricked throngh my sandals.

"Will you not enter first?"

He was bowing to me. I climbed up over the smooth, white stone. The opening was but three feet in diameter, a tiny hole in the top of a white sepulcher. I felt around inside with my foot for a ladder. But there was nothing.

"Drop!"

Was it a trap? Shonld I let myself go and drop down perhaps ten, perhaps twenty, perhaps a hundred feet? Desert sepulchers run deep. He was grinning like a malicious satyr. But if I hesitated there was the knife. And after all, what is a drop of fifty feet? A broken leg, perhaps, but when one has sold a man an unfaithful wife, ia it too great a paymcnt? Did I not owe him that mnch? And it might give him pleasure! I felt my hands slipping on the smooth stone. I closed my eyes, and let them slip.

I fell like a freighted pomegranate. For a moment I felt the darkness closing in about me, passing through my beard and over my head. I felt the darkness, and then I became light about the heart. I was falling a great distance. I thought of many things. Why had I not sounded the baggage iu advance? I should have asked her, "Do you like this chap? Is it reasonable that I ahould ask you to live in a sepulcher?" But then, I did not know that the fool dwelt in a tomb!

When did I think of these things? Even as I fell. In less time than it takes a camel to sneeze, and then—a great weight on my shoulders!

I had landed upon my back. Ah, you may laugh, but it was horrible! My shoulders seemed on fire! Fierce contractions under my shoulders and arms! I cried out with the pain. I was a fool, of course. Who could have heard me! It was dark, and I had fallen a great distance. All of one hundred feet! Far above me I saw a miniature speck of light which wavered. Now it was here, now there. A tiny pin-prick of light, and a voice that laughed: "Fool! fool! fool!" Was it the light that spoke?

I passed my hand over my chest: I was dripping wet. The cold had disappeared. I was lying on a smooth, warm floor. Waves of intense heat passed over me. Somewhere near by there was fire—a furnace perhaps. It flickered occasionally across the darkness, lighting the vault. I tried to sit up. But a weight was on my shoulders; I lay panting.

Then deep thoughts began to run in my brain. It was a holiday season. Men would come for wives. With crates of pomegranates, with curds, with ewe's milk, bartering, scheming, seeking wives. They were fierce, determined men. What if my boy should say, "You must depart. There are no wives here! The master has gone away and there are no wives." Would they not storm; would they not scale the wall and carry away my women? And they would never pay me; I know them too well. But perhaps one will have a kinder heart; perhaps one will say, "Surely this man is not one to lose trade. If he is gone, there is mischief afoot. Some scoundrelly free-lance may have murdered him! Hi, there, boy, in whose company did your master depart?" Ah, if they but think to ask that! But they will never ask it; I know them too well.

FOR hours, ages I lay there. Above me the spark of light vanished. In the night I lay, and groaned. But I saw things; objects made themselves visible to me. And there was the red-green Illumination from beyond that flashed across the chamber. A small chamber! Twenty by twenty perhaps. And in the corner an object. It lay upon a round dais, and it repelled me. It possessed a blasphemous imperfection that I dared not openly acknowledge. It lacked the permanent quality of other objects. It had once boasted attributes—certain attributes—certain attributes! And now it was changing, becoming more unbearable before my eyes. I closed my eyes; I endeavored to shut out the object. But the outline of it forced itself beneath my eyelids; I could not blot out that long thin form from my tired brain. I saw very clearly that I had been a fool to sell a man an unfaithful wife.

And yet what a method of revenge! And had the idiot no sense of decorum? To drop a man one hundred feet into the sarcophagus of his wife!

The next day I could move. It was difficult, but I got to my feet. The furnace had gone out, and a chill had taken me. My eyes were glued together, and the knuckles of my hands were beginning to turn black. A misery in my bones! I felt them crack as I moved across the floor. My eyes could now distinguish objects without the aid of the light from the furnace. Plague on the idiot's stupidity! He might have left me the darkness! It is these little things that hurt, a lack of common decency between enemies.

It was not pleasant to look at her. The heat of the furnace had altered her monstrously. Now the cold might help, but things had gone atrociously far. I bit my knuckles and swore in my beard.

There was a disdain in her face. A horrible, bitter grimace. And I quailed before the justice of it. And yet it was not meant for me. Coward! He dared not face the contempt in his wife's face. He had sought me out, and he had forced the disdain upon me.

The cold increased; something loathsome slid across the floor. A snake or a rat? What did it matter? The agony was all within me. My anger warmed me against the cold without. But I did not like the thought of unknown things gliding between my legs; I was tempted to climb upon the bier. What if I put his wife upon the floor? The rats would

be pleased. It was well to propitiate the vermin: they were insatiable in their greed. What if I should—and yet I had not descended so far! It was foolish to imagine such extremities! A man does not so abandon a woman for fear of rats! I could still hope.

I slid solemnly along the wall, feeling with my hands for a crevice, a crack, something definite to go upon. But nothing but damp mildew could I find—nothing but mildew one hundred feet below the desert. It came off in my hands, peeled layers of noisome greenish mildew. It was that, and the rats, which sent me back to the center of the room. I stood still, in the center, trying to rub my eyes open: they were gummy and stuck together. I could see, but only vaguely, as one perceives things in a prism. The blood pounded in my head; but I could not keep the cold out of my legs and arms. Fool! fool! fool! Something above reiterated it. It beat in through my frozen ears, it ran through my blood, and that shouted out from the tips of my fingers. Fool! fool! fool!

I might have known! To sell a man a piece of baggage for a wife! After all, the rats deserved her. Then the hunger came upon me! A longing for food, for plums, for raisins, pomegranates.

To feel both hunger and cold! To stand in the dark with rats running between your legs, and to long for pomegranates! I saw my women pressing the sweet fruit between their hands; in the darkness I could discern long rows of goblets filled with pomegranate juice! The figure on the bier appeared to mock me. Fool! fool! fool!

He was looking down upon me from above. I saw the tiny pin-prick of light, and tore at my beard. The long hairs came out in my hand. Already the skin on my face was beginning to freeze. I felt my ears: they were stiff and brittle. Low currents of air ran along the floor; I could feel the chill breeze whistling about my legs. But these things were soon forgotten—and then came back the dreams of pomegranates. Row on row of goblets filled with pomegranate juice! I stretched forth my hand to seize one, to drain it, and I slyly anticipated the ecstasy of the warm sweet liquid. Fool! The goblets vanished into thin air; and in my open mouth I tasted the necrophilic damp of a desert sepulcher.

During the next night I was very quiet. I lay upon my back, dumbly delirious. But I knew better than to dream of pomegranates. I filled the darkness with elaborate boards, overflowing with butter cakes, bowls of rice, dates, camel's meat, spices, rich red wine! Was I not shrewd? Even in the darkness did I drain goblet after goblet of Abyssinian wine.

In the morning I called upon Allah—for the first time! Then I repented, and blasphemed. Wallah! Wallah! Wallah! Even in the morning, in the gray cold, with slithery things crawling between my legs! I instinctively began to pity the woman on the bier. I crossed over, and looked at her. Ah, she had changed!

THERE is a fascination in ugliness. We long to cover it up, but it attracts us. How I longed to put a cloth over that face! And yet how morbidly fascinating that monstrous grimace that seemed to dissolve and change as I watched it! Never in life had her face possessed such an attraction.

But how satisfy a longing for pomegranates by studying a face? What a longing for food obsessed me! I began to dream of snaring the rats. If they would walk into a trap! What if I should lie down and remain very quiet? Perhaps the rats would venture out and run over me. During the night I had

several times felt tiny nostrils nuzzling my hand. And once something cold and loathsome had dashed across my face.

I lay down on the floor. It was a madness, for the chill was already in my bones. Already the gangrene had infected my armpits. I knew it too well, the dreadful, sickening pain. I knew also that my ears had turned black, that I should lose my ears. But a hunger fever was about me; I thought only of that. I was alone with my hunger.

I did not move; I did not breathe. Only above me I watched the light, the tiny white light that wavered and mocked. Fool! fool! fool! And there was the darkness and the stifling odors; horrible warm currents of air brushed across my face, and then something wet and slimy. My hand shot out and grasped it. It was soft and plump to the touch—a gigantic rat, a rare prize! What a fool a man is to barter an unfaithful wife! Yes, it was soft and I pressed it fiercely. I squeezed it as I would a pomegranate. I could feel it scratching, and struggling. The vermin! I held it very close, sought to squeeze the air out of its detestable body. Then it bit me. The wet blood trickled over my palm. I let the rat go and sat up.

Was it only in imagination that I carried my hand to my lips and sucked greedily upon it? I had no clear evidence that I had so acted. Only, why had I gladly released the rat; what thrill had seized upon me at the thought of the warm blood trickling over my hand? Fool! fool! fool! Above me the ceaseless iteration; it had become a part of my every thought.

During the day I devoured my headdress. It was not pleasant, of course, but I got it down somehow. It had a sweet starchy taste. It weaned me from my pomegranates—for a time. But there were other insatiate longings. I dreamed of camels. I saw long processions of camels; I stood in a desert place, a land of dead seasons that wander, and watched them come solemnly up over the rim of the desert and disappear in the burning sands. I stood with a hugo knife in my hand, and as each camel passed by I made a desperate lunge at his side with the knife. Great cuts would appear in the sides of the frightened animals, and I would put my lips to the lacerations and drink up gallon after gallon of fresh warm blood.

During the next night my longing reached its culmination. I might have known! From the very first his design had been that I should do what I was about to do. Have you the heart to blame me? My legs and arms were freezing. I could scarcely wriggle my fingers. Under my arms the pain was excruciating. My entire being cried out that I should do a vile thing to satisfy my craving for relief—for food, for pomegranates!

I approached the body. I drew back the cloth which covered it. I shrieked inwardly, but I was determined. There was no alternative. The damp and agony of the sarcophagus were in my blood; my soul was green and sick with noisome mildew. My soul was like the walls of the sepulcher—niter-encrusted and necrophilic.

But even as I bent there came a burst of merriment from above. The vault echoed with triumphant laughter, and the pin-point of light grew. Shafts of soft sunlight filtered through the darkness. In the center of the vault hung a rope! A rope!

"You did not mind? In my heart of hearts, I pitied you. But it was necessary to affirm, to act. Your offence was great, but under the stars, I pitied you! Is it not written: 'Thou shalt deal alone in women of sound heart?' But let en-

mity cease between us. Bind the rope about your waist. My wife you may leave: had you nibbled, I should have regretted—"

Quickly did I fasten the rope about me. And then up, up, up to sunlight—and pomegranates! My dear friend, never violate the Qoran.

To a Dreamer

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

I scan thy features, calm and white
Beneath the single taper's light;
Thy dark-fringed lids, behind whose screen
Are eyes that view not earth's demesne.

And as I look, I fain would know
The paths whereon thy dream-steps go;
The spectral realms that thou canst see
With eyes veiled from the world and me.

For I have likewise gazed in sleep
On things my mem'ry scarce can keep,
And from half-knowing long to spy
Again the scenes before thine eye.

I, too, have known the peaks of Thok;
The vales of Pnath, where dream-shapes flock;
The vaults of Zin—and well I trow
Why thou demand'st that taper's glow.

But what is this that subtly slips
Over thy face and bearded lips?
What fear distracts thy mind and heart,
That drops must from thy forehead start?

Old visions wake—thine op'ning eyes
Gleam black with clouds of other skies,
And as from some demoniac sight
I flee into the haunted night.

African Voodoo and Chicago Spirit Made a Hero Out of George Washington

The Great Panjandrum

By FRANCIS HARD

Author of "The Teakwood Shrine"

GEORGE WASHINGTON was feeling ill. George Washington had the rheumatiz. That was why he had not responded to his country's call with the alacrity that might have been expected from one with so valiant a name.

Martha Washington, his wife, gave him no sympathy in his misery.

"Why yo' all doan' amount to sumpin'?" she shrilled. "Why yo' all didn't go an' 'list in de ahmy an' come back f'nm France a hero, like Mandy Johnson's man, so's I could be prond ob yo'? I'se plumb tired ob seein' de same ol' face, day aftah day, day aftah day. Ah sho wishes yo' had gone an' 'listed."

"Ah was dead sot on dat hero stuff," George opined, "but you knows ah couldn't nevah have gotten in no ahmy wif mah rheumatiz. Ef hit warn't fo' de misery in mah back, ah sholy woulda been in France. Ah sholy would."

"Go long, yo' lazy good-fo'-nuffin' black trash! Yo' was jes' plumb scairt to death, dat's all. 'Coz ef yo' wasn't, yo'd frow back dem shoulders, an' all dat rheumatiz'd jes' dry np an' blow 'way."

"Huh!" snorted George Washington, scornfully. "Whah hit gwine go to, woman? Answer me dat! Ah nevah heared of seeh ig'orance. How you specs mah misery gwino leave me, w'en hit ain't got no place fo' to go?"

He curled his lips in infinite contempt for the feeble mental powers of his spouse. But Martha Washington was not so easily put down.

"Ah hain't got no time to listen to no fool argiments," she said with decision. "Yo' hain't got no mo' rheumatiz dan a fresh-laid aig. Now yo' jes' hurry along an' take dis bundle o' close to Missis Jackson's honse, an' come right back, 'coz ah'm gettin' out a big washin' an' ah gotta hab yo' heah to hep me. De good Lawd knows yo' hain't much hep, bein' all hunched ovah like a ol' man, but yon'se de on'y hep ah got, an' ah has to make de bes' ob it."

George Washington shouldered the bundle of laundry. An expression of pain flitted across his face.

"Whah mah misery gwine go to?" he repeated as he went out. "Jes' figgah dat out, an' mebbe yo' kin tell me wen ah gets back. Pouf!"

He walked up the street with his shoulders a little less hunched together than usual, for he had subdued Martha Washington with an unanswerable argument. He delivered the clean clothes to Mrs. Jackson, and started back, to help his wife with the washing.

But his mind was troubled. He had pitied Martha Washington for her feeble intellect. But was his own intellect any stronger than hers? His misery must go somewhere, if it left him. He knew of

cases where rheumatism had disappeared. Tandy Williams had lost his, for instance. Where had it gone?

George Washington's face became a puzzle, for he was unable to answer his own question, which he had propounded to Martha Washington with such finality. What if Martha should point to Tandy Williams aa an example?

The smoke hung heavily over Chicago, and the smell of the stock yards, two miles away, lay like a blanket over the South Side. The heat weighed oppressively on George Washington, and he turned aside into the little park on Cottage Grove avenue near Thirty-fifth street, to solve the problem of where rheumatism goes when it disappeara, before Martha Washington could vanquish him with his own argument.

The odor from the stock yarda did not greatly distress him, for, truth to tell, he was used to it. But the prospect of being thrashed in an argument by Martha Washington was gall and wormwood to his proud spirit, for he believed firmly in the superiority of the masculine brain, and regarded man as the natural lord of creation. He dropped down, dispirited, on one of the benches which a kindly park commission allowa to exist for the repose of wearied mortals, and proceeded to drink deep draughts of desperate thought. But the draughts were not cooling, for the day was hot, and his mind was not used to grappling with such tremendous problems.

Where, indeed, would his rheumatism go if it left him? Where *could* it go?

He lifted his eyes in distress. His gaze roved furtively over the little park, as if seeking an answer to his question. A passing Illinois Central train poured black smoke into his eyes, but this waa hardly a drop in the infinite ocean of his miaery. For he was about to be crushed by Martha Washington on the field of argument. It was too much.

Voices from the other bench (the park boasts of two) came to his ears. Having removed the cinders from his eye, he now removed hia thumb, and looked irritably at the two speakers. But hia irritation vanished immediately into thin air, and he forgot the cinders. There on the other bench, not fifteen feet away, was the man who could solve his problem for him, if anybody could. This was Dr. Elusha Jones, the most penetrating intellect (in George Washington'a opinion) that had ever graced the South Side.

George had listened to him, awestruck, in several debates, and become a hero worshiper in the presence of that master mind. Why, only two weeks ago he had heard the doctor annihilate his adversary in a public debate as to whether baptism were absolutely essential to salvation, or whether it were merely an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual change. Dr. Jones had proved conclusively that without haptism there can be no inner change, and therefore the act itself, the application of the water, is necessary to the saving of the soul.

Having had this auricular proof of the surpassing power of the doctor's mentality, George Washington did not doubt that it would be but play for the gentleman to solve his problem of the ultimate destination of rheumatism when it leaves its abode in the human body. He would state his problem to the doctor, and return in triumph to Martha Washington with the solution.

Feeling much happier, now that he was about to prove to Martha the superiority of masculine brains over feminine, he slid softly to the other end of the bench, to be nearer Dr. Jones and his companion, and pick up any stray pearls

of thought that might fall from their lips. His change of position was not noticed by the two men. They continued their discussion, and their voices rose by degrees from the subdued murmur which had first come to the ears of George Washington.

The men had looked with disfavor on George's intrusion, when he first entered the park, but they had lost interest as they saw him slouch down, a drooping flower, on the park bench. They had lowered their voices, momentarily, but the excitement that was mastering them soon found its way into their speech, and became audible to the listener on the other bench.

George suddenly sat bolt upright, for he thought he heard Dr. Jones mention the Great Panjandrum. Now the Great Panjandrum, as everyone knew, was the high priest of voodoo. But was this mighty being a real person? And was he a friend of Dr. Jones and his companion?

His pulse beat faster, and he edged closer to the other bench. But his heart went into his mouth at what he heard, and he left his bench and crawled on hands and knees, until he was directly behind the two men. His tongue was dry, and he swallowed with difficulty. His eyes were starting from their sockets. All thought of propounding his problem to Dr. Elusha Jones had left him, for the man seemed no longer a great intellect. He was, rather, a sinister being, sent to destroy the colored race. For he was planning an African republic in Chicago, which would surely bring the fires of the white man's vengeance upon every colored man and woman on the South Side. The whole city, perhaps the nation, would be involved in a race war more terrible than anything ever known in the United States before.

A street address dropped from Dr. Jones' lips. George Washington's ears drank it in, and he fastened his mind on it, for it was the home of the Great Panjandrum, the fanatic whose chief instrument for spreading sedition was this doctor of philosophy there before him, Elusha Jones. The Great Panjandrum, then, was a living being, and not a mere myth.

"And do not write it down," Dr. Jones was saying to his companion, "for it there should be any miscarriage of our plans, no one must know where to find the master. If not today, then his dream must be realized at another date. For we shall try, again and again, until the African race comes into its own, as our superior abilities entitle us to do."

George Washington, flat on his face behind the two speakers, felt a cold shiver run over him. Drops of cold sweat fell unheeded on the grass. A panic fear gnawed at his vitals.

"Everything is ready," continued the doctor of philosophy. "At 2 o'clock the uprising will start. But nothing must be done until the Great Panjandrum himself gives the signal. Everything depends on that."

GEORGE WASHINGTON rose stealthily to his knees, and crept, backwards, to the bench he had first occupied. Once seated there, he yawned lackadaisically, attracting the momentary attention of the two conspirators. Then he strolled nonchalantly out of the park. Once on the street, he turned north and ran with all his speed to the Cottage Grove Avenue police station.

A florid-faced desk sergeant, wearing with what dignity he could an aureole of flame-colored hair and a closely cropped mustache of the same color, stopped him in the midst of a breathless recital of the Great Panjandrum's plans.

Perspiring, panting from running, the excited negro breathlessly began again to stammer out fragmentary details of what he had heard about the uprising of blacks scheduled for that afternoon.

"Calm yerself, me boy," the arm of the law admonished him, emphasizing his words by pulling an imaginary trigger on the pencil stub which he held in his fat fingers. "Are yez gone clean crazy? Or is ut moonshine in ye that's talkin'? Slower, me lad. Now, phwat is ut ye want? Spake out."

"The Great Panjandrum!" George Washington blurted out.

Three or four coppers had strolled into the office. They listened with amused contempt to George Washington's recital.

"Phwat in the world are ye talkin' about?" continued the desk sergeant, implacably. "Has the Great Pan-what-ye-call-him shtolen anything from ye? Is he tryin" to murder ye? Hand us his name and we'll book him for ye, if ut's as serious as all that. Out with ut, mo boy. Phwat's bitin' ye? Who are ye, anyway?"

"Jawge Washin'ton," stammered the unhappy negro, and attempted to resume his narration.

The listeners broke into coarse laughter.

"My regards to your wife, Martha Washington, old top," said a tall, cadaverous copper, jocularly giving George a slap on the back that almost bowled him over.

"She's at home hangin' out the washin'," said George, meekly, interrupting his narrative again.

The outburst that greeted this reply wounded his pride. He felt aggrieved. He was trying to help the forces of law and order, but they were giving him the horse laugh.

"Silence!" roared the desk sergeant, glaring at the disorderly coppers with outraged dignity. "Where d'ye think ye are, at home?"

The hilarity subsided into baritone giggles.

"Where do ye live?" obstinately continued the desk sergeant, holding the pencil as if it were a pistol, and taking careful aim with it at George's breast.

"On Fo'tieth street, jes' off Cottage Grove avenue, your Honor," George replied.

The hilarity broke out afresh, with unprecedented violence, at the title George so innocently bestowed on the desk sergeant, and that dignitary shot glances of fierce anger at the recalcitrant policemen. If looks were daggers, the coppers would have died on the instant.

"Ab lives in de fo'th house f'um de corner, in de rear."

"Well, phwat do ye want? Why don't ye spake up? Who is this Great Panhandler, or what d'ye call him?"

"De Great Panjandrum," George corrected him. "He's a pusson, suh. Dey's a parade of soldyahs, suh, at 2 o'clock dis aftahnoon. Dey want a bonus or sumpin. An' dey's gwine be trouble."

"Trouble, is ut? Well, bejabers, them boys have a police permit to parade, and if anyone shtarts trouble—"

Here the sergeant took careful aim with his pencil, and again pulled the airy trigger, three times, as if shooting somebody.

"But phwat's all this got to do with the Great Panjabers? Out with ut, now. Phwat's wrong?"

"De Great Panjandrum done lib on Federal street," went on George Washington, desperately. "Two dohs no'th f'um Thirty-second, on de uppah story. An' he's gwine organize a cullud republic. Yes, sub, dat's jes' wot he's callatin'. fo' to do. An' hit means

trouble. 'Coz ef he succeeds, or ef he doan' succeed, hit's all de same. Fo' de wite folks will sholy put dat republic down in blood, lots of it, an' hit means dat hundreds of po' cullud folks an' po' wite folks dat ain't nevah hahm'd nobody in dair lives is gwine git murdered. Dat's jes' wot hit means. Yes, suh."

"Say, nigger," retorted the sergeant with heat, "how do ye get that way? You leave that moonshine alone. It's whisky that's shpakin' in ye. If your Great Panjoobers is such a punkins that he thinks he can set up a nigger republic, why don't you help him? You're a fine nigger, you are!"

The coppers laughed again. George Washington felt sick at heart. But he threw back his shoulders and looked the desk sergeant squarely between the eyes.

"Yes, suh," he said, "I'se cullud. I'se black. Ah ain't no mulatto, neithah. But I'se an American citizen, an' ah ain't gwine stan' fo' no fumadiddles. Ah doan' want to see no race riots in dis yeer town, but I'se tellin' you right now, dat ef you doan' go an' get de Great Panjandrum an' lock him up in a good safe jail dat he cain't git out of, dey's gwine be de worstes' an' bloodies' race riot dat you evah heared tell of. Yes, suh. Fo' de Great Panjandrum done been gwine give de signal at 2 dis aftahnoon, an' den de po' fools dat believes in him is gwine attack de parade an' staht de fightin'. Dey aims to set up a republic an' kill de wite people. Yes, suh."

"D'ye get that?" asked the desk sergeant sarcastically, talking to the coppers, and screwing his fiery eyebrows into a fierce scowl. Then, turning his attention to George Washington again: "Clear out o' this, now, with yer moonshine about the Great Pajamas, or I'll book ye fer bein' drunk. Why don't ye arrest him yerself, if ye can find him? The Great Pajamas! Ha, ha! That's good!"

"Dat's jes' wot ah'm fixin' fo' to do," retorted George Washington. "De good Lawd knows ah done tried mah bestes' to get you to stop dis race riot, an' now I'se got to stop it all by mahse'f."

He beat a hasty retreat from the station, and wandered along the streets, his mind working at fever heat. The officers of the law had refused to aid him, and his race was in terrible danger. There were three million people in Chicago. What could the less than half-million negroes of the South Side do against all those white men? It would mean a bloody war, in which he visioned the extermination of his race, the death of Martha Washington (he shuddered at the suggestion), and the end of everything.

TORMENTED with these thoughts, and with his own helplessness, he walked for what seemed a very long time, tracing and retracing his steps. Martha Washington and his argument with her were both forgotten. Forgotten, also, was his rheumatism. The only thing that mattered was to stop the impending trouble.

He looked at the clock in a barber shop as he passed, and started in terrified alarm. He had been wandering for hours. It was already a quarter past one. For a minute he thought of appealing to the mayor, but there was no time for that. The Great Panjandrum would give the signal at 2 o'clock, and the uprising would be on.

George looked about him, and found himself at the corner of Federal street and Thirty-third. He was only one block away from the fountain-head of the revolt.

Hardly daring to express in definite form the resolve that flashed across his mind, for fear he would reject it if he

saw it in its naked reality, he ran down the street, and stopped in front of the three-story frame building where dwelt the grand mogul of sedition. Up the stairs he went, three steps at a time, and burst into a small room where three colored men were engaged in excited conference, with their heads close together, speaking in agitated whispers. They leaped to their feet as George Washington rushed in.

The three men were robed in white garments, cowled like monks, with the hoods thrown back, revealing their heads. One was fat, and squinted at the intruder through puffy folds of flesh around his dull black eyes. The other two men were lean and malign. Their robes were spotted with dabs of fresh blood, and red crosses had been drawn in blood over the men's hearts.

George Washington shuddered as he confronted the sinister trio.

"I has a message fo' de Great Panjandrum," he panted. "Wich is him?"

The taller of the two lean men looked at him skeptically.

"The Great Panjandrum cannot be seen," he said. "From whom is the message?"

"F'um Doctah Elusha Jones, suh," replied George Washington.

The name proved a talisman, an "open sesame" to the inner temple of voodoo. The desperate colored man felt that sinister rites must be going on behind the heavy black curtain that covered one side of the room. This curtain was now drawn back by unseen hands, revealing a small door, covered with weird and horrible symbols. A painted green serpent writhed malevolently across the paneling, crushing in its folds a white infant, and menaced by a charging black ram with short, sharp horns. George experienced acute nausea. A sensation of cold fear attacked the pit of his stomach, for he realized that he was about to stand in the presence of the high priest of voodoo.

The door swung slowly back. In George's disordered fancy the painted snake moved, drawing its folds tighter about the form of the child, and the black ram seemed to shake its sharp horns. The tall, lean man who had questioned him now shoved him forward, and the door swung shut behind him.

For a minute George could make out nothing, for a brilliant electric arc light dazzled his eyes. Then he saw, standing before him, a coal-black negro, scarcely more than five feet tall, wizened, and apparently very old. Fuzzy tufts of gray hair showed behind his ears. His face was carved by a thousand wrinkles. His thin hands, ending in carefully polished nails, clutched nervously at a tract that he had been reading when George Washington entered the chamber. He was loosely garbed in a white robe, dabbled in fresh blood, like the garments of his aids in the outer room. A tall stove-pipe hat sat on his thin temples.

The room was hung with heavy black curtains, which shut out all light from outside. It was illuminated solely by the arc light that had dazzled George when he first came into the room. On the table was a bowl filled with blood from a small black goat, freshly killed. The animal's carcass lay alongside on the table, and its heart was floating in the bowl. The table, like the walls, was shrouded in black cloth.

The cunning eyes of the wizened negro looked searchingly into the face of the intruder, as if seeking to read his errand there.

"Is you de Great Panjandrum?" asked George, struggling for words, and frightened nearly to death.

"I am he," replied the other.

"Says wich?"

"I am he. What do yon want? Be quick, fool; I can't talk to you all day."

"Oh, mistah, Doctah Jones done sen' dis message by me, dat hit ain't no use fo' to staht dat dere revolooshion nohow. Hit ain't got no chance fo' to succeed, an' you is jes gwine frow awsy de lives of de cullud people. Yes, suh."

The high priest's face took on a terrible expression.

"This to me?" he roared. "This from Elusha Jones? He dares dictate to me?"

"Yes, suh. I mean, no, suh."

"We will proceed without him. It is time to strike, and at once."

The Great Panjandrum began to divest himself of the blood-streaked robe of his voodoo priesthood, revealing a neat business suit underneath.

"No, suh, hit ain't Doctah Jones. Hit's me, an' hit's de othah cullud folks dat will be kilt in dis yeer foolish revolt! No, suh, you cain't mean you is gwine staht to fire on de soldyahs dat's ont paradin' fo' to get a bonns f'um Congress. Cain't you see, beggin' youah pahdon, suh, bnt cain't you see dat hit ain't no nse? Dat dey ain't no chanst fo' hit to succeed? No, suh. Dey ain't no chanst. An' you ain't gwine move f'um dis yeer room, till you promises me dat dey ain't gwine he no revolooshion. 'Coz nohody ain't gwine staht nuffin' 'less you gives 'em de signal."

The Great Panjandrum raised his voice in a sharp command. The door swung open, and the three men from the outer room entered.

"Bind him and gag him and drop him into the hole," the high priest ordered, abruptly.

The robed figures moved forward to obey, bnt George Washington, in an agony of desperation, clnng to the robe of the leader in a last entreaty.

"No, suh. Ah ain't gwine leave you till you promises. Hit cain't do no good, suh, to de cullud folks. Hit cain't do no good nohow."

The three men leaped upon bim, but he clung with the grip of despair to the Great Panjandrum. The tahle crashed over on its side. The howl upset, and drenched George in the hlood of the black goat. His shabby felt hat fell to the floor, and was kicked to one side in the scuffle.

The fat man turned his attention to a hidden push-hutton under the carpet, waiting for the other two to pry George loose from the Great Panjandrum. But the four men rolled and scuffled and kicked and bit, and the fat man could not press the button withont dropping all four of them into the hlack hole that yawned heneath the carpet. The flying legs of one of the men strnck the fat man on the hack of the head. With a howl of pain, he involuntarily pressed the hutton. Tho floor opened. George, whose right hand had been pried loose, clutched frantically at the leg of the fat man, and pulled him down. All five fell throngh the floor, and the bowl rolled after them, together with the remains of the black goat. The trap-door closed above them.

HARDLY bad the Great Panjandrum and his men fallen into the dark hole with their prisoner, when a shuffling of feet was heard overhead. Several men bnrst into the room. The votaries of voodoo clapped their hands over George Washington's mouth, to silence him. They listened intently.

The men, who had entered tbe room with drawn revolvers, were a detail of police, sent to arrest the Great Panjandrum, after a later warning than George's had wakened them to a sense of the peril confronting the Sonth Side.

Dr. Jones and his companion were already in custody, and several others had admitted their part in the scheduled uprising. But the head-spring of the movement was gone, for the room of the Great Panjandrum was empty. The carpet, perfectly synchronizing with the edges of the trap-door, concealed the tell-tale crevice that would otherwise have led the police to find the high priest and his captive in the dark hole directly beneath their feet.

George heard their exclamations of disappointment, as they caught sight of the overturned table, and other evidences of a struggle. One of the coppers picked up George's blood-stained hat.

"Don't this belong to that nigger who came to the station this morning, the one who told us where the Great Panjandrum could be found?" he asked.

The coppers passed the hat from hand to hand. It was drenched in the goat's blood that had poured on it from the overturned bowl. The carpet was dabbled in blood. Evidently the struggle had been desperate.

"Poor devil," said one of the coppers. "He's dead enough now, I guess. The damn fool must have tried to capture the Grand Panjabrum all by himself! He had nerve, anyway, that bird had."

George swelled with pride. Not visibly, for it was very dark in the hole; but he swelled nevertheless. Why, he was a hero! Or at least he would be if he got out of this scrape alive. He tore at the hands of his captors, who held him fast by the mouth, effectually gagging him. He tried to scream out, to tell the coppers that he was there, just under their feet. But the tall, lean man pressed his thumb tight against the unhappy captive's windpipe, and shut off his breath. George struggled hard for a minute, and then lost consciousness.

How long afterwards he awoke from his swoon he did not know, but it seemed to him that a long time had elapsed, for his dreams had been long and troubled. He was still in the black hole, and a hand was held tightly over his mouth. But there was no longer a pressure on his windpipe. The men with him—the Great Panjandrum and his aids—were as silent as death. Not a whisper passed between them. Even their breathing was inaudible.

George opened his eyes. All was as dark as the pit. He heard a slight noise over his head, as if someone were rolling pebbles over the floor. Voices made themselves audible to him, and he distinctly heard a man cursing. The noise of pebbles stopped, then began again.

"Little Phoebe!" said a voice. "Come to papa!"

"A dollar he comes," said another voice.

"A dollar he doesn't."

By the voices George knew there were three men in the room above. They were coppers who had been left behind to seize the Great Panjandrum if he should return. George knew well enough what their conversation signified, for rolling the spotted cubes was one of his proudest accomplishments. He had lost more money that way than he had ever spent on all the other necessities of life put together. He had even been forced to put in many extra hours soliciting washing for Martha, to get the wherewithal to fling the flying dominoes.

The sound of the rolling dice recalled him to a sense of life and the pleasures thereof. He could not die like a rat in a trap, when liberty, life, joy, were flaunting themselves just a few feet above his head.

Wrenching himself free for an instant, he screamed for help. Instantly the struggle was renewed in the black hole, but the coppers had heard his cry. They

tore up the carpet, and the hidden push-button was revealed. Standing back from the trap, they pushed the button, and the door fell back. One of the coppers held it from springing into place again by inserting the dice in the springs, and another flashed his pocket light into the dark hole.

Resistance was futile, and the Great Panjandrum and his aids surrendered. One by one they gave their hands to the coppers, and were pulled out of the hole and handcuffed. George was last. He stood upon his two feet, a hero, and told his story, which he had to repeat later at the police station.

BUT IN the meantime there was wailing and weeping at Martha Washington's. She had received the news of George Washington's death with the grief that was becoming and proper to a faithful and loving wife. First she buried her face in a pillow-slip that she had just ironed, and drenched it with tears, making a further ironing necessary. Then she took the blood-stained hat from the policeman who had brought it, and wept over it, and called upon heaven to witness that she had always loved this wonderful hero husband of hers with a love that surpassed all understanding.

The news of his death had spread rapidly, together with the story of his incredible heroism in attempting to take the Great Panjandrum single-handed, after the police had refused to help him. One report had it that he had slain the Great Panjandrum in mortal combat, and was thereupon foully done to death from behind by a craven disciple of voodoo, and dragged away and his body thrown down a well. But all accounts agreed that he had been a hero. And the blood-stained hat, still red from the life-fluid of the black goat, was mute witness that he had been murdered.

"Oh, mah man, mah man!" moaned Martha. "He was a hero, mah man was! An' naow he done lef' me! He won't nevah come back to me, nevah no mo'! An' all his life he was so kind, an' we nevah ain't had one cross word pass between us all our lives. An' naow he's dead! Ain't it awful?"

Her grief was sincere. There could be no doubt of that, although some of her neighbors thought she was overdoing it just a little.

"Wy, you Martha, doan' tell so many lies, ef you wants to git to heb'n wen you dies," Mandy Williams reproached her. "Jawge warn't no hero, else he'd a gone in de ahmy. An' you was *always* quarrelin', you two. Lan' sakes, ah nevah knowed two sech people fo' callin' each othah names as Jawge Washin'ton an' you."

"Mandy, yo' quit talkin' dat way! I'se enjoyin' mah misery, an' beah yo' comes an' tries to spoil it all!"

BUT George Washington was far from dead. He walked homeward with a sprightly step, after he left the police station, for the world was his. He had vanquished the Great Panjandrum, and now and henceforth forever he would be a hero. What would Martha Washington say now?

She was almost alone when he burst in upon her grief. She looked up through scared eyes, and blinked. The woman with her, who had come to console her and gather the latest news, shrank away.

"Watsa mattah?" asked George. "Wy you-all lookin' dat way? You-all sho' does look skeered o' sumpin. Watsa mattah, Martha?"

"Jawge Washin'ton! Yo' hain't no ghost? Yo'se all heah in de flesh? An' yo' hain't ben murdered! Praise be!"

This was something like what he hsd expected. George's chest swelled higher, with pride. But there was something else on Martha's mind. Her eyes were as big ss saucers. She was looking at his manly shoulders, and the devil-may-care toss of his head.

"Jswge Washin'ton!" she scolded him. "Whah yo' ben all day? An' whah yo' rheumatiz done gone? Haow come yo' frows yo' shouldshs hack lak dat, wen yo' hain't ncvah hen good fo' nuffin' wid de rheumatiz?"

George was stunned.

"W-wy, Martha," he stammered. "Ah guess sh done fergot about de misery in mah back. Leastwise hit ain't hotherin' me none now. But Msrtha, sin't you kinds glad to see me back again? Ain't yon prond of me, Martha?"

"Well," said Martha, relenting, "mehbe ah is. Mebbe ah is proud ob yo'. But yo' hurry up naow"—her voice rose querulously—"an' get dem close offn de line, 'coz ah got a big ironin' sn' ah got to git it done. Git a move on, niggah; yo' heahs me?"

George Washington ohediently shouldered the basket and went out into the bsck yard. Martha Wsshington's high-pitched voice followed him. But there was a happy glesm in his dark eyes as he took down the clothes and threw them into the basket. For at last, after all these years, Martha Wsshington was proud of him.

The HOUSE of DUST

A Mystery Serial by L·A·BORAH

CHAPTER ONE

LAMONT HOUSE

AS FAR as Davis Junction, the journey was irksome beyond words. Doctor Kirk Hayward leaned back against the moth-eaten, maroon upholstery of the car seat and sought vainly for a comfortable posture. The top of the seat-back tortured him constantly, smiting the lower edges of his shoulder blades when the jolting of the car became extreme. The shallowness of the seat and the length of his legs combined to bang his knees against the seat in front of him at frequent, ill-advised intervals.

Three hours of this he had endured —three hours!—three hours with nothing to look at but the dull southern landscape of a gray October afternoon, seen through a coach window so mottled with soot and grime as to lend a sullen tone to the whole scene which crawled toward him.

For the last hour he had been alone in the coach. Twice he had dozed, only to be awakened by the chugging of the one-lung locomotive up ahead, or the slamming of a door when the conductor made his trips from coach to coach at fifteen-minute intervals in search of a chance passenger who might have eluded him on his former rounds. Twice rain splattered against the panes and made snaky rivulets through the grime, twisting the scene into grotesque forms that interested the traveler mildly. But the rain did not materialize beyond a sprinkle.

Towns crept up at more or less regular intervals. The combination freight and passenger train halted interminably at various dun-colored depots, exchanged packages and jerkline gossip with local reception committees, gave Hayward a glimpse of mules and mud and mulattoes, cotton bales or turpentine vats or a tobacco-spitting cracker; then the journey was resumed.

Then came Davis Junction. Hayward became aware of increased activity about this station at the crossing of the L. & N. There were shouts and bustle and the rattle of trucks, but no other passengers entered the soot-grimed car in which he sat. The bustling ceased eventually, and he could hear the strident tones of the station hands shouting gibes back and forth with the trainmen. He idly cursed the delay, the weather, the roadbed, and the business that had necessitated this roundabout way to Crawford, the thriving little Louisiana town where he had spent his early years and where he had started his practise two years before.

From somewhere up the line came the croak of a whistle, and the reason for the delay became evident as the long line of coaches of an incoming train slowed to a stop on the track beyond the station.

Hayward descried the girl before she was halfway across the platform. From out the little group about the station door she walked quickly toward his train. He sat up at sight of her. What there was about her

that attracted him, he could not hsve told in that inatant glimpse; but, unimpressionable as he had prided himself, he became aware of an inexplicable feeling of satisfaction in her very nearness, despite the fact that he had never acen her before.

Slender, and a trifle under average height, she was a wisp of a girl with an alertness and grace of carriage that seemed fairly to radiate health and vivacity. A smart little hat, tilted almost rakishly above crisp tendrils of brown hair, enhanced the piquancy of a face almost elf-like in its roguish appeal. She wore a trim suit of some dark material of which Hayward fully approved, although he could have identified neither its color nor its texture. He watched her eagerly aa she approached, and breathed a prayer of acknowledgment to the god of good fortune when she appeared in the door of his coach.

He understood her little gasp of dismay at sight of the uncomfortable seats. As she entered the car and walked uncertainly down the aisle in an attempt to discover a place not littered with orange and banana peels or peanut shells, Hayward was ao fascinated by the soft contour of her cheeks, touched as they were with the slight depression that held promise of a dimple when she amiled, that he waa unaware he waa staring almost rudely, until he aaw the tinge of color heighten under her clear olive complexion and her chin jerk up in alight hauteur as she hurried past him.

In some confusion he turned quickly to the window again, and, snatching up tho magazine that he had so impatiently cast aside a tedious hour before, he read assiduously for some forty-odd times the first sentence of an article the substance of which he had digested twenty minutes after the heginning of his journey.

Three times, in the hour that followed, he stole a surreptitious glance back toward the occupant of the rear of the coach. Once, flattering himself that he caught the hint of a smile, he essayed a timid response; but he sank back in his seat, disconaolate, when the slate-gray eyes became unseeing and the perky little chin awept up to an angle entirely discouraging.

He read again that profound first aentence in the medical journal, then, with a snort of disgust, he flung the offending periodical from him and turned for relief to the landscape. A slight sound, like a giggle, emanated from the region behind him. He did not risk an exploring glance, but stared aghast as he realized that the train waa dragging its tortuous way along the shore of Pine Lake to the outskirts of Crawford.

He scrambled to his feet. Locking the recalcitrant medical journal in his bag, slapping his hat upon his ruffled hair, and anatching up his top-coat, he turned for a brazen look at the girl before he should leave her. She was not even heeding him, but was staring wistfully down the gray, sullen length of the lake, at the far end of which loomed, through the dusk, the shapeless mass of Lamont House, an abandoned mansion popularly reputed to be inhabited by ghosts. He shrugged his shoulders and headed for the car platform, arriving just as the brakeman flung wide the door, and bawled some version of "Crawford" into his very face.

The train atopped for water a hundred feet short of the station platform, and Kirk atarted down the car steps preparatory to dropping off at the tank to make a short cut to the livery stable where he had left his car a few days before. The flagman atopped him with a question as to the progress of a fellow-trainman for whom Hayward had been caring, so that half of the dozen moments at the water tank were gone before Kirk prepared to step off. He was entirely ignorant of two firm little feet upon the car platform behind him until a

sudden jerk of the train shot one of them into his back and flung their owner upon his unoffending shoulders.

By good luck he maintained his own balance, and succeeded in preventing the girl from catapulting out upon the graveled roadbed. As the train stopped at the station, he righted himself and turned to her.

"I—I beg your pardon," she gasped, trying vainly for composure, and making a brave effort to squeeze back the tears. She was seated upon the top step, slightly disarrayed by her fall, and clutching a slim ankle in one white gloved hand.

"Glad I was able to save you from something more serious," Kirk replied. "Are you hurt?"

The girl flushed slightly.

"No, thank you—I—my ankle—."

From the platform below, the flagman ventured to interrupt the colloquy.

"Say," he bawled, "I can't hold this train all day. Take her into the station and look her over, Doc."

"You'll hold the train until we get off," Kirk snapped, "or there'll be somebody else holding down your job. Take the lady's bag."

He turned to the girl again.

"Can you walk as far as the waiting room?"

"Surely."

By dint of leaning on Kirk's arm she made the distance, the humbled person wearing brass buttons and a flagman's cap following behind with Kirk's yellow case and the girl's black bag. Once ensconced in a chair, she smiled up at Kirk. The latter slipped a greenback to the flagman, and devoted himself to the injured ankle.

"My name is Hayward, Kirk Hayward," he began. "Perhaps you gathered, from what that half-baked specimen said, that I am a physician. Won't you let me see how badly you have twisted that ankle?"

"It did hurt at first, but it is much better," she assured him. "Thank you just the same. You've been very kind. My brother was to have met me, but apparently he isn't here."

"Your brother?"

"Yes. I—I'm Elise Lamont, and my brother, Jarrell—"

Kirk interrupted excitedly.

"—was the chap I fought most when I was a kid."

The gray eyes suddenly filled with light.

"Then you know him?"

Kirk laughed.

"I used to know him. Jarrell left this town long before I did. He couldn't have been more than eight at the time. I'm just his age—twenty-eight. He hasn't been back since, so far as I know. Did I understand you to say that he was to meet you?"

"Yes."

A troubled look came into her eyes.

"You see Jarrell has been married lately, only last summer in fact; and it was his idea to spend a portion of his honeymoon down at the old house at Pine Lake—our old home, you know."

Hayward made reservation mentally that Lamont House was the last place in the world in which to stage a honeymoon, but he refrained from saying anything, remembering in the nick of time that the haunted reputation which the house had been accorded had grown out of the fact that this girl's father had been discovered mysteriously murdered there some twenty years ago. He substituted a more conventional query.

"And you were to be one of the party?"

She laughed a little.

"Yes. Rather unusual, isn't it? But I have never seen Caroline, my new sister-in-law, and Jarrell thought that it would be nice for us to get together here at the old place. I've not been back since—well, it's over twenty years. It really seems quite a lark to me."

She forced another little laugh, which caused Kirk to suspect that the "lark" was not so pleasantly anticipated as she would have him believe. But he pried no further, supposing it to be merely the natural hesitancy occasioned by meeting the new sister.

"If he's newly married, I'm not surprised that Jarrell isn't here to meet you," he gibed. "Better let me drive you out in my car; you can't walk far with that ankle."

"It really doesn't hurt at all," she protested. "I couldn't think of putting you to that trouble. I can get a cab—or a taxi."

"A taxi? In this town?" Kirk laughed. "You might get Jake Corbin's old mule and buckboard, but you'd be shaken to pieces before you had covered half that distance. I'll have the car here in a jiffy."

"But Jarrell—"

"Jarrell is probably seated in one of the cozy nooks of Lamont House trying to tell his newly espoused just how beautiful her new sister—"

"Oh!"

The girl drew herself up.

"Pardon me, but I couldn't help it. I am as contrite as can be, but I refuse to take it back. What I really started to say was that Jarrell was probably engrossed in preparations for the home-coming. The old place must be in rather bad shape. Twenty years of disuse doesn't make any house exactly homelike. How long has Jarrell been here? I left day before yesterday, and I hadn't heard of him then."

FIVE minutes later they were whirling along the dusty road toward Pine Lake and Lamont House. The sprinkles of rain had pockmarked the road but had not been sufficient to lay the dust. The low-hanging clouds, however, held promise of a wet night, and the stillness and the darkness and the nearness of the sky gave their world an ominousness that Elise found difficult to cast aside. There was an unwonted gloom, a yellow, ghastly lambency of the western sky, a strange sense of impending catastrophe, an unshakable oppression in the very atmosphere, and lest she feel it too strongly, she resorted to conversation with the nervous stage driver.

As they rounded the foot of the lake, a glance over the long dark strip of water gave no hint of the house that lay at the opposite end. The huddled pines along the shores showed inky against the yellow-gray of the west. Hayward was disheartened. Was it possible that Elise was going to meet with further disappointment? Had plans miscarried so as to delay the arrival of Jarrell Lamont and leave the girl alone in the ghost-ridden old mansion? Something of the same thought must have flashed into the girl's mind, for she started to speak, then checked herself as a gleam of light showed star-like in the midst of the pine grove a mile and half away. She clapped her hands.

"Oh, they are there," she cried. "I knew they would be. Hurry, please hurry, Dr. Hayward. I know Jarrell will be worried. He probably sent some man, and the fellow missed us. Do hurry, please."

And Hayward hurried. That sudden gleam, steady, motionless, framed in those silhouetted pines at the far end of the lake had made him exultant too. The car leaped forward. Over the outlet bridge he roared, out in one long, grand shoot along the southern shore, the road stretching like a creamy ribbon through the dusk before them, behind them a swirl of dust.

Past Pine Tree House, the chief hostelry of the little resort colony, they flashed and turned into the last half-mile lap which should bring them to Lamont House. The road was shrouded with pines now, and Hayward switched on the lights. To all appearances they were the only living,

moving things in the universe, they and the car thrusting on into the night as if seeking to escape the deadening forces that seemed to encumber the very air.

Kirk depressed his brakes sharply as the headlights picked up the twin stone pillars that flanked the gateway to the Lamont estate. Elise touched his arm.

"Let me out here, Dr. Hayward. Now that we know that they are here, I'm all right. I'll walk from here to the house."

Kirk shook his head, and headed for the gateway.

"Not if I have my way," he said.

"Please, Dr. Hayward."

And at the note in her voice, Hayward stepped on his brakes again, and turned to remonstrate with her. She interrupted his attempt,

"There's no use to reason with me, Doctor, and I am really running no risk. We both saw the light, snd look there—"

She pointed to the roadway in front of the machine.

"Some one has been here; see the wheel tracks. You mustn't come any farther, Doctor; give me my bag and I'll skip up the roadway and around the bend, and walk in on them when they least expect it. I wouldn't cheat myself of the fun of surprising them for anything. Please."

Kirk debated for a moment.

"But why not drive in?" he queried.

She laughed tinklingly.

"Drive in? With this juggernaut? Dr. Hayward, your car is a beauty, but I really think that if they were listening, they must have heard us every foot of the wsy from the station. No, you creep back ss quietly as you can, and I'll stalk the newlyweds. I can't thank you enough for bringing me."

Kirk clambered out over the wheel.

"At lesst I shall escort you on foot," he decided, and helped her from the car.

Taking her bag from its resting place, he led the way into the grounds, Elise at his side.

The branches of the pines overlapped above the winding roadway. There wss no sound of wind through the foliage. There was no breath stirring, only a sullen atmosphere pregnant with moisture. The only sound was the slither of their footsteps as they went down the sand driveway. When they spoke, it was softly, as if to preserve the very stillness.

Out of the dark, the blackness of the house itself suddenly loomed before them, huge, ungainly, with its mansard roof showing dimly against the grayness of the sky. From some window farther down, a shaft of light pierced the blackness like a dim spotlight. Elise pointed to the shaft in vindication.

"There," she said laughingly, "I told you I would have been all right. You must go back now."

She turned her back upon the house and held out her hand to him.

"I hope to see you some other time. Perhaps by then I shall have thought up some good wsy to thank you for what you have done."

She stood facing him, silhouetted against the fsint nimbus of light from the window. He held out a heavy electric torch which he had brought from the car.

"I've got to have some excuse for seeing you again," he said, "so I'll leave this with you, and come for it in the morning. You may need it in negotiating those steps."

He took the hand she held out to him, and shook it stiffly in a sort of mock formality to cover a sudden indefinable confusion.

"Good night," he said, "until tomorrow."

He turned sharply and went down the roadway. She stared after him for a moment, seeing nothing against the blackness, hearing the crisp sound of his footsteps upon the sand. The sound died out as he turned the bend. She faced about, and started for the steps, only to bring herself up short with a sharp exclamation.

The light from the window had disappeared.

CHAPTER TWO

DUST

TO BE snatched suddenly from a moment more or less sublime in the contemplation of a personable young man disappearing into the murk of a stormy night, and to be flung face to face with the fact that one is alone in a pine grove under the shadow of a mountainous house from which comes no sign of life is no slight shock.

Elise Lamont gasped and gaped at the place where the flood of light had been a moment before. Blackness was there—impenetrable, limitless, spirit-laden! She shuddered as the horror of her plight forced itself upon her. Then, summoning courage, she shook her fear aside and clicked the switch of the torch that Hayward had thrust into her hand.

The beam of white light shot through the darkness so suddenly that it startled the girl, keyed as she was to the pitch of tense nerves. The circle of illumination focused upon the warped steps that led to the main doorway. She raised the torch, and the door itself sprang into the glare. Far from feeling fright at the cone of light and its gyrations, Elise now came to feel in it a sort of companionship, a sense of protection. She began to reason more calmly, and even risked a little laugh at the terror that had squeezed her heart at the first realization that the light from the window was gone.

The explanation was simple, after all. Jarrell or Caroline or Weems, the butler, had simply removed the lamp from one room to another, or perhaps had drawn the shade or closed the shutters. What was the matter with her? Was the eery spirit of the place forcing itself upon her already? Perhaps it was the night itself which caused all this silly hysteria. She stooped, picked up her black bag and walked briskly up the steps.

The circle of light shrank to a brilliant disk a foot in diameter throwing into rusty relief the huge latch of the paneled door. Elise pressed the lever under the door handle. There was no movement. She pressed harder. There was the creak of metal on metal: she could feel the catch release, and she tugged at the door. It would not yield. Bringing the torch close to the crack between the door and the casing, she could detect a dull metal bolt. The door was locked.

Exasperated, she turned down the roofless veranda, trying the shutters of the windows as she passed. The determination to surprise Jarrell and Caroline had reasserted itself, and she was resolved to get in without their knowledge. She rounded a corner and came upon a pair of French windows. The shutters, which masked all the other windows of the house so far as she could determine, were in this case thrown back, and her torch-light glinted upon the long panels of glass. She touched the little latch, and the tall window swung inward, releasing a gust of stale air.

She stood in the opening and shot the gleam of her torch this way and that about the great room before her. At sight of its condition, she shrank back aghast. It had once been her father's library, and its furniture and books were where he had left them twenty years before. Yet they were not the same. The furniture was all in place, even to a pair of candlesticks

that graced the mantel. The old hangings still covered the windows; the long bookcases still towered to the ceiling. But dust shrouded everything—gray dust, thick fluffy dust, thin silky dust—dust of every conceivable texture and shade of gray! There was nothing but dust everywhere! She shuddered at its ghastly, deadly grayness under the cold eye of the torch.

The whine of the wind through the pines came to her ears, and a moment later the swirl of a gust blew shut the French window behind her. Then the heavens burst and let down a delnge. Rain splashed in dashing sheets against the window through which she had just entered. She breathed a sigh of relief at the thought of the soaking that would have been hers had she hesitated ten seconds more about entering. But her sigh ended in a gasp of dismay as she realized that Kirk Hayward was driving an open car through this flood—and all because of her, or rather because of Jarrell's neglecting to meet the train. Bnt that dust—!

She crossed to the table and drew a finger along its top. The sensation was that of rumpling soft velvet, and a shallow furrow followed her finger, disclosing the dull sheen of aged mahogany beneath. She swept the light about the room again, letting it flit from piece to piece of the once luxurious furnishings. She was heartsick at the thought of such beautiful things hidden for a score of years simply because local superstition had made of the old house a place of awesome fear. How silly people were—especially Louisiana people!

Not twenty minutes later she was to recall that thought and remark how silly it had been. She moved toward a door, which apparently led to a main hallway, and through which she hoped to find some communication with the rest of the house—that part which Jarrell had had renovated for his honeymoon. She could hear the rain roaring its flood npon the house and slashing through the pines, and she thanked the stars that guided her destiny that she had a roof over her head. She swept her torch toward that roof. The ceiling was festooned with cobwebs. She shnddered, for she had a maddening fear of anything like a spider or a spider's web. B-r-r-r-r! She conld stand the dust, perhaps, but those dangling webs—! She vaguely imagined that she heard the scnttling of spiders in the tarry corners of the high ceiling.

She hurried out into the hall. Here again was that terribly silent, deadening dust. She tried to disregard it, for it struck a chill to her heart to contemplate it. One phrase forced itself into her thought, strive to evade it though she did. It was a part of the funeral service: "Dust to dust, ashes to ashes—" Dust and death! She fled from room to room of the lower floor, seeking some way of entrance to that part of the house where this dust would have been removed, where there were lights and cheery rooms and the joy of cheery companionship, but she could find no such exit from this sarcophagus of dead days.

One thing did come to her out of the cone of white light which stretched before her wherever she went. Here and there she came upon details in the old rooms which stirred dormant memories, so that she seemed to be moving through chambers with which she was fully familiar. Her mind, flashing ahead of her as she moved swiftly from room to room, anticipated the exact location of fixed pieces of fnrniture before she so much as entered the room in which they were located.

Thinking that communication might be established along the second floor level, she started upstairs. Inadvertently she stretched out her hand to lay hold of the stair rail, but she

checked herself at thought of laying her hand upon that downy gray surface, so much had she come to hate the dust. She paused for a moment, and allowed the beam of the torch to sweep up the steep incline. She stared, almost fascinated by the uncanny smoothness of that six-inch rail, stretching up and away with all the unwrinkled velutinosity of a satin ribbon.

B-r-r-r-r! She shivered at the thought of how near she had come to touching that thing; and she hurried up the stairs to the floor above.

Two-thirds of the way up, a narrow casement was set into the wall, and as she passed the window, Elise was startled by a flash of lightning that set the sky aflame with a lurid glow and revealed the branches of the pines tossing in a wild carousal of swirling silhouette. The instantaneous exposure was photographed upon her very brain. She could hear the drive of the storm without, and, between gusts, the sound of water gurgling down the eaves and drain pipes punctuated the ceriness of the night. She hastened up the remainder of the flight.

ON THE upper floor again she found nothing but dust—dust—dust. The main corridor upstairs proved a cul-de-sac, ending in a blind wall that must have formed one side of the huge chimney from the fireplace below stairs. She opened six of the seven doors that opened upon this hallway, however, and found a dust-laden room behind each. Beds were in orderly condition, toilet articles even on the dressing tables; but everything was buried beneath that even blanket of grayness.

The seventh room was locked—bolted, and the bolt was rusted shut. Dim memory recalled it as her father's den, and a connoted thought dragged in a hint once received that it was in that room, behind that door, that her father's mutilated body had been found twenty years before.

Stifling whatever sense of loathing or of latent horror she might have felt, she thought to venture an entrance into the chamber. But on the instant that her hand was about to rest upon the porcelain surface of the doorknob, she noted that that surface was free of dust. She recalled distinctly that such had not been the case with the handles of the other doors. She seized the knob firmly, and turned it, but the door did not budge.

For a brief moment she stood pondering the problem of why that particular door, of all on that floor, should be locked. She felt a sudden fascinated desire to know what lay behind those oaken panels. Then from beyond the bolted door there came a sound that drove her heart up against her palate. It was the sound of something falling—something small—something hard—something metallic, perhaps—but the unmistakable sound of a falling body striking upon a bare floor.

Before she had time to attempt an explanation, her coward feet carried her more courageous self back to the staircase and started the descent. Down the long staircase she came, swiftly, with an occasional quick glance into the dark behind her, picking her steps carefully, seeking to avoid contact with the wall on one side and the dust-covered rail on the other.

Suddenly she stopped, her throat gone dry, her spine prickling. Somewhere, in the rooms below her, she had heard a sound. It was nothing pronounced—something akin to the screech of a loose floor board, or the complaint of a rusty hinge closing under a careful hand. Unmistakable, uncanny, untraceable though it was, she was as certain she had heard it as she was that it was storming outside.

The thought of the storm offered a very plausible explanation, and her pulse resumed its regularity. It had been the screech of a hinge right enough, she concluded, the screech of a shutter swinging in the wind. She came on down the stairs, more swiftly now, impelled by an emotion scarcely akin to fear, yet smacking of the terror that accompanies real courage.

As she approached the foot of the staircase, the beam of her torch swung to the right and focused upon a detail that made her eyes almost leap from their sockets. On the velvet surface of that dust-laden rail was the imprint of a human hand, and below it a smear where a garment had touched and brushed the gray coating aside!

In the few moments during which she had been above stairs, some one—she had almost said some *thing*—had stood on this very stair, had apparently started to ascend the staircase, but had turned back. Instant with the realization came action. She snapped off the glare of her torch, and scuttled for the French window by which she had entered.

Midway across the library, she stopped suddenly, and turning, raced back to the foot of the staircase, flashing her torch as she did so. She had forgotten her bag, which she had placed beside the newel post before exploring the upper floor.

But when she reached the foot of the staircase, the bag was nowhere in sight. She scanned the hallway eagerly, fearful, filled with a dread uncertainty. There was no sign of the bag. Her heart pounding like a steam riveter, she tried to think back over what she had done during the last half hour, and the more she thought the less certain she was as to the exact moment in her travels when she had set down her bag. She decided to make a hasty search of the rooms again, for to go out in this deluge would mean a soaking, and dry clothes would be indispensable. So from room to room she sped again. But she found no sign of the bag and her search ended again at the foot of the staircase.

Suddenly an explanation of the disappearance of the bag and the other untoward events of the evening flashed upon her, and the explanation seemed so absurdly simple that it drew forth a little involuntary laugh that echoed horribly about the high corners of the rooms. Some one from the other part of the house had entered this part and had found her bag; then, thinking that she had gone out into the storm again to seek another entrance, had taken the bag back into that other region. The theory fitted the other happenings exactly—the sound of the hinge, the finger prints on the banister. It might have been Weems or Jarrell himself. Those smears in the dust—she would have another look at them.

Half afraid, half ridiculing her fear, she ascended the four or five steps necessary to obtain a sight of that clawlike imprint on the stair rail.

The ray of white light swung to the rail, focused—then swept the whole length in a tremble of fear.

An instant later the torch struck the floor with a clatter, and the girl leaped wide, struck in a heap, scrambled to her feet, and fled blindly across the dusty library. She crashed heedlessly into furniture, blundered against the French doors, and stumbled wild-eyed out into the downpour of rain.

CHAPTER THREE

THE TRANSIENT TRACE

HAYWARD, wet and uncomfortable, stood with his back to the sputtering grate fire in the living room of the Pine Tree Inn, his hands nervously clasping and unclasping behind him, as he answered with heedless monosyllables the thousand ques-

tions of innkeeper Tab Shepard and Tab's wife, Esmerelda.

The storm had caught Kirk before he had driven a quarter-mile from the Lamont Place, and he had forced the car to the shelter of the little hotel. Now, as he went over with ever-increasing uneasiness the events of the evening, the conviction was forced upon him that he should never have left the girl alone on that gloomy approach to the house.

Vague, disquieting fancies troubled him. What if her brother had not yet arrived? What if she had been unable to arouse any one by knocking at the heavy door? What if the half-light that had shone throngh the dust-csked window had been that of some guttering candle lit by a gang of tramps? He knew those ruffians often spent the night in a deserted mansion. He felt that he was a miserable fool. He would go back to mske sure that everything wss all right.

With an exclamation of impatience, he snatched np his sodden coat and hat, and started for the door, not heeding Esmerelda's querulous: "Laws, honey, you cain't be thinkin' of goin' out agin' sech a night as this?" Then a thought deterred him. If he should go splashing back throngh the tempest to that old house only to find Elise pleasantly comfortable at her brother's hearth, he would very likely be well laughed at for his psins. He recalled her fearlessness and her delight at the prospect of surprising the newlyweds, and he conld picture with jnst how mocking a toss of her head she would greet his blundering return.

"No," he assured his hostess, "I think I'll stay." And he forced himself to return to the fire and the monotonous dronc of country gossip in which he had not the slightest interest.

For the fourth time Esmerelda had regaled him with the narrative of how she had saved her sister-in-law's youngest when it had been "took with the croup", and Hayward, in his turn, had returned reluctantly from the mental contemplation of a pair of slate-gray eyes laughing from under the brim of a perky little hat to assure her that her methods were in the highest degree scientific, when there came a startling interruption to the medical dissertation.

From out of the night came the sound of rushing steps across the porch, a hysterical pounding upon the door. Before any one could start from the fireside to answer the summons, the door crashed open. A gust of wind and rain thrust Elise Lamont before it into the room.

Tab sprang to shut the banging door and exclude a second deluge. Esmerelda and Hayward leaped to where the limp form of the girl lay in a sodden, huddled heap on the floor.

Kirk, the more agile, more vitally concerned, got there first, and gathered the slim form into his arms, snapping out crisp orders as he did so, until (as Esmerelda afterwards expressed it), "he must hev thought I had a dozen pairs of hands and as many eyes."

"Some brandy, quickly, Mrs. Shepard," he said as they laid Elise upon the horsehair couch to the left of the fireplace. Esmerelda produced a flask, and Kirk forced a little of the liquor between the lips of the unconscious girl. Then he set Esmerelda to chafing her wrists, while he and Tab piled more wood on the fire.

"She's comin' to, Doc," shrilled Esmerelda suddenly, and Hayward whirled from the blaze to the draggled form on the cot. Elise was a pitiful figure as she lay there under the glare of the kerosene bracket lamp above the mantel. Pale she was, and waxen of skin, and that iridescent black hair at which he had marveled that afternoon clnng in damp strands about her face. Her chic little hat was gone, and the oozy

Louisiana mud had splashed to her knees. She could not have been wetter had she plunged into Pine Lake itself, and the wet garments clung like molds to the soft curves of her delicate figure.

Hayward knelt beside her, his fingers groping automatically for her pulse, his eyes fixed upon her face, watching for the flicker of the eyelids which Esmerelda had noted. The pulse throbbed tantalizingly, alarmingly slow. The lids remained drooped over the eyes, their lashes falling far down upon the white cheeks. For what seemed an hour this condition prevailed; then the curtains lifted, and the slate-gray eyes, popping from their sockets at sight of the faces bending over her, stared wildly. Twice her lips sought to form words, but the sound refused to come.

"You're all right, Miss Lamont," soothed Kirk. "Nothing can harm you now. You are at Pine Tree Inn, that little place we passed on our way out this afternoon, you know."

But the eyes continued to rove from one to the other of the faces above her. Esmerelda slipped away, to reappear a moment later. She bent over the girl tenderly.

"There, there, honey," she crooned. "There ain't nothin' goin' to scare ye no more. Take a sip o' this. Don't shrink back. It's nothin' but hot tea."

The blue lips opened a little, and Esmerelda poured a few swallows between them. A moment later Elise Lamont sat up on the edge of the couch. Kirk forced her down again, gently. She clutched frantically at the edge of his sleeve, and began to gasp out hysterical phrases of fear.

"It was there, I tell you," she gasped. "When I went upstairs the rail was smooth and silky, and when I came down again those marks—those horrible marks were there."

She began to cry as if some one had contradicted her and had hurt her feelings. Kirk dipped a handkerchief in the dipper of water Esmerelda had brought, and bathed the girl's temples.

"Of course they were there, Miss Lamont," he agreed. "But if you can give me a few more details—"

"Let me sit up, please," Elise interrupted, and suited the action to the words. "I am better now, thank you."

She essayed a feeble smile at Hayward.

"I am very glad to find you here! I—I hadn't quite hoped for that—I—don't know what I did hope for. I simply—ran and ran and ran from that terrible place."

Tears threatened again, but she choked them back.

"I'll not cry any more, I promise you."

"Certainly not," Hayword forced a laugh. "Now just what bogie man did you see?"

The girl shuddered and buried her face in her hands before replying.

"That's what I don't know," she said at length. "It's not what I saw, but what I didn't see."

"What, you didn't—?" Kirk stopped short, amazed. "Perhaps if you began at the beginning, Miss Lamont—"

"I'll try," she smiled. "I don't know how clear I can make myself. You didn't see those marks, you know, and I—I did."

"Go on," urged Kirk, seating himself beside her on the couch.

Emerelda sat on the other side, and took the girl's soft hand between her gnarled ones by way of assurance. Tab had retrieved his pipe, which he had cast aside at the whirlwind entrance, and stood before the fireplace in the attitude of a small boy listening to a ghost story.

Elise began to unroll the narrative of the evening's events since Kirk

had left her; the entrance into the old library, the dust, the search of the lower floor, the ascent of the staircase, and the detail of the unmarred rail. At the story of her exploration of upper rooms, Tab's pipe fell from his relaxed jaws and crashed unheeded into a hundred pieces upon the tiling.

"My Gawd," he gasped, "and the room in which Cass Lamont died is on that floor, young woman."

But Elise did not heed his comment. She told how she had descended the stairs, and had discovered the clawlike marks on the velvety rail. Even Kirk's spine prickled at this, and Esmerelda's eyes bulged.

Then came the climax. Elise was transported beyond the confines of Pine Tree Inn, back into the dust-laden atmosphere of the Lamont House, and the fear in her voice, as she told that her bag was gone, crept into her three hearers. Staring straight ahead, she plunged into the return to the staircase and the resolution to view again those finger prints on the rail.

"I went up the steps," she concluded, her voice sunk to a gasping whisper, "and turned your torch, Doctor, upon that rail. Before Heaven, what I say is true. From foot to head, that six-inch strip of wood was covered with as even a layer of dust as when I first saw it that evening. The marks I had seen ten minutes before were gone, and in their place was that accursed dust."

There was a death pause, while Tab stroked a walrus mustache with a nervous thumb and forefinger, his face gone pasty, his lips murmuring strange, weird things of "hants" and spirits he had always known to infest the mansion at the end of the lake. But no one heeded him. Kirk's mind was set whirling in an attempt to grasp what this might mean. While his belief in spirits was vague, he did hold that disembodied souls had some active place in the world's activities; but he was not ready to accredit this phenomenon of the disappearing finger prints to ghostly visitants. Some thing, or some one, had been in that house during the girl's stay. That some one had been most desirous that his presence remain unsuspected, and he had overstepped himself in the attempt to cover up his tracks. Who was the some one?

Hayward put an entirely different query to Elise.

"What did you do then?" he asked, as calmly as possible.

"Do? I don't know what I did. I remember dropping your torch and running out into the storm—and then I awoke here. I must have run all the way."

Kirk turned to the bug-eyed Esmerelda.

"Get this girl to bed," he ordered sharply, his tone almost strident with tension. "Give her something hot to drink, and this."

He drew a bromide powder from his pocket case.

"See that she sleeps till morning, undisturbed."

He stepped quickly to the chair before the fire, and snatched up his steaming coat and hat.

"Doc—"

"But what—"

"Where are you going?"

Tab, Esmerelda and Elise cried out simultaneously.

Kirk turned at the door and noted that the girl had risen and was staring after him. He forestalled further query on the instant.

"I am going to Lamont House to lay that ghost. There is nothing to worry about. I have an automatic pistol in my bag in the car. I'll see you tomorrow. Good night."

The door swung shut behind him and he raced for his car around the corner.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SEVENTH ROOM

THE STORM was at its height. Rain was coming down in gusty sheets, and the road, disclosed at intervals by terrifying flashes of lightning, gleamed whitely awash.

But Hayward would not be stopped by the tempest. He sprang into his car and sent it lurching, skidding, toward the Lamont Place. Once, rounding a sharp turn where the road cut close to the steep bank of the lake, he nearly went over into the water; but his breath-taking escape only made him drive the faster. In less than five minutes from the time he left Pine Tree Inn, he passed under the black arch of the Lamont gate.

The lightning gave him a glimpse of a dark clump of shrubbery to his left, and into this he drove through the long grass of the unkept lawn, and stopped the car where it would be effectually concealed by the dense foliage. Then he procured his automatic pistol and a heavy wrench from the tool pocket in the machine, and picked his way cautiously toward the house.

Not a light showed in the grim bulk. It gloomed there among its pines and cypresses as if the black mystery of twenty years of disrepute had engulfed it. There was no weird sound about the place, no ghostly moan such as is usually associated with haunted buildings. Only the wind in the dripping branches, the slatting of the driving rain against the ancient walls, the complaint of a leaking eaves trough, or the intermittent banging of a decrepit window blind, broke the stillness.

Hayward made a complete circuit of the building, stumbling blindly through the long, dark grass, tripping over roots, rotting logs and tough creepers that seemed actually to clutch at his feet with sinister purpose, and once falling headlong into the empty basin of a broken fountain. He found nothing suspicious excepting one cellar window, which, unlike the others, yawned blackly open, affording an easy means of entrance to the basement. This he should have liked to explore, but he had no light and he finally decided against going in through the scuttle. Cursing his oversight in not bringing a torch, he felt his way around to the veranda.

The heavy door was bolted, just as the girl had found it earlier in the evening, and he did not spend any time trying to force it open. Instead he slipped quietly along the wall to the French window, which was swinging wide, and stepped noiselessly into the room beyond.

A dark staleness, like that of a long-sealed crypt, offended his nostrils. The air was dead and heavy. The oppressive quality of the close, musty atmosphere seemed fairly to assume an entity that was to the last degree uncanny.

As he moved forward, his sleeve brushed against some hanging or tapestry, and a cloud of dust fumed into his face, half choking him. Startled, he paused for a heartbeat; then he crept slowly out into the hall and to the foot of the stairs.

There his foot struck against a heap of trash; something rolled clattering along the floor; and a bright gleam of light flashed so suddenly into his face that he almost cried out.

Recovering himself quickly, he stooped and picked up the electric torch which Elise had dropped in her mad flight. It had fallen into a heap of dust and rubbish in such a way as to bury its light. His foot had dislodged the covering.

As he flashed the light about the dust-laden hall, the full import of the girl's story came upon him. Everywhere was dust—velvet, soft, clinging. It lay deep in the corners and

in the crevices. It clung to every curtain, every wall-hanging. It hung heavily on the long festoons of matted cobwebs that half hid the age-old rafters of the ceiling. On the queer-shaped, old-fashioned window-panes it made grotesque figures.

Hayward let the glow of his torch pass around the room, to fall finally upon the long rail of the stair and follow its smooth length from bottom to top. There was absolutely no mark, no finger print to blemish the velvet surface. The rail was evenly coated with what seemed the gray accumulation of twenty years. Surely Elise must have been mistaken about the hand print on the banister.

On the steps the dust was not so smoothly distributed. Here and there a spot of polished wood showed fairly clean. This condition Kirk was puzzled to explain, until in stooping the better to examine one of the clear spots, he became aware of a faint draft of cold air. To be sure, the wind through some broken window or warped door-jamb had moved the gray film. But then the dust coat on the rail was unbroken, and the moving air was foul, not in the least like a breath from outdoors. What could it mean?

Continuing the inspection of the steps, he found unmistakable marks of a woman's shoes; and a wave of tenderness touched his heart at the sight. A vivid picture came to his mind of Elise, fighting bravely against her terror, ascending into the black region of the second story.

At the thought instinctively he flashed his torch toward the hall above. Was it some figment of imagination conjured out of the eeriness of the place and the recollection of Elise's story? Or was it reality? It almost appeared to him that a shape flitted across the range of his vision, weirdly indistinct in the dancing shadows.

With a bound he was up the flight of steps, and he flashed his light into every nook of the upper hall. Not a thing was there but dust—dust and silence, and dread.

He did not understand the cause, but he felt strangely tense, nervous, breathless. There was a sickening emptiness at the pit of his stomach. With a shrug he forced a laugh in an attempt to fling off the feeling. The sound of his own voice rang unnaturally loud and shrill through the corridor. For the first time he realized just how still it was in the house. A death-like quiet hung over everything like a muffling pall. From the wild storm without, not a whisper struck his ear. He could hear the labored sound of his own breathing, the quickened beating of his own heart.

With a contemptuous snort at his weakness, he went back to the lower floor, determined to examine every room with the utmost care. At first he made a good deal of unnecessary noise by way of defiance to the qualms to which he had almost succumbed a moment before. But the mystery and the shadows gradually got on his nerves, and he was soon creeping about as quietly as possible, straining his ears for the faintest sound.

In one room, which had evidently been finished as a dining room, he received a turn that set his heart thumping wildly. Just as he had finished his survey of the walls and floor and had started for the door, something rustled stealthily across the region behind him. Whirling like a flash, he leapt for the sound—and upset an ancient china closet. The clatter of breaking crockery echoed through the entire house with a frightful din that brought Hayward's heart into his mouth. He swung his light quickly about the room again. In a corner it struck

for a fleeting instant upon the form of an ordinary rat.

Disgust overwhelmed the young man. He kicked the fallen cabinet savagely and stalked hack to the staircase. Here he paused in hlank astonishment, staring. At the foot of the steps, on the very apot where he had heen a few minutes before, stood a small hlack traveling bag!

WHAT was the matter with him? Had he lost his senses? He advaneed to the hag and looked it over. On a tag that was attached to the handle he read the name, Elise Lamont. There was absolutely nothing in the hall to indieate that the bag had not heen there all the time. Two small footprints ahowed where Elise had stood. A larger mark he identified as his own track. He was convinced at last that the girl had simply been the victim of the occult silenee, the ereepy dust, and her own imagination. Nothing inexplicable had happened to her.

Having satisfied himself that all was right below stairs, he climhed slowly again to the second floor. Just at the head of the stairs a window showed momentarily lurid in a flash of lightning, and he saw limned against the space the tossing branches of a cypress tree. To say the least, the place was oppressive. He did not wonder that a girl, even so hrave a girl as Elise, had been frighteued hy the situation.

Passing down the long corridor that ran the full length of the house and gave on each side into what proved to be sleeping rooms, he came to a hlank wall. There was nothing strauge here. The last room to the left, the one which Elise had said was locked, ereaked open when he pulled strongly at the knob. He explored the room carefully. It had evidently heen fitted up as a den, for odd-looking cnrios hung on the walls or littered the fnrniture. A fireplace on the aide toward the hlank end of the hall indicated that the great stone chimney was huilt there.

Hayward turned around and started hack for the stairway. He was assuring himself that he had laid the ghost, when a crash just outside the hall window startled him. He sprang forward to investigate and was almoat blinded hy a glare of lightning that illuminated the entire corridor. Perhaps it was only an illusion, hut he imagined that he caught a fleeting glimpse of a human ahape between himself and the window.

His courage rushed back at the challenge of a real peril, and he turned his light full toward the stair head. Nothing stirred, hut he fancied that he could hear a sort of gasp as of lahored, stertorous breathing.

Stooping, he examined the floor heneath the window. Not a thing appeared at first, and he was ahout to give up the search as nseless, when hy the merest chance his vision caught the faint half print of a naked foot!

He stared at the imprint, almost unhelieving the evidence of his aenses. This was no hoax. Some strange thing was in that house!

With a rush he went from room to room, upstairs and down, hut finally returned to the vicinity of the tell-tale track. Thinking to examine it more closely, he hent over it again. He started hack with a gasp.

The footprint was gone! Dust, smooth, velvety, unmarred, covered the surface of the floor as far as he could aee!

He sat down on the top step and tried to collect his scattered thoughts. Of one thing he was now certain. He could gain nothing by running at random about the house in pursnit of shifting sounds. He might as well keep his position at the stair head and watch for the thing that had heen responsihle for the weird happenings.

As he sat there, it seemed to him that a faint, peculiar fragrance hung in the air. He sniffed suspiciously, but could gain no definite olfactory image. It was a nameless sort of sweetness that was ineffably delicious. After a time he became intolerably drowsy. The scent in the air was like a soporific. His eyelids drooped. He started up and fought against the sleepiness. Then the strange odor became oppressive, overpowering. He felt that he was afloat on great billowing waves of languorous fragrance. A deep slumber engulfed him.

Wild dreams danced before him. He seemed to be lost in a black, febrile swamp, where hideous reptiles moved writhing through the clutching ooze of quicksands. A slimy, horrid thing slid over his hand. Then the dream faded. Oblivion overtook him.

How long he slept he had no means of telling. Perhaps it was minutes, perhaps hours. He awoke with a start to panic confusion, realizing at first neither where he was nor what had aroused him. The moonlight, streaming through the mottled window panes, shone so brightly into his face as almost to blind him. He groped to a sitting posture. Then suddenly he was shocked into full, alert consciousness.

A blood-chilling scream sounded twice from the region down the hall —a scream which ended in a horrible, bubbling gurgle!

Hayward leaped to his feet and back against the wall just in time. Even as he moved, a pencil of greenish light flashed across the lower end of the corridor; and a knife whirred past his head and struck quivering, glittering into the window casing. There was the crash of a closing door and the light was gone.

He jerked his revolver from his pocket and fired at the point where the light had appeared. Then he dashed down the hall toward the blank wall.

He was in total darkness now. His torch had burned out. He came back to the stairs, revolver in hand, and began again to try in order the doors along the corridor.

Everything was just as it had been before he slept, until he came to the door of the seventh room, the room of the fireplace. That was locked. He could not even shake it. He fumbled for a match, found one, and struck a light.

The flame disclosed a heavy bolt, shot and rusted tight as if it had not been loosened for years. What did it mean? In his excitement he dropped the match, and then bent to pick it up.

As he stooped, his eye came to the level of the lock; and he sprang back with a lurch. A faint glimmer of light showed through the keyhole.

Kneeling, he peered through the opening. The room was dimly revealed, half illuminated by the ghastly glow of a green shaded lamp. At a table opposite the door sat a man, his head tilted grotesquely back. It was several moments before Hayward discovered that the man was dead—dead from a welling gash across the throat, so deep that it had all but severed the head from the body—dead recently enough that the blood was still flowing!

Hayward snatched the wrench from his coat pocket and beat frantically at the door fastening. The great bolt would not move. He began hammering at the panels of the door. He soon made an opening in the rotten wood, large enough to admit his body. Through this he plunged into the room, stumbled, and fell against the body of the murdered man.

As he recovered himself, he glanced up at the wall opposite the door and saw the reflection of his own white face staring at him from a full-length mirror, a streak of

blood from the dead man across his forehead. The effect was ghastly. He half turned away.

At that instant an unbelievable thing happened. Beside his own mirrored image for a second appeared another. It was the face of Elise Lamont!

CHAPTER FIVE

THROUGH THE SPLINTERED DOOR

WITH a sobbing cry of terror, Elise Lamont sat bolt upright in bed, her wide-open eyes staring unseeingly about the moonlit room. She was in the clutch of a horrible dream. In fancy, she was back in the dreadful darkness of that house of creeping dust at the threshold of the seventh room, the room of the bolted door. She had lifted her hand to try the lock, when without warning the dream door had swung open before her. The heart-chilling horror of the vision that had been revealed to her had caused the scream. There on the floor, his ghastly face upturned to the green light of an old student lamp that stood on the table, she seemed to see her brother Jarrell. She sprang to him and lifted his head. Something warm and sticky covered her hands. The back of the head had been crushed in.

The sound of her own voice broke the spell of the nightmare, and she awoke. She was trembling all over. A cold sweat drenched her. So real had been the vision, that even awake she could not throw off the terror it had inspired. An unshakable conviction possessed her mind that something horrible had really happened to Jarrell.

She got up, and going to the window, gazed intently across the whitely gleaming forest toward the huge, squat shape that was Lamont House. At first she saw nothing unusual. Then suddenly a light flared in an upstairs window. One thought and one only came to her. Jarrell was really lying in that house, the victim of foul play. That hideous dream had been telepathic, a warning of some fearful calamity.

Forgetting herself, her horror of the place, the peril of the undertaking, everything except that her brother was in dire need of her, she snatched her clothing from the chair upon which Esmerelda had placed it, flung open the window, climbed out upon the hotel balcony, and without an instant's hesitation started for Lamont House.

Keeping to the grass along the roadside to avoid the retarding mud, she covered the distance quickly. In fifteen minutes she stepped softly upon the dark veranda of the old mansion, crept along the wall to the open French window, and entered the library. There was not a ray of light to guide her, for the moonlight did not strike the windows on this side of the house. She felt her way to the staircase by sheer instinct.

On the steps she paused for a moment. A memory of that disappearing handprint squeezed her heart. But the warning of the awful dream of Jarrell drove even that fear from her mind. Heedless of the lurking terrors of the black shadows, she climbed to the head of the stairs. She became aware, as she neared the top, of a sickeningly sweet odor that was almost overpowering; but it drew her on as if by some inexplicable attraction. She halted for a few seconds, striving to identify the strange fragrance; but she could gain no definite concept, though the scent was vaguely familiar.

Through the hall window the moon shone palely, lending a ghostly half light to objects on the landing. She shrank back into the shadows on the steps, hesitating to cross the patch of light. Then it was that her eye caught the glint of something metallic against the dark wood of the window

casing. Fascinated, yet dreading to touch the thing, she crept toward it, reached it. It was a great sheath knife, stained darkly near the hilt, but clean and bright along the blade. It was imbedded deeply in the casement. She jerked the weapon free with an effort and stood dazedly staring at it. Where could it have come from?

A slight noise from the further end of the corridor caught her attention and caused her to whirl about. A ghastly green light like that of the nightmare shone dimly across the hall from the broken door of the seventh room. Breathless with dread, yet drawn on by a power beyond her own will, the girl crept toward the strange radiance. At last, with a desperate courage, she sprang directly into the doorway.

An almost unbelievable scene lay beyond the shattered panels of the door. At the table beneath the green light of an antique student lamp sat an old man, his head thrown back grotesquely, a gaping cut across his throat. And over him, turned half away from the door, one bloody hand raised as if to strike, a streak of blood across his white face, stood Kirk Hayward!

With a piercing scream, the girl flung the knife clattering upon the floor and fled. Along the hall, down the stairs, out upon the veranda and on into the road she ran, blind with terror and screaming insanely.

Behind her she heard some one spring in pursuit, and the knowledge only sent her forward the faster. Once in the road, she turned and sped madly toward the inn. Whoever it was that had started after her must have given up the chase, for she reached the inn yard without further mishap. Sobbing, breathless, trembling so that she could hardly stand, she staggered around to the open window and dragged herself back into her chamber. With her last strength she closed and locked the heavy shutters, slipped out of her clothing and crept into bed.

There she lay shivering for an hour, her excited mind a prey to a thousand heart-stopping thoughts. Who was the murdered man? Had Hayward killed him? If so, why? What had caused her dream of Jarrell? Whence had come the knife? Was the vision of Jarrell a premonition of reality?

It seemed to her that the dawn would never come. In the midst of these wild conjectures, utterly beaten down to a state of nervous collapse, she fell asleep. She dreamed that the man in the chair had tried to kill Jarrell and that Hayward had struck him down to save her brother.

AT SIGHT of the apparition in the mirror, Hayward fell back against the table, shocked for the moment beyond the power to move. He had caught only a fleeting glimpse of the reflection, but that glimpse had been enough for him to identify Elise—Elise, deathly pale, her face distorted, her hand clutching a knife.

Chill horror fairly dazed him. He stood there staring at the mirror like one in a trance. Only his own pallid, blood-smeared image gave back his look. Almost he believed that he was out of his senses, that the vision had been some illusion of delirium.

It was the loud clatter of the girl's feet on the bare staircase that struck through his lethargy and roused him at last to action. He wheeled and sprang through the door in hot pursuit. But he was too late. Even as his feet struck the top step of the flight, the lock of the French windows downstairs told him that the intruder had got clear of the house, and for a few seconds he heard her screaming as she fled into the night.

He plunged down to the lower hall and out into the yard. His eyes searched in every direction for a fleeing figure. The moonlight slept on the rain-wet pines. There was not

even the flutter of a disturbed night bird to break the blank stillness.

Mystified beyond measure, Hayward made a thorough search of the entire grounds. He even explored the road for a quarter mile in the direction of the inn. All his efforts came to naught. He could find not even a trace of a presence other than his own. At last, after a half hour of this futile beating about, he gave up the search and returned to the house.

As he went, he turned over in his mind the strange developments. What could have brought Elise back through the night to that place of grim horror? He had left her safe at the inn under the watchful care of Esmerelda and Tab. She hsd appeared utterly exhausted, prostrated by terror. Had she been only simulating this condition? His memory of her colorless, horror-stricken face absolutely precluded this conclusion. There could be no shadow of doubt that she had been really frightened almost out of her senses, that she had been completely exhausted by her wild race through the storm. Then what could have happened to drive her back again to the old house? Some resistless urgency must have been responsible for this almost incredible act.

The picture that he had seen in the mirror flashed again before his imagination. The distorted face, the bloody knife—could Elise have been the slayer of that man in the chair? The thought was too horrible to entertain for a moment. Yet there was the sinister evidence of that reflection. With a shrug he flung aside the suspicion and went across the veranda to the open window.

It seemed to him as he entered the library that he heard the heavy "pad, pad" of muffled steps somewhere above stairs. He paused to listen with strained attention, but the sound was not repeated. Slowly, pausing at each step with ears alert for the slightest disturbance, he mounted the stairs and crept back along the corridor toward that mysterious seventh room.

The door was as he had left it, a faint nimbus of light shining through the splintered panels a little way out into the hall. Dreading to look again upon that grinning cadaver, he slipped inside the opening.

The room was deathly quiet, and almost dark. The old lamp had burned so low that even objects close to it were indistinct in the shadows. He looked first at the full length mirror glimmering dimly in the half light. Then his gaze shifted slowly, as if drawn by some dreadful fascination, to the chair by the table.

For fully a minute, he stood staring, his eyes starting, his face white with a deathlike pallor. Then he sprang forward in a frenzy.

The dead man was gone!

He went all around the room, frantically upsetting the furniture, and searching every remotest corner. Not only was the body gone, but every blood stain, every trace of the crime was obliterated. A gray film of dust lay over every inch of the room.

Bewildered, doubting his own sanity, Hayward came to a stop by the table and brushed a hand across his eyes as if to tear away the curtain of delusion. No trace suggested that that room had been occupied in years. He must have dreamed the horrors of a half hour ago. Yet there was the splintered door, a silent witness of his adventure.

A rustling noise from the direction of the hearth caught his attention. Whirling, he seized the smoky student lamp from the table and stooped quickly under the mantel into the dark cave of the fireplace. Nothing was there but the grotesquely dancing shadows cast by his own body. He moved back to where the floor of the grate ended, and thrust his light down into the chimney. Could it be that a shape moved at the bot-

tom of that black well? He flung himself face down on the floor and reached with the lamp as far into the shaft as he could; but to no avail. With a last feeble sputter, the light went out.

A full realization of his helplessness came over Hayward as the blank darkness closed over him. In his present predicament it was worse than useless for him to continue his investigation. He must go back to town for a torch, for help perhaps. Not a thing could be gained by staying here. He felt his way out of the fireplace, across the room, and into the corridor, thence downstairs and out into the night.

His car was standing just as he had left it in the clump of bushes. He climbed in, drove carefully from the grounds and turned toward home. At ghost-breaking he had proved a fizzle.

As he entered the outskirts of Crawford, a question occurred to him. Should he notify the authorities of the murder at Lamont House? It was the only logical thing to do; yet he hesitated, a picture of the inept, bewhiskered village constabulary coming before his mind.

Then another argument presented itself. To bring outsiders into the affair might be to incriminate Elise. He remembered only too clearly the startling reflection in the mirror. Such evidence, in the opinion of the stupid officers, would be enough to warrant the girl's arrest.

He decided to work out the case alone.

CHAPTER SIX

WHAT THE MOON SHOWED BILL

THREE o'clock in the morning! Pine Lake Road, drowned in puddles and indescribably muddy, alternately gleamed and gloomed as the waning moon now emerged from the rack of flying clouds, now hid itself in lowering blackness. The chill wind that had accompanied the break in the storm moaned and sobbed in the black branches of the pines. Now and then, a ruffled owl whooed disconsolately, or a bat, disturbed by the rattling gale, hurtled across the darkness. Once a wolf shrilled a weird minor to the moon. There was something uncanny in the very air.

So at least thought Bill Joy, returning along this lonely track from "setting up" with Katie Barnes, his Pine Township sweetheart. As he urged old Dock, his "paw's gentlest buggy hawse," ever faster along the ghostly trail that led through the tossing wood around the edge of Pine Lake, and past the old Lamont Place, his thoughts turned shudderingly to the tales of haunts, voodoos, and other horrors with which this whole neighborhood was supposed to be infested.

He glanced furtively, fearfully at the yawning shadows along the road. The goose-flesh roughened on his fat body. At every unusual night noise, his fluttering heart leapt and sank sickeningly. The entire length of his short spine prickled as with a thousand nettles. Never had old Dock been so belabored since the days when Bill's "paw" had come home over the same road from "sparking" Mary Ann Timmons.

Old Dock resented urgency. Having reached the age of discretion, he was jealous of his rights; so he merely shook a disparaging tail at the speed demon in the democrat buggy behind him, and plodded along at the same old gait. On and on they went along that interminable streak of blackness and red Louisiana mud, old Dock stolid, Bill gasping and trembling with the fear of the unknown.

About a half mile north of Lamont Place, the road emerged from the forest and ran for a space along a winding ridge. Here Bill breathed a little more regularly, until the moon, bursting suddenly from a murk of clouds, disclosed the awesome bulk of

Lamont House, looming grotesquely among the black trees above the high bank of Pine Lake.

This fleeting illumination, unexpected as it was, almost unnerved Bill. His short arms trembled, and with difficulty he swallowed a cry of terror. It is quite probable that he should never have summoned courage to pass the Lamont Place, had not old Dock gratuitously decided to quicken his pace almost to a gallop, and to drag his unwilling driver lurchingly after him.

Down from the ridge plunged the ancient steed, down through the gruesome shades of a phosphor-glowing swamp; then up the pine-roofed tunnel that wound between Lamont House and the fearful high bank of the lake. And Bill perforce must cling desperately to his seat, almost pushing on the reins in his eagerness to be past the place of horror.

After what seemed to Bill an endless time, old Dock dragged the mud-splashed vehicle to a point directly opposite the dreadful house and just at the verge of the high bank. And there, of all places, he decided to balk!

First with wrath and blows, then almost with tears, Bill besought the old horse to go on. But Dock had made up his mind to tarry there on that spot for a rest. What could he understand of the qualms of the young swain brought up on spooky stories of hants and hobgoblins?

Shivering, Bill climbed down from his sodden chariot. Fervently he cursed the impulse of mad vanity that had induced him to venture forth last night despite the menacing sky, to come before the coy Katie in the glory of his new mail-order outfit. What though a man delight ten Katies with brown derby hat, only a little too small; green and gray and brown and red checked suit; patent leather oxford slippers, and a wonderful vest and tie? What if a man—or a boy (Bill reflected self-pityingly upon his tender years)—knock 'em all dead at the dance over to the school house? Better that he were at home in his bed, unhonored and unadorned, than stalled here in a world of eery terror, wet to the skin, and fearful for his very life. Afraid even to glance toward the old house, he kept on the side of the buggy next the lake, while he fumbled with Dock's harness in trembling eagerness to get the procession started again.

At last the old horse showed signs of returning locomotion, and Bill started back to the democrat to climb to the seat again. He put one foot upon the buggy step and was in the act of swinging up to his place, when there came from the dreadful blackness almost into his face the horrid screech of a hoot owl—a screech that sent Dock galloping up the road as fast as his rickety legs would take him and sent Bill staggering.

With a quavering squawk, Bill turned and started to run, in blind terror, straight toward the edge of the precipitous lake bank! A providential root laid hold on one flying foot and flung him as flat as he could lie upon the rotundity of his abdomen.

He lay for a moment on the ground, kicking, clawing, and groaning with pain and terror. The moon, which had been obscured since the beginning of Dock's rush down the ridge, shone forth again with the ghastly light that heralded approaching dawn. Its radiance illuminated the lake and struck a shaft on the chubby figure of the prostrate Bill. He had fallen so close to the bank that his head protruded from the edge!

His protuberant eyes stared about for a space unseeingly. Then gradually he began to notice objects below him and to realize his predicament. Among broken white rocks and drift at the foot of the cliff the water of the lake lashed itself into foam or swirled away in horrible, black eddies. The effects of the storm had not yet passed. Seeing all

this, Bill moved with celerity. He fairly clawed the ground in his haste to be up and away.

But his troubles had only begun. As he was scrambling back from his perilous position, he caught sight of something moving in the edge of the water—something that rose and fell with the waves sluggishly like drift, yet something that was not drift. Bill stared at the strange thing, fascinated. He saw it whirled away from the shore, then a moment later, by an nnusnally heavy wave, flung high on the rocks, to lodge firmly in a crevice. When the water receded, the thing lay stretched out full length in thc moonlight, half in the churning wash, half out.

Like one hypnotized by terror, Bill gazed down npon the ghastly object, which was now clearly revealed to him by the blue radiance of the moon. What he saw was the body of an old man, the white face upturned to the stars, the long white hair rippling snakily in the water, the chin wobbling sickeningly above a gaping cut across the throat!

Stupor held the nnfortnnate youth for a moment, bnt for a moment only. When the fnll force of his discovery dawned upon his dazed mind, he let out a yell that might have been heard in Crawford, three miles away, and fled.

He fled with animation. He took the obstacles like a string of hnrdles. Neither fence nor ditch stayed him.

On he fled—on and on!

HOW many times Bill fell in that aimless dash, the world will never know. It is doubtfnl if Bill himself knows. From the thrashing trail discovered by thc searching party next day, however, the number of croppers must have been something to conjure with.

Running with a natural galloping stride, Bill described in his going a sort of irregular semi-circle; and finally slipped and fell flat on his back in the Pine Lake Road south of Lamont House. There he lay, gasping for breath, and staring fixedly at a roadside bush from the branches of which wailed a plaintive whippoorwill.

Owing to the obstacles that had impeded Bill's wild journey, old Dock, galloping steadily along the road toward his oats, was not far behind his master when the clinging mnd of the road claimed its victim. Indeed, Bill had just summoned strength to extricate himself from the mire and had clambered to his feet preparatory to continuing his flight, when he heard a horrible slogging, splashing noise just behind him that caused him to shrink back into the bush of fearsome bird calls, every hair of his head lifting as at the tonch of a spirit.

The tattered vagabond that had been the effulgent lover of Katie Barnes was clinging weakly to a sickly sapling when old Dock flonndered by; and it was with joy and relief beyond expression that Bill sprang in hot pursuit of the lurching democrat, caught on to the endgate, and climbed at last into the seat. Dock loped peacefully along, unmindful of the return of his driver.

Bill felt, for the moment, comparatively safe, and he gathered up the fallen reins with a show of returning calm. He even began to whistle "Hold the Fort" to steady his courage. Still he found himself casting tronbled glances toward the reeking trees that crowded the road; and the occasional flutter of some night creature would set his heart wildly ponnding again.

It seemed that the powers of darkness were out in force. The waterlogged pines were vocal with weird whispers; the moon, sinking in a pall of inky blackness, shed a fitful, ghastly light that set the noisome waters of dismal forest swamps asheen, only to fade away to ntter night.

Somewhere a rivulet was babbling among rocks, and its sound brought back to Bill a vivid mental picture of

the thing he had seen from the lake bank. He stood up in the democrat the better to lay upon the back of the now lagging Dock the ancient buggy whip; and, blind with his terror, he steered the horse out of the road.

As the wheels began to crash over the uneven turf off the trail, Bill realized his hapless situation and began praying in a loud voice for divine light and heavenly guidance. Almost, it seemed, in answer to his prayer, a flash of distant lightning leapt into life on the scud of the subsiding storm and revealed to him his surroundings. He was in the middle of the old Lamont family burying ground!

The flying wheels had just struck an ancient tombstone, and there was a crash as the thing fell! Just as the lightning flashed, a long, clammy branch of dripping hemlock struck Bill in the face hard enough to knock him back into the buggy seat. Then a mourning dove, scenting the approach of dawn, cooed sobbingly from a cypress near by; and from a dank swale of the forest sounded a raucous, blatant, long-drawn laugh!

With one horrified leap Bill left the democrat. He was running when his feet struck the ground. He faded away from that place even as the lurid glow faded from the cloud pall. It was yet two miles to Crawford, but Bill covered the distance in about the length of time it would have taken an ordinary runner to travel half as far. He flung himself upon his father's porch and began clawing and beating at the door.

Old Man Joy, who was at the moment just getting dressed, heard his son's final struggles and naturally thought one of the coon dogs was begging for breakfast. "Wait a minute, drat ye," he called out. "I'll feed ye right smart soon."

At the welcome sound of his parent's voice, poor Bill revived. "Oh paw, paw," he moaned, "it's me, it's me. Fer God's sake, lemme in." He choked. "The Senecas hev took to the warpath an' skelped the hull winter colony out to the lake. I seen the bodies a layin' on the rocks below that high bank a-bleedin' like stuck hawgs."

There was a rattling sound, then silence.

Mouth agape, the old man hurried to the door and haled his record-breaking son into the house. He laid the inert scarecrow on the lounge and stood back to stare in wonder.

As Bill revived from his self-induced stupor, he became partially coherent and the more-or-less authentic details of the night of horror came out. His father swallowed some of the yarn and discounted the rest, so that he arrived at last at a fairly shrewd approximation of the truth. At least he became certain that his son really had seen something out of the ordinary.

"We'll git Clem Withersbee," the old man decided when Bill's narrative had begun to ramble back over the old trail. "Git up, boy, and come along."

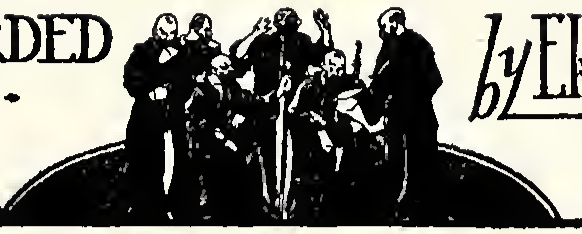
Together father and son left the house and hurried away toward Crawford and the constable. As they went, the old man kept muttering to himself in a way that caused Bill to huddle close to his side.

"I reckon," was the burden of the father's half-whispered monologue. "I reckon, Bill, yeh have run on to the awfullest thing you ever dreamed of. Putts me in mind of the tak' off o' ol' Cash Lamont twenty years ago."

And so was the news brought to Crawford of Pine Township's first terrible murder since the mysterious death of Cassius Lamont a score of years before.

[TO BE CONCLUDED]

SIX BEARDED MEN



by Elwin J. Owens

LUCIFER P. LUGENVOLL, the money lender, was alone in the spacious library of his elaborately furnished bachelor residence. Long before, his housekeeper and his private secretary had retired for the night; but Lucifer still pondered over private papers, as had been his custom during the thirty greedy, unscrupulous years he had hoarded his wealth.

Into the early morning hours he remained. His emaciated face was tensely drawn; his gray hair was disheveled by the nervous action of his long bony fingers; and his small green eyes moved slowly, studiously over the lines of the yellowish-brown document that lay unfolded on the massive walnut table. The second reading for the night.

He settled a little deeper into the comfortable upholstering of his large winged chair. For a moment his eyes were riveted upon the feminine signature—a lonely widow. The eyelids drooped, his colorless brow wrinkled, and a quiver went through the gaunt, aged form.

He clutched at his hair, and with bowed head arose from the table. His troubled mind unconsciously carried him through the folding door into the reception room and on to the great plate-glass window that looked out upon the city street.

The Egyptian darkness of the night, as compared with his brightly illuminated rooms, the deserted pavement, and the extreme quietude, turned him back.

Reluctantly, half-mechanically, he retraced his steps. Again his eyes fell upon the faded paper on the table. His lean, grasping fingers caught the much handled corner and he started to fold the document. The signature stood out plainer than ever before. His eyes closed and he crumpled into his chair.

Shortly, the door bell rang wearily. Lucifer listened. The sound of muffled voices and cat-like steps broke upon his ear. His trembling hand reached across the table and the forefinger pressed upon the button to summon his secretary. It would not respond to his touch.

He gasped weakly and waited. Again the alarm at the door, and again painful silence.

The knob turned, and inch by inch the heavy, paneled door swung noiselessly ope..

Lucifer rested his head upon the tapestried wing of the chair. His hands dropped limply to his sides. He struggled to arise, but could not move.

A silent command. Six men dressed in black, all with flowing, black beards, marched languidly through the portals of the outer doors.

The aged money lender attempted to cry out, but words stopped in his throat; his tongue was tied.

To the library they came and formed in single line on the opposite side of the table, directly in front of him. There they stopped as if at military attention.

Lucifer cleared his throat with great effort.

The leader held up his hand for silence and averted his solemn black eyes to the man at the rear of the line.

The man stepped back and closed the double door; his face turned ceilingward; an upraised hand, and all was still. Slowly, he returned and took his place.

"The spell is upon the house; no sound can penetrate beyond this room," said he. His voice was low and frigid.

Dead silence.

The leader stroked his long, black beard.

"We are here, Lucifer, and we want you. We want you now," they whispered in deep, well-rounded unison.

"Who are you that you should enter my home unbeckoned at this unseemly hour of the night?" groaned Lucifer, his drawn face twitching painfully.

The leader took one step toward the table and, in a monotone, enunciating each word perfectly, replied:

"A judge of last resort, an administrator of the final law, am I."

He paused a moment, then bowed to number two, who likewise advanced a step.

With uplifted right hand, he spoke slowly and in deep undertone:

"A minister of the gospel, a mediator for the crimes of mortal man, a servant of the dying, has been my chosen calling."

The leader nodded to number three, who took his place beside the minister.

"A doctor's degree have I, a dispenser of medicine and skilled in delicate surgery. To the latter, my nerves have been attuned for many, many years."

He spoke sharply, but in even a lower voice than had the other two.

A gesture from the leader and the remaining three stepped promptly into place. Another signal and their voices blended together:

"Recognized masters of art are we; workers of mystic spells, and co-adjustors of moral wrongs."

They paused a moment, then turned to the leader.

"Proceed! We shall gladly await your judgment."

Lucifer leaned forward with strained eyes.

"Have mercy, men, I am weak in the fullness of years. I have money. What is your price? I wish to retire and spend my life in peace. Say what you wish! But have mercy, men, have mercy."

"He pleads for mercy," chimed the three mystics, dolefully. "Mercy! He knows not the meaning of the word!"

Again dead silence.

Five eager faces turned with solemn mien to the leader. Thoughtfully he stroked his flowing beard.

"Is it not the law, that he who is silent, when in justice he should have spoken, shall be silent when personal gain urges that he speak?"

The leader's voice was slightly louder than a whisper. The five others each nodded in his turn.

"Then," said he in firmer tones, a slight raise in his voice, "we shall examine the papers on the table; each extortion of money shall constitute a crime, and each crime a punishment."

He turned to the man at his side.

"Right Reverend, what does the Old Testament say? An eye for an eye?"

"It does."

"Then along this line it shall be. The papers, honest men, and search them carefully. Let not one thing escape your cautious vision."

Through the folded documents the visitors of the night did quickly delve. Foreclosures, all of them. Thirteen documents. Then, the yellowish-brown sheet spread upon the table,

making fourteen in all. The first man read the unfolded one, and groaned vengeance.

"Poor woman, now a guest of charity," he mumhled and passed it to another.

Each man in turn did read the much woru document, and each was deeply pained.

The leader spoke an inaudihle word and six men stepped hack in line.

Lncifer's hands reached out clutchingly toward the papers; his lips moved, hut no word could get beyond his teeth. Hc gasped, shuddered and shrank hack into the chair. Muscles of his waxen face twitched, wrinkles became quickly deeper, a quiver, and he was limp. His eyes closed slowly; he hreathed with effort.

The leader raised his hand, and, pointing to the man across the tahle, commanded: "Look you npon thc wan face for a moment! Bear well in mind the documents you have read and the punishment they have inflicted upon the people who came to him to borrow. Consider with a kindly heart the weight of ripening years, and" (his voice hecame more firm) "in the balances of justice place the good he might have done—and did not."

He looked each man squarely in the face, and went on more slowly: "Weigh the value of his life, and bc not rash. When your minds have reached a judgment, state the penalty. I wait."

The minister was the first to speak.

"Upon his promise to further wrong no man, I vote to give him one more chance."

"No, no!" cautioned the leader quickly. "You understand wrongly. This is a final judgment. Tonight he pays. No other chance did he give to the lonely widow or the others he did rob. Again, I state, the penalty must be paid tonight, even as he does demand when settlement is due."

The three mystics stepped forward as if they were one man.

"We pass judgment—"

Lucifer leaned forward and a groan crept through his straight-cut lips.

The mystic second from the end raised his hand.

"Just now I call a spell."

His voice was strong hut weird.

"Lncifer shall hear hut can not speak, he shall feel but shall not move; this, that we need not mince words with him, that he may remain helpless in our power."

"What is your judgment, mcn?" The leader stepped forward as he asked.

The man who stood beside the doctor answered for the threc.

"He shall pay in flesh. For each small amount, we take a toe; larger amounts, a foot; and still larger, a limh."

"'Tis granted," declared the leader in a solemn tone. "Doctor of medicine and practitioner of surgery, prepare your instruments. Men of the mystic art, make hare the tahle and lay his body straight upon its top."

The minister stepped hack and took a chair.

"You can not count me a party to thc plan. I did not comc to mete out a punishment such as this. I came to show this man his wrong and turn him to the right. No, men, I shall drop out hut shall remain. And should his life be hlotted out, I shall say the last rites over his remains."

"Proceed," ordered the leader, "the hours say that the day is soon to break, and we must of this make haste."

THE tahle was soon cleared, and while the mystics placed the helpless form upon its top, the surgeon

pulled up a smaller table and placed his instruments in a row upon it at his right.

One document was read, and Lucifer felt the smallest toe on his right foot removed. He twitched in pain but could not speak. Another reading and another toe. On and on they read until ten toes had each been severed from the feet.

"This eleventh document is for a greater amount. This man died destitute, and the foreclosure shows that all his property slipped into Lucifer's hands in default of a paltry loan."

The reading mystic paused and glanced at each of the other four.

"A foot or an ear," suggested one.

"An ear," the leader murmured.

The surgeon's knife moved rapidly, and soon the severed member was beside the money lender's motionless head.

"Make haste," ordered the leader. "the hands upon the clock do, at this moment, point to three. Read three documents, and pass judgment upon them all. Let the penalty be equal to the sum total of the extortion."

Quickly the mystics each picked up a document and, after reading them, conversed in whispered tones.

One bowed to the leader, who recognized his right to speak.

"We are agreed. Each one of us, before speaking to the other two, had fixed the same penalty for one crime. A woman's home did go to pay the debt incurred in borrowing money to pay for the burial of her one supporting child."

"What do you say? Nothing could be too great!"

The minister stepped forward before the answer could be given.

"Pray men, do not go further. Can you good men not stay your maddening desire? This man is maimed for life. Why do you persist in carrying out your strict intent—to kill this man piece by piece? Let me at this opportune time suggest that the surgeon dress the feet and head; allow Lucifer to live, that he, in living, may repent."

"May repent!" repeated the leader with knowing emphasis. "You do not know the man of whom you speak. His clutching hand can not be stayed by mere weaklings such as words." Then, with a slight change of voice, "No, I can not grant your request. To do so would be folly; and, too, did you not state that you would not take a hand? You wished that you might comfort him when breath was all that did remain. This I shall grant. Nothing more. Be seated, Right Reverend, and in a short time you may assume the duties which fall into your calling."

As the minister, with lowered head, tiptoed to his chair, the leader directed his eyes to the three mystics who stood waiting to continue with their words.

"What is it, men of the mystic art?"

"A lower limb we deem would pay the price."

The leader stroked his beard thoughtfully, while his eyes traced the outline of the man upon the table. At last he spoke:

"A leg, careful surgeon. Let it be severed at the knee."

The doctor took up his instrument, as the leader continued:

"The hours are passing. Read while our surgeon works. Leave the document which we found unfolded upon the table until the thirteenth one is done."

As the limb fell from the body, the mystics raised their eyes.

"Again the same amount and, therefore, an equal penalty."

A nod of sanction from the leader, and the instrument touched the flesh.

All were silent while the surgeon amputated the doomed member. This done, he wiped his instruments, laid them upon the small table and stood erect.

"This man," said he, as his eyes turned to each of the bearded men, "has suffered much. His breathing is slow and irregular. His voice is stilled. Let us leave him thus."

"Never!" declared the leader in a determined tone. "It shall not be. We each have read the unfolded document. It is most brutal that he should take all that this kind old woman trusted in his hands. She now does die in want and misery, while Lucifer does still live. He takes her life blood, and you would ask that we should let him pass."

His voice grew strong.

"Men of the mystic art, this doctor has grown weak. We can not falter now. Say what you will. I wait."

"It shall be death," declared the mystic of the third art.

"Not by my hands," said the doctor with a groan.

"Perhaps not," the leader replied, "but so shall it be. Lucifer can not speak, nor can he walk, neither can he move from the flatness of his back. Still his clutching hands remain."

"Just that," murmured the three mystics in unison.

"Doctor, we excuse you," said one, reaching out his hand. "Place in my hand the keenest instrument that you have and we will ask no more."

A moment, and the shining blade was in his hand. He held up the other.

"Lucifer can now move his right arm," he whispered.

He held the knife toward the man on the table.

Lucifer's clutching fingers seized the handle.

"The point shall go to his chest," commanded the mystic, "and he shall press it to the hilt."

He stood over the white-haired man and spoke in sepulchral tones.

"Place your forefinger upon the end and meet death by your own hand."

Slowly, the point went to the place indicated. Little by little, the blade entered the flesh.

"Hold!" commanded the leader. "We leave now. Let the spell still hold him. But I decree that he shall be alone when the end does come."

He turned quarter way round and addressed the minister.

"Offer up a silent prayer, and we shall be gone."

With upraised hands the minister prayed, then touched the forehead of the money lender. He folded his arms and nodded that he was through.

"When we are out the door, press hard, Lucifer," ordered the mystic. "Press hard or we will return."

Six bearded men fell into line, and filed slowly out of the room, and through the outer door.

LUCIFER pressed hard and long with his forefinger. Faintly, the sound of a distant bell rang in his ears. It was not until he heard the foot-falls of his approaching secretary that he unclosed his eyes.

Before him lay the open document, and beside it the numerous folded ones. He beckoned the secretary to come close.

"Take these papers," said he weakly, "and bring every one of the people who have signed them to my library at noon today. Call my banker and have him present also, for I shall write checks freely—freely, my dear fellow, freely."

He arose and staggered forward a few steps.

"Your arm, dear sir, your arm. I will now go to my room that I may become rested."

An Odd Little Story of Weird Chinese Revenge

The Green and Gold Bug

By J. M. ALVEY

Author of "Spirits" and "Tragedy Island"

THE inqnest was over. The coroner had gone, and so had the twelve men who formed his jury. The police officials and reporters for the press had ceased to ring our doorbell. The undertaker, polite and low-spoken, had got his work well in hand and the two coffins lay side by side in the dimly-lighted parlor. An awed silence was in the house where but a few hours ago grim tragedy stalked its hideous way.

But I am starting my story at the wrong end. Let us turn back forty-eight hours to the beginning.

It was early on Wednesday night, and my uncle and I, dressed for dinner, sat, each at a window in the living-room watching every passing taxi in the street. At last one stopped outside; two figures stepped out into the cold night; and while one paid the taxi driver, the other rushed up the front steps and came into the front hall and flnng her arms round my uncle's neck. It was my kid sister Joe, back from a five months honeymoon in the far-distant and mysterious countries of the orient.

"Well, well," said my uncle, "is the little rosebud glad to be home again and rest once more in her uncle's arms?"

And Joe said: "Yes—oh, yes!" and burst out crying and hid her face on my uncle's oversizo vest and held his coat lapels, each with a tiny, girlish hand.

I went out to greet her hnsband but fell back before him as he advanced, so shocked was I at the change in his appearance. From a handsome youth, well-built and smiling, he had become a pale, shriveled figure which staggered under the weight of the light hand baggage he was dragging into the house.

My uncle and I had planned to give the travelers a royal welcome. Our plans, however, were rudely swept aside, and the bridegroom was rushed upstairs to bed and the doctor summoned.

Just what the sick man's ailment was the physician was unable to determine. There were times when his heart raced like fury and his breath came in gasps and his neck swelled and his eyes bulged. At such times he clutched the bed clothes with an iron claw and tried to raise himself. Then the spell wonld pass like a snap of the fingers, and the patient would relax and fall back as if exhausted from a violent struggle.

About midnight he rested easier, and Joe, my uncle and I sat down to the nntasted dinner.

"A month ago, in China," said Joe, "we went up into the monntains one day, to a temple where a horrible old creature sat on the floor with incense burning all around him. He was a magician, or priest, or soothsayer or something, and had power with the Chinese gods. But

Dick laughed at him and said the poor Chinamen were suckers to fall for his line.

"And the magician was angry and rose up in all his ugliness and put a curse on Dick and on his family. Dick was going to fight him right there, and we would have been murdered, I'm sure, only I pulled him away and made him take me quickly back into the city.

"And that night," said Joe, "Dick had the first attack."

"Josephine!" cried my uncle. "Do you know what you are saying? I'm—Confound it, my dear, what nonsense! 'Put a curse on him?' You know better than to believe such trash. 'Curse,' the devil, my dear! Dick has got some low-down foreign plague. It don't matter whether the Democrats or the Republicans are in power, there's no place like the U. S. A. Confound these outlandish, God-forsaken, evil-smelling places, where all the pests and misery of the world are bred. Dick's got bubonic plague, or the beri-beri or some such fool thing."

Joe told us that Dick got over the first attack in a few hours, but two weeks later on the first night out at sea on the way home he had the second, and it was worse than the first. After that they became more frequent and more violent, and Dick was wasting away and poor Joe's heart was breaking.

"Fiddlesticks!" said my uncle. "Bosh and tommyrot! 'Curse,' my eye! I'm no doctor, but the lad's got some heathen disorder. But cheer up, little woman. We'll have your lover overhauled and in A 1 shape in a jiffy. It may take a month to get real sick in China, but that's China. You're home now, my dear, and it don't take all day to get a pain in the tummy here, nor all night to get over it. Just smile, little girl, and get ready to go to housekeeping. That's what."

It was two o'clock before the house settled down. It was three when I heard a noise outside my door. I went out to see what it was.

The light at the top of the stairs had been left burning, and as I opened my door there was enough light to show me the deformed creature that was creeping along the wall of the hallway, a hideous man, a weird beast, some terrible imp from hell, what I could not say, so awful was it, so unlike anything I have ever seen, or heard of, or fancied.

And this thing opened the door of the boneymooners' room and passed in.

I had no revolver, so I took up a dumb-bell that I used of a morning for exercise and went to the door of the room where the thing had entered. I opened it, and reached in and snapped on the lights. In the bed lay the travelers sound asleep. I went over and touched them to make sure they were only sleeping. I looked under the bed, in the closet and out on the porch roof under the windows. There was nothing there.

Joe, open-mouthed and wide-eyed, caused me to pull my head in from the window.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said I. "Don't be frightened. I thought I heard the fire engines going down town and came over to look."

I went downstairs to look around a bit. The hall, the parlors, the dining-room were all empty, but in the little passage that runs from the dining-room to the kitchen I thought I heard a footstep. I was sure I did. I stood and listened. And then somebody sneezed.

I pulled the swinging door open. There stood my uncle in his nightshirt.

"God bless my soul!" he said. "I was about to shoot you."

"You're catching cold," I told him. "Go to bed. What are you tramping around here for this hour of the night?"

"And why are you, sir?"

"I heard a noise," I explained.

"So did I."

"And I thought I saw something."

"'Thought!'" he cried. "'Thought,' hell. I *did*."

"You did. Where?"

"You saw it, too?"

"Yes, in the corridor outside my room."

"You're lucky," said my uncle. "I saw it in my room."

He smiled a grim smile.

"I was so shocked that I could not move. After it left I got up and came down here. I thought it might have come this way."

"No," I said. "It came past my room and went into their room."

THE next day the sick man was much improved. Joe was brighter. My uncle smiled in spite of his troubled mind. I said nothing.

That night we went to bed early. I was tired out and soon fell asleep. It was three o'clock again when I heard a noise. This time I rushed out and came face to face with the unearthly visitor. It gave me one mighty crack on the chin that sent me back into my room. I lay on the floor in a semi-dazed condition for full five minutes as well as I can estimate. Then I grabbed my dumbbell and went out again.

As on the previous night, I went to the door of Joe's room and opened it and switched on the lights.

On the floor lay Joe, blood at her mouth and nose. Across the foot of the bed lay her husband, looking more like his old self than I had seen him since the day of his wedding.

I told my story at the inquest. The police officials laughed at it. The reporters seized upon it as great stuff for the papers. The coroner's jury considered it gravely, and then gave it as their verdict "that Josephine Blackton was murdered by her husband Richard Blackton, who afterward died by his own hand."

They are right and yet they are wrong. I have found new evidence. I shall make it known.

In the trunks of the honeymooners, which arrived tonight, was a collection of curios. Among them was a small bottle containing a strange insect, a green-and-gold-colored bug, snd the bottle was labeled: "Shang-tang Jan. 15. The strange bug that stung Dick last night. We believe that someone threw it in the window."

I don't like the idea of a murder and a suicide in our family. I don't want that coroner's verdict to stand. I'm going to prove that sn enraged old magician in the mountains near Shang-tang caused the green and gold bug to be thrown in the window where the Americans were staying and it poisoned Dick and slowly drove him mad; destroyed his human qualities, mind and body; and that the two who lay side by side in their coffins were both murdered and that the murderer sits among his incense burners seven thousand miles away. I'm going to prove it if I have to go to China!

A Fascinating Weird Story of Voodoo and Witchcraft is

The Tortoise-Shell Cat

By GREYE LA SPINA

Extract from a letter from Althea Benedict, Pine Valley Academy for Young Ladies, to Mrs. Wordsworth Benedict, New York City:

IN SPITE of your care to reserve a room for me, Miss Annette Lee called me into her office yesterday and begged me to share it with a new girl.

It seems that Vida is the only child of a very old friend of hers, Felix di Monserreau, a rich Louisiana planter. Miss Lee says she thinks I may have a good influence over my new room-mate, but she managed to evade my tactful inquiry as to what Vida's vices might be. She did seem awfully disturbed. She said that she appreciated my nice attitude; and if I found the companionship disturbed me, would I report it to her immediately? She was so agitated she just couldn't look me in the face. I can't imagine what can be the matter with Vida.

So far, my new room-mate appears to be rather nice. Her father has been most generous and our room is the envy of all the other girls. I would have written you earlier, mother, but we've been getting our new things settled.

Vida wants everything to go with her particular style of beauty! She confessed that she was perfectly miserable if she didn't have a background that suited her, and that she knew I wouldn't mind—particularly as she was willing to pay for the decorations. So she has the room decorated in the most stunning fashion, in shades of orange and dull green, with heaps and heaps of down cushions. She says she loves to lie around on a pile of cushions, like a cat.

I wish you could see her. She's really a type of girl to attract attention anywhere with her dead-white skin, her dark red lips, her black hair and her eyes—. Her eyes are quite the queerest I've ever seen. They are narrow, long, slumbrous, with drooping lids through which she looks at one in her peculiar way. The iris is a kind of pale golden brown that gives the impression of warm yellow. When dusk comes, I've seen the pupil glowing with some strange iridescence, the iris a narrow yellow rim about it; for all the world, it makes me think of a cat's eye.

Don't forget to tell Cousin Edgar to send me the necklace he promised to bring me from Egypt. I've told the girls about it, and they're dying to see it.

YOUR ALTHEA.

The same to the same:

. . . Studies are going forward nicely. Nothing new, except a couple of rather queer things about my room-mate. I thought I'd better write you first, before saying anything to Miss Lee about it. Perhaps I'm only imagining things, anyway.

Vida is certainly a very odd girl,

mother. I am beginning to believe that she can see in the dark, with those strange eyes of hers. What makes me think so—you know how I love to change furniture around every little while? The other day I altered the position of everything in the room. Vida wasn't there, and before she came back the lights-out bell rang. I meant to stay awake and tell her not to fall over the table, that was in front of her bed, but when she did come I was so drowsy that I didn't get a chance to speak to her before she had reached her bed.

And, mother, she threaded her way among those things just as if she could see them perfectly; not a single moment of hesitation. It gave me the most eery feeling. I hid my head under the quilt, for I felt as if she were watching me in the dark. I know you'll laugh when you read this, but I didn't feel like laughing. And I still have an unpleasant feeling about it, for how could Vida walk so rapidly among those things, not one of which was in the same position she had seen them in last, unless she could actually see in the dark?

Last night another odd thing happened. There must have been crumbs in our wastebasket, for we heard a mouse rattling around in it. Just before I could switch on the light, I heard Vida bound across the room from her bed. When the light was on, she stood by the wastebasket with that mouse in her hands, and I can tell you it was a dead mouse! She looked so strange that I squeaked at her, "Vida!" She jumped, dropped the dead thing and scuttled back to bed. She seemed quite cross because I had put on the light, and I think she cried afterward in the dark, although I can't be sure of it.

Mother, does it seem uncanny to you? I wonder if this night-sight is what Miss Annette referred to? I hate to say anything, for after all, what's the harm in it?

. . . When is Cousin Edgar going to send that necklace?

The same to the same:

. . . Something happened that I cannot help connecting with Vida. Yet I don't like to go to Miss Annette with it. I'm sure she will smile and tell me that I have an exceptionally lively imagination.

Vida and Natalie Cunningham had a dispute the other day about something or other, and Natalie looked it up and when she found Vida was right, she was sarcastic about it—Natalie, I mean. Vida just looked at her with those strange golden eyes glowing, bit her lip, and remained silent.

When we were alone afterward, Vida said to me, "Do you know, Althea, I'm afraid something unpleasant is going to happen to Natalie?"

I must have looked surprised, for she went on hastily:

"There's some kind of invisible guardian watching over me, Althea, that seems to know whenever anyone is unkind to me. For years I've observed that punishment is visited on everyone who crosses me or troubles me in any way. It has made me almost afraid of having a dispute with anyone, for if I permit myself—my real, inner self—to grow disturbed, something always happens to the person at the root of the trouble."

Of course, I hooted at her forebodings. I told her she was superstitious and silly. But, mother, that night Natalie Cunningham lost her favorite ring, a stunning emerald. It was stolen right off her dressing-table five minutes after Natalie turned off her light. She got up again to unlock the door for her room-mate, put on the light, and—the ring wasn't where she'd left it.

The door was still locked; the window was open, hut it was a third-story window, as most of the dormitory windows in our building are, and there is no halcony under it.

Mysterious, wasn't it? Our floor monitor, Miss Poore, declared that Natalie must have dropped her ring on the floor, hut Natalie has hunted and hunted. The ring certainly isn't in her room. Who took it? How? It frightened Natalie so that she is afraid to he alone in her room without a light.

The odd thing ahout it is the way that Vida looked at me when the girls told us ahout it. She actually wants me to helieve that her "invisible guardian" stole the ring to punish Natalie for having been sarcastic to her. Did you ever?

I wonder if poor Vida is—well, just a bit flighty, mother?

How ahout that necklace?

The same to the same:

. . . I'm so excited that I can't write coherently. All the school is in an uproar over what took place last night. I am more disturhed than the rest, for I am beginning to have a suspicion that Vida is right when she says that unpleasant things happen to people who cross her. It makes me nervous, for fear she may get provoked at me for something. I don't know whether or not I ought to report the whole thing to Miss Annette; I'm afraid she'll think I'm romancing. Won't you please write me and tell me what to do?

Yesterday morning Vida's old colored mammy, Jinny, who is in Pine Valley in order to be near her charge, came up for Vida's laundry. Miss Poore came in while Vida was putting her soiled things together, and offered to help sort them over.

Mammy Jinny gave a kind of convulsive shiver. She looked up at Vida, staring hard at her for a moment. Vida stared hack in a queer, fixed way. Then my room-mate's eyes flashed yellow fire. She told Miss Poore in a kind of fury that she'd hetter mind her own business and not stick her old-maid nose into other people's private concerns.

Miss Poore was wild. (You can't blame her. It was really nasty of Vida). She took Vida hy the shoulders and shook her hard. Vida didn't resist, hut she looked at the floor monitor with such an expression of malice that Miss Poore actually stepped hack in dismay.

"I'm sorry for you, Miss Poore," said Vida to her. "I'm afraid you are going to suffer severely for laying your hands on me. I'd save you if I could—hut I can't."

Miss Poore went out of the room without answering. Vida gave the laundry to Mammy Jinny, who insisted upon taking laundry-bag and all. After the old colored woman had gone, Vida flung herself on her hed and cried for an hour. She said she was crying hecause she was sorry for Miss Poore. I failed at the time to see any significance in her remark, until after last night—. .

Ahout two o'clock this morning, the whole floor was wakened by the most terrihle screams coming from Miss Poore's room. I sprang out of bed and rushed into the hall, where I met the other girls, all pouring out of their rooms. We rushed to Miss Poore's room and she finally got her door open to let us in.

Mother, she was a sight! Face, hands, arms, were all covered with hlood from hites and scratches. She was hysterical, and no wonder. She declared that some kind of wild animal had jumped in at her window and attacked her in the dark. The queer thing is, how did that creature —if there was one—get into her room and then out again before we opened the hall door? Her window was open, hut it is a third-story one and there is no tree nearby from

which an animal could have sprung into her room.

She is in such a condition this morning that Miss Annette told us in chapel she would have to leave the school to recover from the nervous shock incident to the attack. The mystery of it is the only topic of conversation today, as you can imagine. And now for the odd part of it.

When I got back to my room, there lay Vida, apparently sound asleep. She hadn't been disturbed by all that racket. Some sleeper! I waked her and told her.

Mother, she lay awake the rest of the night crying and carrying on terribly, declaring it all her fault, although she couldn't help it. Her statement was rather confusing. She insisted it was her "invisible guardian" who had attacked Miss Poore, but she begged me not to tell anyone. Her advice was superfluous; if I went to Miss Annette with such a statement, she'd think either Vida was crazy or I was simple.

I tried to sleep, but I can tell you I left the light on. And I wasn't the only one; all the girls had lights in their rooms the rest of the night.

The coincidences are strange, aren't they, mother? Natalie displeases Vida and has her emerald ring mysteriously stolen. Miss Poore displeases Vida and gets scratched and bitten. But even a coincidence can't explain why a wild-cat should bite Miss Poore on Vida's behalf, can it?

Do please write me soon and tell me what I ought to do about informing Miss Annette.

The same to the same:

I TOOK your advice and told Miss Annette. She said she must trust my discretion not to let the other girls know anything she told me, and then admitted that Vida has been followed by this reputation in every school she's been in, until her father couldn't enter her in some schools. Something unpleasant always happens to any person who displeases Vida di Monserreau. And although she disclaims having done anything, yet she declares it is done for her.

Miss Annette asked me if I wanted to have my room to myself. I thought that Vida really hadn't done anything to me, and she had certainly made our room the nicest in school. I decided to let her stay on, and Miss Annette thanked me so heartily that I was actually embarrassed.

. . . Why didn't you tell me Cousin Edgar was coming down? I couldn't imagine who it was, when I was called to the reception room to see a gentleman. Imagine my surprise!

He gave me the chain, mother, and it is perfectly precious! Have you seen it? It's tiny carved cats with their tails in their mouths, and the pendant is a great jade cat with topaz eyes. The girls are wild over it, and Vida particularly is simply crazy about it. She asked me if Cousin Edgar couldn't get her one like it.

Cousin Edgar said a rather funny thing. He clasped the chain about my neck and declared that I must promise not to take it off without his permission. Now, why do you suppose he did that? When I asked him, he just shrugged his shoulders and said something about your having shown him my letters. What have my letters to do with my promising not to take off the cat-chain?

Yesterday he came over to take me driving. When he came into the reception room, he thrust out his chin in that odd way of his and said abruptly: "There's a cat in the room. Thought Miss Annette didn't allow pet animals."

I knew there couldn't be one, but he insisted and began to look about the room. And then—the oddest thing, mother! We came upon Vida

di Monserreau, asleep in a big armchair by the fireplace. She had crouched on her knees, with her hands out on the arm of the chair and her chin on her outstretched hands, for all the world like a comfortable pussy-cat.

I said to Cousin Edgar: "Here's your cat," and laughed.

He looked at Vida closely. Then he said softly to me. "Althea, you are speaking more to the point than is your wont." (You know how he loves to tease me, mother.) "Introduce me to the pussy," said he.

I waked Vida. She was terribly embarrassed to have been seen in such an unconventional pose, but she told me afterward that she liked Cousin Edgar more than any other man she'd ever met. I think he liked her, too, although, of course, he didn't say much to me about it.

Vida asked him, almost at once, if he didn't have another cat-chain like mine. She'd taken a tremendous fancy to it, she said.

"Perhaps you can prevail upon Althea to give you hers. If you can, I'll get her something else to take its place."

At this suggestion of his, Vida turned imploring eyes upon me. Mother, I was disturbed. I thought of what had happened to Natalie and to Miss Poore, and I wondered if something horrible would happen to me if I refused to give Vida my chain. So I just put it to her point-blank.

"What will happen to me if I don't give my chain to you, Vida?"

"Nothing to you, Althea, darling. I could never be really angry at you," she whispered.

"Then please don't ask me to give up my chain," I begged.

I looked back as I went from the room with Cousin Edgar, and her eyes were on me in the most wistful way. Poor Vida!

. . . I wonder what the attraction is? Cousin Edgar is remaining here for an indefinite visit, he says. I do hope he hasn't fallen in love with Alma Henning; I simply cannot bear that girl. I suppose he won't ask my advice, though, if he has fallen in love with one of the girls. Belle Bragg is wild over him, and Natalie thinks him scrumptious.

He has old Peter with him and is stopping at the little hotel in Pine Valley.

The same to the same:

. . . I suppose I ought to tell you some things I've hardly dared write before because they are so—well, so extraordinary. I've been afraid you might think something the matter with my brain, because I'd been studying too hard. Cousin Edgar says it is in good condition and my head straight on my shoulders and to write you the whole thing, exactly what I thought about it.

Mother, there *is* something uncanny about Vida di Monserreau. I told you how catlike she was at times, and how she loves sitting in the dark, or prowling about the room in the dark.

The other day I came into the room ten minutes before lights-out. The room was empty when I turned on the light. But as I went to my desk, a great tortoise-shell cat was stretching itself lazily in the armchair where Vida loves to sit, near the window.

Like a flash Miss Poore's experience passed through my mind and I started for the door. As I got to the hall, I turned around, and—mother, believe me or not—there wasn't a sign of a cat. But sitting in the armchair, staring at me with those queer yellow eyes of hers, was Vida di Monserreau.

I sat down on a chair near the door and breathed hard for a moment. Then I said, "My gracious, Vida, how you startled me! I didn't see you when I came in. What happened to the cat?"

"Cat?" says she, yawning. What cat?" She stretched her arms lazily and settled herself comfortably on the cushions.

I can tell you I felt queer. My eyes had played me a very strange trick, making me see a striped black and yellow cat where Vida was sitting. I felt it best to say no more to her for fear she might think me out of my head. But the more I think about it, the more I am convinced that there was a cat.

And if I did see a cat, stretching and yawning in the armchair, where, if you please, was Vida when I was looking at the cat? And where did the animal get to? (I looked everywhere before I'd go to bed, although I didn't tell Vida what for. I pretended I'd mislaid my gym slippers, that were all the time in my locker. I could feel her yellow eyes on me while I peeked under the beds and around.)

When I happened to mention the incident to Cousin Edgar, he told me not to forget that I'd promised not to remove the chain he'd given me. He said something about its being a talisman to ward off evil influences.

Now, mother, don't write and tell me not to study so hard! Cousin Edgar doesn't think I'm crazy or delirious, so I guess you needn't.

The same to the same:

. . . This morning Cousin Edgar called me on the telephone to ask if anything had been stolen from one of the girls last night. There had. Grace Dreene had lost a locket and chain. Cousin Edgar asked if the locket had her initials on it in chip diamonds! How did he know? I'll tell you.

Last night he was sleepless, so he took a walk up here. The moon was shining directly on my side of the dormitory and he distinctly saw a great tortoise-shell cat come out of what he thought was my room.

There is a very narrow ledge around the building, under the windows, about three inches wide. The cat walked along that ledge until it reached Grace's window, where it jumped in. After a moment it came out with something glittering in its mouth!

Cousin Edgar hissed, "Scat!" The cat hesitated, startled, and the thing went flashing from its mouth to the ground. Cousin Edgar watched it go back to my window, then he picked up the article. It was Grace's locket and chain. The cat had stolen it from Grace's room! Did you ever hear of anything so queer, mother? I've read of monkeys and jackdaws, but a cat!

Cousin Edgar mailed the chain to Grace. Fancy the astonishment of the girls when the stolen thing came back through the mail!

But what do you make of it? The cat came out of, and went back into, my room! The things I do think are so extraordinary that I'm afraid to say them, even to myself.

From Captain Edgar Benedict's notebook:

AFTER having found out all I could from Althea about the strange facts in this most interesting case, I determined to follow the only clue that presented itself, i. e., the old colored mammy. It seems that she called regularly every Tuesday, so I made it a point to linger near the academy on a Tuesday morning, and was rewarded by seeing the old woman appear bright and early for her young mistress' laundry.

She is a queer character. Far from being the decrepit old creature I had been led to expect by Althea's description, she is a tall, handsome mulatto woman with flashing eyes that hold a strange magnetism in their direct, unblinking gaze. Her face is deeply lined with wrinkles that to my opinion have been etched by the character of her thoughts rather

than by the hand of time. She carries herself humbly when in the presence of academy people, but I have seen her, once out of sight of the school, straighten up that gaunt form and throw her head back proudly, altering her dragging walk into a brisk and lively stride.

She carried the young lady's fresh laundry into the academy and in half an hour came out laden with the soiled laundry, which she had in an embroidered laundry-bag. Once out of the sight of the school, she broke into a rapid, swinging walk, and I had much ado to keep her in sight. She reached Pine Valley and made for the negro quarters, where she entered a house that I noted carefully.

As I wanted very much to get a personal impression, I knocked at her door, and inquired if she could do my laundry work. She stared at me, pride in those black eyes of hers. Then she said very curtly that she did washing for one person only, and shut the door in my face. There is a fierce, implacable atmosphere about that old black woman. I would dislike tremendously to arouse her hatred.

. . . Just gotten back from a night visit to Mammy Jinny's cabin. Fortunately, when I got there, she had left a full inch of space between the window frame and the lower edge of the window shade. Through it I got a fine view of the old witch—for witch she certainly is, and somehow involved in the mysterious happenings at the academy.

It is not the first time I have watched a witch's incantations. But I have never before had such a strong personal interest in them.

The old negress pulled out the laundry from the bag, and with it tumbled a flashing emerald ring! That must have been the ring of Natalie Cunningham. How did it get into Vida di Monserreau's soiled laundry, unless put there by Vida herself? Is Vida an accomplice or an innocent victim?

Mammy Jinny now drew from her bosom a stocking, and shook out of it as fine a collection of rings, brooches, bracelets, chains, as I've ever seen outside a jeweler's shop. She laid the emerald ring with them and sat staring at her plunder. After a while, she pushed it back into its hiding-place. Then she began to pace the dirt floor of her squalid cabin.

As she walked, she muttered. Sometimes she wrung her hands. Fragments of her words drifted to my ears, as I listened.

"My baby Vida—my little missy! Forgive me, missy! But you must pay for your father's crime. I cannot forgive him!"

All at once she flung herself down before the hearth, for all the world like a great cat and began to stare unblinkingly into the smoldering embers. By my watch, she remained in that posture absolutely motionless for fully two hours, during which I honestly wished I were elsewhere; there was something about her tense attitude that conveyed a baleful significance to my intuition. I knew that she was projecting her mental powers to accomplish her black purposes, like the evil old witch she was. It was hardly an agreeable situation for me, but I dared not move until she herself began to stir.

I have an idea that the witch, the tortoise-shell cat and the odd Vida are more closely connected than might seem credible. I must take Althea somewhat into my confidence.

. . . My plan worked perfectly. Vida was very happy to possess the cat-chain and easily agreed not to take it off. Last night I kept watch over the old negress, and Althea—at my request—watched Vida. Vida slept peacefully through the very hours when I watched Mammy Jinny sweating and working her incantations in vain.

. . . I am on the right track. Althea tells me that Mammy Jinny came into the academy and ordered Vida to take off the cat-chain. Vida refused with what seemed natural indignation. Mammy Jinny told her the chain was "bad voodoo." Vida stood firm. The old negress was so furious that when she left, she forgot to how herself, and strode away, full height, much to Vida's astonishment.

. . . Althea has been carrying out my further directions with a cleverness and tact that does her credit. She snipped one of the links in the chain when Vida wasn't looking, and Vida has asked me to have it repaired, as my cousin suggested. Tonight Vida will be without the protection of the chain. I have instructed Althea as to her part, and I shall myself watch the old witch.

. . . All last night Mammy Jinny worked her spells. They were successful this time. Althea has told me what happened.

Althea saw the cat steal from Vida's bed to the window, and return with a stolen bracelet in its mouth. It dropped the article into Vida's laundry-bag. Then, as Althea expressed it, the cat sprang into Vida's bed, and—there lay Vida, peacefully sleeping! No wonder Althea couldn't close her eyes the rest of the night.

When one of the girl's chums came in to say that a bracelet was missing, Althea had it ready to return. She said she had picked it up in the hall.

I am going to put a stop to the whole business. It is voodoo, pure and simple, with a taint of the devil that is unpleasant, to say the least. Whatever the old negress' intentions, she must not attempt to carry them out by means of an innocent young white girl who has somehow fallen under her dominant will-power. If I cannot put a quick stop to it, I shall tell Vida di Monserreau exactly what she has to fear, and provide her with a talisman.

LAST night was certainly a thrilling one from start to finish. I sent old Peter to remain outside Mammy Jinny's cabin, for I wanted a full report of her actions. I myself, with Miss Annette's kind cooperation, hung a stout rope-ladder from Althea's window while the two inmates of the room were in the gymnasium, and covered the top with pillows to conceal it from prying eyes.

At about one-thirty a. m., the great cat came out of Althea's window—left open for this purpose—and went out upon the narrow ledge. It made me hold my breath. (What if it had fallen? The thought makes me shudder yet.) It disappeared within another open window, and I went quickly under the window and called to Althea that it was the fifth window. She closed hers at once and went to Belle Bragg's room, where the cat had gone in.

Both girls saw it go out of the window. Then Belle looked at her dressing-table and found her wrist-watch missing. Althea said she thought one of the girls had borrowed it and would bring it back in the morning. Then Belle closed her window—a vain precaution—and Althea returned to her own room.

Meantime, I had mounted the ladder quietly until I was directly under Althea's window, where I braced myself strongly for what I had in mind would follow.

The cat found the window closed. It beat with its forepaws at the pane in a pitiful manner.

I reached up and tossed the repaired cat-chain about its neck. Although I had rather anticipated what followed, it made me gasp, for it was the limp, unconscious body of Vida di Monserreau that I supported in my arms!

Althea opened the window and between us we got the poor girl on to her bed. I warned Althea to be silent and was off to find old Peter and get his report.

I was thoroughly provoked when I found he was not on watch outside the cabin as I had expected him to be. Then I peered under the window-shade. What I saw was my old black Peter, squatting on the floor before the hearth, his arm about that old witch and her head resting on his shoulder!

I *was* furious! I gave a thundering rap at the door. Peter let me in. But the old scoundrel, instead of seeming ashamed and guilty, met me with a broad grin that showed his white teeth from ear to ear. To my further astonishment, Mammy Jinny rose to her full height with a grin that matched his.

It took my breath away. I demanded an explanation. Between them, it was mighty hard to find out the truth, for it was a long story that went back to the young girlhood of the old negress.

She and Peter were slaves, owned by Vida's grandfather. When a valuable ring was missing, the old man charged Peter with the theft, and sold him into a distant state where he could never hope to see his wife again. Jinny knew the facts, but what good would it have done her to have told them? She might have received a whipping. She knew that her young master had given the ring to a white girl whom he was courting on the sly.

Jinny appealed to "young marse." He laughed in her face. She determined then to be revenged. Concealing her hatred, she demanded and received the care of Vida, when "young marse's" wife died in childbirth.

From that time on, Mammy Jinny worked out her plans, using her knowledge of voodoo, until she had so bent the child's will to hers that Vida was absolutely responsive to the old negress' thoughts. How she performed the apparent metamorphosis I had seen, she would not tell, however, but only looked at me defiantly out of her proud eyes.

Mammy's idea of revenge seems to have been to fasten the disgrace of theft upon Vida di Monserreau, thus shaming "young marse." Her methods of accomplishing her end are, like all methods of black magic, better left undisclosed to the general public.

As old Peter has long owed me loyalty, since I saved his life years ago, I had little difficulty in persuading him to take his wife to Jamaica, from which place they were originally bought, and where Peter in later years returned, in hope of meeting Jinny there once more. They will be out of Vida's life henceforth.

This does not mean that Vida is to go unprotected. I shall take care of that, with the permission of her father. But I do not believe that old Jinny will ever again crouch in invocation to the Evil Powers to bring the tortoise-shell cat into materialization at Vida's expense.

The PHANTOM RIDER

by OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

Author of "The Cup of Blood," "The Malignant Entity," Etc.

BIG BILL HAWKINS laid the trap with admirable precision. Every little detail had been worked out with the utmost nicety.

The care-free manner of his partner, Seth Ormsby, indicated that he suspected nothing, though he did seem somewhat puzzled by Big Bill's unwonted loquacity and unprecedented joviality. He had shown a strange lack of enthusiasm when, after a summer of unrequited toil, the prospectors had stumbled on the vein that promised to make them both independently wealthy. During the days spent in preliminary work with a view to replenishing their depleted larder, he had been unusually taciturn, even sullen at times.

As they rode abreast along the trail, followed by the two pack-mules, the foremost of which bore in its saddlebags enough gold dust to purchase the entire general store at Red Dog, Big Bill outdid himself in his efforts to be agreeable. At the same time he was thinking, planning.

Big Bill, a dyed-in-the-wool prospector, had first met Ormsby in the Deer Foot Saloon at Red Dog. He had lived up most of his savings and needed a grub-stake. Ormsby, a wandering cowpuncher out of a job, had the necessary money. Under the mellowing influence of liquor they had struck up a partnership.

The country through which they wandered was an open book to Hawkins, and Ormsby, the newcomer, always relied on his burly partner when a choice of directions was to be made. It was Hawkins who, in this instance, had suggested they take this new trail to Red Dog, where papers were to be filed and supplies purchased.

Big Bill felt that he had ample reason to hate Ormsby. For nineteen years he had been prospecting in this region, sometimes with a partner, but more often alone. He had managed to find enough pay-dirt to keep body and soul together and had made occasional moderate strikes rich enough to support him in idleness for several months at a time. The thing that stuck in his craw was the fact that when the big strike came—the strike for which he had been hoping, toiling and struggling for nineteen years—he must share it with this greenhorn: this newcomer who couldn't tell quartz from shale. He had gambled the best years of his life for this stake and felt that fortune had cold-decked him when she finally dealt him one royal flush and Ormsby the other. It meant that they must either split the pot or leave it up for a show-down, and Big Bill had resolved on a show-down dealt from his own stacked deck.

"Seems like we're goin' sorta outa the way to git to Red Dog," remarked Ormsby when they suddenly turned at a fork in the trail.

"Not so much," replied Big Bill with studied indifference. "They's a water hole down this way and the animals ain't goin' to be none the worse

off for wettin' their whistles. We got to think of them as well as ourselves. It's a long, hot ride and the other trail is bone-dry."

"Right you are, Bill. I plumb forgot about the poor brutes. A man'll do that sometimes when he's got a full canteen himself."

"You're a hell of a cowpuncher," roared Hawkins. "I don't never forget 'em. They can't run without water no more'n a ottymobile can run without gasoline."

"It's this big strike of ourn that's got me kinda loco," replied Ormsby. "I don't know whether I'm horseback or ridin' a airyoplane half the time."

Big Bill did not reply. His eyes were on the trail ahead. The time for action was almost at hand. The sharp curve, now only fifty feet away, was the appointed place.

Nearer and nearer they drew to that curve. Big Bill's gaze did not falter. True, the hands that held the reins trembled slightly, but there was nothing in his expression that might serve to betray his purpose. He was wearing his poker face. The time for the show-down had arrived. He reined back slightly, drew his keen hunting knife, and stealthily severed the lead ropes.

With a vicious kick he suddenly drove his spur into the left flank of his unsuspecting steed. As the horse reared, he pulled on the right rein, jerking the animal against Ormsby's mount. The ledge was a narrow one —the drop only a matter of a few feet. Horse and rider lurched, slipped, and fell into something that received them with a dull splash. A moment later man and beast were struggling desperately in a yielding, slimy mess that threatened to engulf them in a few seconds.

Big Bill's horse galloped swiftly up the trail for more than a hundred yards. By sawing the bit he brought the animal to a prancing walk, then to a dead stop. He turned and rode leisurely back. The frightened squeals of the mired horse all but drowned the man's cries for help.

"My God, Bill, it's quicksand!" shouted Ormsby.

Hawkins dismounted leisurely and walked to the brink. Taking a plug of tobacco from his pocket, he bit off a hunk, chewed for a moment, then spat into the bubbling, slimy mess beneath him.

"Damned if it ain't," he said. "Hang on for a minute and I'll throw you a rope."

With studied deliberation he turned and gave his attention to the coiled lariat that dangled from his saddle. He seemed to be having trouble with the knots.

"Hurry, Bill, for God's sake!" cried Ormsby. "It's up to my waist already!"

Big Bill continued to pull at the tangled lariat. Somehow, with each pull, the knot grew tighter. At length he turned. Ormsby had succeeded in loosing his own rope and was trying to throw it to him. The slimy ooze was up to his armpits. Of his horse nothing could be seen but the foam-flecked nostrils. These disappeared as he cast the rope. It fell at the feet of Hawkins.

"Grab holt of my rope, Bill, I think I can crawl out on it."

Big Bill stooped slowly and picked up the slime-smeared rope. Then, with a vicious laugh that was almost a snarl, he hurled it in the face of his victim.

The deadly quagmire had reached Ormsby's chin. A look of blank surprise came to his face. It was followed by one of hatred and revulsion as the sinister purpose of his partner was revealed to him. He tilted his head backward for a last sobbing inhalation.

"You dirty coyote," he gasped. "You murderin' yaller dog. I'll get you for this if I have to break out of hell to do it. I'll—"

His speech was cut short by the mounting quicksand. A slimy hand waved for a moment above the surface, clutching claw-like at the empty air. Then it, too, disappeared.

Big Bill surveyed the bubble-strewn surface of the quagmire, apparently unmoved. The only remaining trace of his revolting crime was Ormshy's half-submerged Stetson, which had fallen a few feet from where its owner went down. He sank it from sight with a carefully aimed rock fragment. Then he turned his attention to the waiting animals.

The two pack-mules watched him unconcernedly, their long ears drooping limply, as he picked up the ends of the lead-ropes and knotted them together. He vaulted into the saddle and rode to the water hole, only a few rods distant. When the beasts had drunk their fill, he set out with all haste for Red Dog.

THE blood-red sun was poised just above the western horizon when Big Bill rode into the village. After seeing that his animals were properly bedded and fed he removed the heavy sacks of "dust" from his saddle-bags and hied to Bonnell's General Store.

"Hello, Bill," greeted Dave Bonnell, peering over his silver-rimmed spectacles as the burly prospector strode through the door. "Where's yer pardner?"

Big Bill laughed a bit nervously.

"Skipped out a coupla weeks ago for parts unknown," he replied. "Took most of the grub with him, too, the damned skunk! But the joke's on him. Day after he left I struck pay dirt and staked out a nice little claim for myself. I want you to weigh in this dust for me and fix up my papers."

The ancient counter trembled with the impact of the two heavy bags which he suddenly placed before the astonished storekeeper.

Dave Bonnell weighed the gold dust with wide-eyed wonder.

"You shore hit pay dirt this time, didn't you, Bill," he remarked. "Want any cash on this or just a receipt?"

"Gimme about a hundred cash and a receipt for the balance," replied the prospector. "I 'low to ride over and file claim in the mornin'. Think you can fix my papers up this evenin' so I can git an early start tomorrow?"

"Have 'em ready for you by the time you get through with your supper," said Bonnell. Aside from being a storekeeper he was a notary public and justice of the peace.

Bill ambled over to the Deer Foot Saloon for a couple of shots of whiskey as an appetizer. Then he went into the adjoining cafe, where he tucked a huge beefsteak, a half dozen eggs, French fried potatoes, coffee, and a piece of pie under his belt. After lighting a long black cigar he returned to the store. Bonnell had the papers ready for his signature. He removed his hat, raised his right hand in solemn oath and affixed his name.

"Well, so long, Dave," he muttered, when Bonnell handed him the documents. "See you tomorrow afternoon."

"You'll be wantin' some grub and things, I suppose."

"Yeah. Plenty of things. So long."

"So long, Bill."

LATE the following afternoon Big Bill rode back from the county seat, the sole owner of the richest claim that had been filed in that office for many years.

He had often wondered how it would feel to be wealthy. Time and again he had planned the things he would do should he ever strike it rich. Now that the big moment had arrived, however, his thoughts were chaos. For one thing, he had promised himself

plenty of wine, women and song. As Red Dog afforded only the first mentioned article and it would be necessary for him to inhabit that village for some time to come, he decided that the time for indulgence was at hand. Accordingly he drew up before the Deer Foot Saloon, carelessly tossed his reins over a hitching post, and strode through the door, oozing affluence.

The wine was, of course, only figurative. Big Bill looked on wine as a woman's drink. He liked his liquor and liked it straight. He swaggered up to the bar and planked a twenty-dollar bill on the counter before the astonished eyes of Joe McGinnis, the porcine bartender.

"Whadda ya got that's good and strong, Joe?" he asked.

"Well, we got some Old Crow, some Arkovcet that'll proof about a hundred and twenty, and some Three Star Hennesy and—"

"Gimme Three Star, and see what the rest of the boys will have."

The motley crew of cowpunchers, prospectors, sheep herders, card sharps and others of doubtful occupations or no occupations at all, voiced their various wants in no uncertain terms. When they were served they drained their glasses, chorusing "'S lookin' atcha," "Here's how," and "Happy days."

Convivial companionship was not lacking after that, especially since Big Bill, in view of his recent prosperity, insisted on buying a lion's share of the refreshments.

By ten-thirty, however, the crowd began to thin out. Many of the roisterers lurched out to their waiting steeds, some singly, others in small groups. A few who had imbibed too freely lay with heads resting on tables or lolled back in their chairs, oblivious to the drunken songs and ribald jests that went up from those who were able to hold to their moorings before the bar.

Big Bill tossed his last twenty-dollar note under the nose of the barkeeper.

"Givesh nozher drink, Joe." he said gravely. "What t'ell y' standin' there like damn Dumb-Isaac for? Ja 'ear me? Shed jam Bum-Isaac. Shwatcha are, too."

"You had enough, Bill," said Joe. "Here; put your money in your pocket and go on to bed."

"Had nuff did I?"

Big Bill glared hostilely at the bartender.

"Gesh I know when I got 'nough. Gimme drink."

"You'll get no more to drink tonight. Not here, anyway."

"Shay. Who t'll shink you're talkin' to. Do I get a drink 'r don't I?"

Big Bill was getting ugly. His hand stole toward the forty-five that hung at his hip. The revelers on either side of him stepped back in sudden alarm.

"You heard what I said. Take your money and get out."

The forty-five roared and broken glasses tinkled in a shower behind the bar. It roared again and a hole appeared in the mirror, surrounded by spoke-like cracks that radiated in all directions.

The sheriff, who had been enjoying a sociable game of draw poker in the back room, poked his head and gun from between the double doors at one and the same time.

"What the hell's goin' on here?" he roared.

Big Bill had a wholesome fear of the law. The sight of the gun and star almost sobered him. Panic-stricken, he dropped his forty-five, rushed out through the door and flung himself upon his horse.

The sheriff ran after him, but was stayed by Joe Vienza.

"Let him go, Jack." he said. "They's nobody hurt and we can make him pay for the glasses and mir-

ror tomorrow. He's rich enough to buy this whole town now."

BIG BILL, galloping hastily along the village street, felt sure that he was being pursued. He spurred his horse until the blood spurted from its gashed sides, and tried to think. What was it he had done? For the life of him he could not remember. Everything was hazy up to the time the sheriff had appeared. Suddenly his hand touched the empty holster. He had used his gun. Perhaps he had killed a man.

Killed a man! The thought persisted. Yes. He had killed a man only the day before. And that man had sworn — what was it he had sworn? The exact words of the dying Ormsby came back to him with amazing vividness.

"I'll get you for this if I have to break out of hell to do it."

Could a man break out of hell, or wherever his spirit might chance to go? Could the dead return to wreak vengeance on those who had wronged them? He wondered, then urged his horse forward with renewed frenzy as the sharp clatter of hoof-beats sounded close behind him.

It seemed, however, that with the first staccato click of those pursuing hoofs the horse needed no urging. The frightened beast leaped forward with ears laid back and nostrils distended as if running for its very life. But despite the speed he was making, the increasing distinctness of the sounds behind him told Big Bill that his pursuer was gaining on him—gaining with amazing rapidity.

He expected to hear a command to halt or feel a bullet between his shoulder-blades at any moment. He feared to go on, feared to stop—even feared to turn and look at his pursuer. The suspense was nerve-racking.

Well. It would soon be a matter of his life or that of the sheriff. Undoubtedly he had shot a man and, if taken for it, would surely swing. His forty-five was gone, but he still had his derringer. With an oath he snatched it from his pocket and swung in the saddle. His pursuer was less than fifty feet behind, and Big Bill seldom missed at fifty feet.

He raised the tiny weapon and fired. Then, seeing that the bullet had not taken effect, he cursed and fired again. His pursuer came on, sitting bolt upright in the saddle, apparently unmoved.

There was something strange about the appearance of the oncoming man and beast—something terrifying, appalling. He had not noticed it at first, but the realization suddenly burned itself into his consciousness. The horse was strangely familiar and the man—only one man he had ever known wore his Stetson creased thus and at that peculiar, jaunty angle. And that man was dead—murdered. Again the words of the slain Ormsby came back to him:

"I'll get you for this if I have to break out of hell to do it."

He strained his eyes in an attempt to pierce the semi-darkness. Suddenly the moon peered from behind a rapidly-moving cloud—and he *knew* . . .

The derringer dropped from his nerveless fingers. A queer choking feeling paralyzed his throat. He passed his hand before his eyes and looked again. The vision persisted.

Nearer and nearer came that silent, relentless pursuer. With a shudder of horror Big Bill saw that he or it was uncoiling a lariat.

The loop widened, whirled about that ghostly head and shot through the air. Big Bill ducked, then uttered a shriek of mortal terror that ended in a gurgling, agonized wail as the rope settled and tightened about his throat. For a moment he felt himself dangling in empty air—then all went black . . .

EARLY the following morning two cowpunchers from the Bar L Ranch rode into Red Dog. One carried an extra saddle and bridle, the other the rapidly atiffening body of Big Bill Hawkins.

They were quickly surrounded by a crowd of curious onlookers. foremost among whom was the sheriff.

"Where'd you find him? What happened?" asked the aheriff, aa two men assisted in lowering the corpae to the ground.

The cowboy whose horse had borne the body dismounted.

"Dangdest queerest thing I ever seen," he said. "We found Big Bill and his horse lying at the bottom of a ravine. Bill waa dead and the horse had broken both forelegs, so we shot him."

"But what killed Bill?"

"As near as I can make out, he waa roped and strangled. There'a a rope burn around his neck and he don't seem to have no broken bones or other injuriea."

"Who follered Big Bill out of Red Dog last night?" demanded the sheriff, facing the crowd.

"No one follered him," volunteered a prospector. "I seen him come out and ride away alone."

"Whoever got him," continued the cowboy, "must've left in an airship."

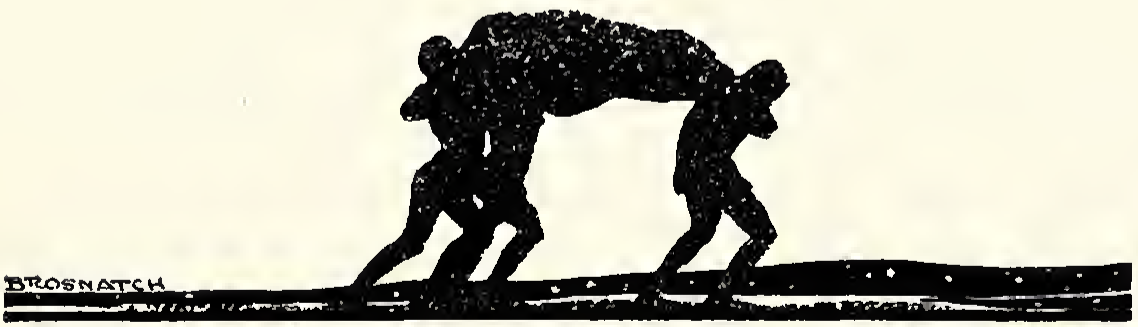
"An airship? What do you mean?"

"Well, me and my pardner went up to the top of the ravine to try and find out what happened. We saw the tracks of Bill's horse where he had come runnin' up and plunged over the edge. Bcaide them was the trail of another horse that ended in a four-track slidin' square like your bronc' makes when you rope a steer."

"And where did they go from there?"

"That's just the point. We hunted high and low and circled the place for a hundred yards in every direction. *There wasn't a single track of horse or man leading away from the place where Bill Hawkins died!*"

Note.—"The Malignant Entity," a fascinating pscudo-scicntific story by the author of the above tale, appeared in the mammoth May-June-July Anniversary Issue of Weird Tales. Copy will be mailed by the publishers on receipt of fifty cents



This Unusual Tale Was Written by a St. Louis Newspaperman Who Afterwards Committed Suicide

A Soulless Resurrection

AS WAS my custom each year, I went to St. Maude, that beautiful little suburb of Paris, in June, 19—, to spend my vacation after a taxing year of study in the Ecole Polytechnique, where I was being fitted, as my father had been before me, to emblazon upon the family escutcheon the title "Architect" and thus justify my existence.

St. Maude was but a step for me. In Pont St. Esprit, which the good God chose to have the honor of my birth (for, with my lofty ambitions that would outstrip the works of Notre Dame and St. Peter in Rome, I considered even Paris would some day like to claim me), I had often made thirty-five kilometers a day hunting with my father. I was proud of my strong limbs and rugged frame, and the mincing promenades of the afternoon I left to the boulevardiers. So I set out on foot for St. Maude, where my fair young cousin Genevieve, her mother and the latter's aged father, long a retired physician, expected me.

Bright and fair was the day of my approach to the pleasant suburb where I was to spend the next two months. The sun's brilliant rays glistened like rain drops on the rich foliage of the stately trees so generously scattered at every turn of the eye. The humming of a bee that I startled from a vagrant honeysuckle by the roadway as I trudged along with springing step, gladdened my heart with its musical suggestion of bucolic quiet and aroused a flood of happy associations formed in idle moments spent in the picturesque purlieus of my aunt's little home. I drew in full breaths of the fragrance of lovely bluebells and lilies of the valley. In the distance I could see the cattle lazily grazing. As I crossed a rustic bridge, my eyes fell upon two youngsters languidly reclining on the bank of the stream awaiting the disappearance of their cork floats to announce that some venturesome fish had swallowed the bait. At sight of them my own pleasant boyhood days were recalled.

They recognized me instantly and called, "Hello, Jean!" and I whiled away a bit of time with them, promising to join them in their sport, some day soon. They were overjoyed to see me, for the little rascals knew there was fun ahead and a few sous.

I tramped along the border of the woods, enjoying with infinite zest the smell of the fresh green earth. I heard the cheerful chatter of a busy little squirrel, disturbed in his woodland industry. Cutting through the patch of forest, where at every turn I recalled some familiar spot, I soon espied my aunt's quaint cottage half-concealed by a growth of birches.

Its gabled roof, even from that distant viewpoint, showed sorry need of a repairing hand. Where the sun's burning rays penetrated through the loopholes left by the foliage, the shingles had cracked and curled. Blistered patches of paint, too, rendered the house more in spirit with its woodland environment. As I neared it I could see that,

as of old, the flower boxes stood on the front window sill and from them trailed the clematis and nasturtium. A dainty ivy threaded its serpentine way to the eaves. Saucy little birds chirped and sported about the ancient chimney. In the garden everything ran in nature's own seeming confusion save in one little spot where a woman's hand had set some choice plants. Here a patch of marigolds, there a cluster of peonies, then a touch of daisies showed their pretty heads in the midst of the geraniums, and with a careless eye to artificial nicety bashful fuchsias hung their tender bells in the shadow of some giant sunflower.

Traveling the well-worn path I had so often trod, I suddenly came upon my young cousin, fairer this day than ever. She was sprinkling the flowers, and until then had been hidden from my view by a mass of rose bushes. She turned as she heard my footstep, and, instantly recognizing me, ceased her pleasant labor and ran to welcome my arrival, throwing her arms about my neck and kissing my cheeks. Her beautiful face, the picture of lovely innocence, was radiant with joy. Her voice, as soft and sweet as the nightingale's, thrilled me with its lovely tone. Zip, the old house dog, came leaping upon me. Genevieve's mother, attracted by the unwonted commotion, next greeted me.

We talked about the flowers, the woods, the odd little house and the dog. I even found myself twitting my lovely cousin about the fantastic weathervane that whirled and squeaked and turned jerkily this way and that as if in a pet over the contrary winds that never would let it point in one direction for even a minute. Indeed, under the charm of her singular beauty, the music of her voice and the grace of her sinuous figure, I forgot to reply to her invitation to enter the house and partake of refreshments. At last, however, having exchanged all the news that came spontaneously to our minds, we stepped inside.

My granduncle, they told me, was in his laboratory. Of late, they said, he was eternally puttering about with his chemicals, attempting experiments that sometimes by their strange noises would arouse them suddenly from their sleep in the middle of the night. Perhaps I would see him in the evening, but I was cautious not to disturb him at his work, for he had become exceedingly secretive and peevish.

Inside the house, everything bore the touch of the hand of time and the earmarks of generations before me. The ancient clock in the hall seemed weary of ticking away the moments of mortal man's time.

That night I did not see my old granduncle. I could hear the tinkling of test tubes, the gurgling of fluids and the shuffling of his feeble footsteps as he dragged himself about in his workshop, from which pungent odors of acids emanated.

Next day at lunch I heard him slowly feeling his way like a blind man through the narrow hall that led from the room he used for his laboratory to the dining room. He nodded his ragged head when he saw me and smiled absently, but never deigned to say a word or proffer his hand in welcome. I was struck by the marked change a year had wrought in him. Long white locks fell disheveled over his aged head. His face was like a time-worn sheet of parchment, wrinkled in a thousand folds and yellowish gray in patches. His eagle-like eyes, set beneath finely arched brows and a magnificent forehead, burned with an unnatural fire. Constantly he was deeply engrossed in his thoughts, to the exclusion of the rest of us.

But with the charming Genevieve, sparkling in her maiden beauty, what more needed I to fill my time and make

the summer days pass happily? Often I sighed because this fascinating girl was so near to me in relationship. Otherwise I should surely have courted her impetuously and, no doubt, have lost her through my reckless ardor. We strolled together through the summer woods, her mother often accompanying us, or sat for hours on the rustic bench in front of the cozy home, as happy as the birds building their nest.

Once a week I would take her to Paris, this exquisite flower, so fresh, ingenuous and lovable. We would wander through the Louvre, admiring the marvelous paintings, or stray through the Luxembourg. On other days we would promenade along the Boulevard des Italiens or the Champs Elysées, commenting on the ceaseless gaiety of the life we saw. Once I took her to the Ecole Polytechnique, showed her all the departments and even the desk at which I sat and absorbed the knowledge I hoped would some day redound to the fame of my family. One night we went to that most magnificent of opera houses, the Grand Opera, and saw "L'Africaine." For a week she was in ecstasy over that immense production. Her gentle soul responded sensitively to all that was beautiful and refined.

A FORTNIGHT after one of these delightful trips, a sudden gloom and sorrow smote this happy circle. I came home one night from a two days' sojourn in Paris to find my beautiful cousin in bed, her mother, grandfather and Dr. Maneau around her. She had tripped, the day before, on a rusty barrel hoop. A jagged end had penetrated her dainty foot and blood poisoning was making rapid progress. I was distressed beyond belief. Five days later, death had forever clouded the brilliant luster of Genevieve's soulful orbs.

That night we carried her into the old parlor and laid her gently upon her bier. My granduncle said he would embalm her body himself, and even though kindly Dr. Maneau offered to arrange all the funeral details, the old man held to his determination to do the ghastly work.

In the evening, the mother, exhausted from grief and loss of sleep, fell into a profound slumber in her room. I had remained all day beside the bier. I ate nothing. About dusk I went out to cool my fevered brow. For hours I wandered through the woods and fields, hallowed by the feet of her who had gone.

Returning, I saw the room where the bier lay, dimly lit, and from the shifting shadow on the curtain I knew her grandfather was standing over the corpse of the saintly girl.

It was not with premeditation that I approached the house softly and quietly, turned the knob and shut the door so noiselessly that even I heard no sound. My great grief had rendered me unconsciously quiet in my every movement. At the side of the room nearest the old man was a folding screen wrought in fantastic tapestry, and a step further was a lounge. Not wishing to disturb the old gentleman in his sad contemplation of that dear face with its ghostly traces of mortal beauty, I sat down upon the lounge, completely hidden from his view, and buried my weary, aching head in my hands.

How long I sat thus, I do not know nor do I remember hearing the old hall clock sound the midnight hour. I was suddenly startled by the shrill voice of the old man. From the stairway which led to above, I could hear the heavy breathing of the worn-out mother. It was not his voice that chilled my very bones, though at that hour and in that situation, considering the condition of my nerves, a bit of nervousness could be overlooked.

"It must work this time! It cannot fail! It cannot fail!" I heard his piping voice exclaim.

I arose and looked over the screen. There he waa, as hefore, leaning over that white lovely face, hands clasped behind his back, fingers nervously clutching each other, his breath coming in short gasps, his whole frame atremble.

"One more, another one, five thousand units more and it cannot fail! Ah-h-h-b-h! How the Academy will hail me, me the old Bergeau!"

I saw him take a hypodermic needle. I saw him grasp a tiny phial from a pocket of his shabby coat. I watched him fill the needle to the full, hia hand shaking as if palsied. A strange light was hurning iu his eager little eyes. Like a ghostly gohlin hauntiug aome graveyard sepulcher, he stretched out his thin gaunt arms and turned toward the dead girl. I was tranafixed with horror. Why I did not intervene, I cannot say. Some horrihle curiosity kept my eyes fastened on his weazened form and held my limbs powerlesa to move.

I could see him part the dainty lace that covered her cold, alahaster bosom. He sank the needle into the lifeless, unresponsive flesh and slowly stepped to the end of the bier to watch jealously the saintly face, ethereally pure in death.

For several seconds he kept his ghastly watch. The terrible silence froze my breath. The old clock ticked with awful regularity. The great brass lamp on the heavy center tahle flickered a ghostly flare, and I thought I saw the girl's lips move. But it was only a fancy then.

Five minutes went by, the old man standing immovahle save for the treabling of his arms. My eyes turned first to him and then to the girl on the bier.

The old clock struck one, so faint and solemn that it seemed miles away, and I knew midnight had flown.

MERCIFUL Father! What was that? Had my mind snapped? Had reason suddenly left me? Had madness insidiously crept into my brain? Or were my atrained eyes growing treacherous? God, no, for the old man was tremhling so violently now that his teeth chattered. his eyes dilated frightfully, and he began to reel and totter like a drunkard as his wheezy voice exclaimed:

"She moves. oh. God. she moves!"

Sick and faint with horror, clutched by an icy dread. my throat swelling under a strangling sensation and my eyea feeling as if they would burst their sockets, I groaned heavily and my head dropped to my breast as I saw the girl's eyes open, one hand raise itself from its folded position of repose on her bosom and her lower limbs tremhle as if ahocked hy electricity.

When I looked again, she had raised her head and half turned her body. Another moment and she fell heavily from the hier. Like one asleep, she slowly raised herself and stood at full height, now seeming douhly high in her long white robe, her rich hlack hair streaming down her hack. Such a picture of nameless horror no human being ever saw before. The old lamp threw a dim glare over the tall ghastly figure. Her eyes, wide open and staring vacantly, were as glassy as in death; her white lips were parted in rigid lines, the whole giving an unearthly expression to her ashen face, tinged at the cheeks with the faintest trace of color.

The old man had resurrected her body, but not her soul! It was a corpse, alive, moving. more terrihle a hundred-fold than death!

From sheer horror, I fell at full length as the animated Thing came

toward me, its great glassy eyes looking nowhere, its arms moving like those of a person groping in the dark; the head, oh, hideous, unnamable horror, creation unthought of by man, too terribly ghastly for the grave; blood-chilling, flesh-shriveling sight, turning slowly from left to right, the staring eyes moving oppositely, the mouth leering as no death had ever leered!

There was no mind to guide, no soul to govern. The old man had sunk to his knees. His hands were clasped in agony and his withered face raised to Heaven.

"Oh, God, what have I done, what have I done?" he moaned and sobbed piteously.

I RAISED myself as if from the grave and again beheld the Thing. It had turned and, as it reached within a foot of the lamp, tottered. From its throat came a hideous gurgle; the mouth opened wide; the arms outstretched; and it pitched suddenly forward.

The lamp fell and an instant later exploded with a terrific detonation. The old man uttered an unearthly yell. The room filled with flame and smoke. I could see neither the Thing nor the old man as I leaped through the door. In a trice the room was a roaring furnace.

I rushed upstairs to wake the old mother, but collided with her at the head of the stairs.

"Henri! Where is Henri?" she shrieked, frantically pushing my hands aside and swaying down the steps into the parlor, before my smarting eyes.

"Henri! Henri—"

The voice died away in the furnace's roar.

Screaming wildly, I leaped through the open window on the landing and ran into the forest.

Disappointment in Love Resulted Strangely in the Life of This American Artist in Paris

A Suicide Complex

By ROBERT ALLWAYS

"HOLY catfish!"

A scuffle in the bar and a child's scream brought me to my feet. Through the open door a cognac glass hurtled past my face and shattered against the rows of bottles lining the wall. A machine-gun chatter of French and a heavy-artillery roar of American profanity began in the bar. The eternal Battle of Paris, still going on four years after the armistice!

I stepped cautiously in, expecting to find a drunken tourist suffering from a too thorough reacquaintance with American mixed drinks, which since their deportation by Mr. Volstead have become native of Paris, but with some surprise I discovered Hawkins. He was nursing a heavily bandaged shoulder and singing it to sleep with a lullaby of international cusswords.

After several attempts to interrupt him, it became clear that one of the *patron's* children had bumped the wounded shoulder and that he had proceeded to kick the child out of doors. Gradually, as Hawkins' vocabulary exhausted itself, his arm quieted down and he concluded a discourse on the clumsiness of Parisian barkeepers' children with an apology for the cognac glass which had so nearly hit me. That, he explained, was a mere gesture, entirely by way of emphatic punctuation.

By this time I had computed the approximate amount of money Hawkins owed me (this was no simple matter, for he had touched me several times in two or three currencies a year or so before) and I dragged him into the other room, ordering two double Calvadoses and giving the *patron* fifty centimes for the broken glass to restore peace. I could well have used the modest sum my computations resulted in, but I was destined never to get it.

"Why the mummy clothing?" I asked when we had settled around a three-legged table. We were just off the Place St. Michel in an underground bar known as the *Bolée de Cidre,* chiefly noted for its very hard cider and the drawings by assorted artists of all nationalities which roam the Quartier Latin. These literally covered its dingy walls. The room was half-full of barrels of wine, though the favorite drink was Calvados or apple-jack, and a pungent odor of cider and sawdust filled the air. I had fallen into the habit of dropping into this cool, quiet place after lunch, where I could write for three or four hours without interruption and later join in the discussion of the latest events and theories of the art world of Paris with the artists who usually dropped in for an hour before their rather late dinner, to sip an *aperatif* and talk.

"Overwork," replied Hawkins. "My foot slipped when I was painting on the rocks up in Brittany last week and I fell and broke my shoulder."

"*Tiens!* I heard you hadn't been working. Haven't seen anything of yours lately—nothing in the last two Salons. You've been away from Paris?"

He twirled his thin-stemmed glass a moment, frowning, and I noticed that he was thin and haggard. Then he gulped down the white, bitter liquid and ordered a whole bottle. While the waiter was bringing it, he fidgeted around the room, twice breaking into a little hacking laugh that sounded half like a sob.

"No," he said, finally sitting down, "that's all a lie about falling off the rocks in Brittany, and I haven't touched a brush for a year. At present I'm working at a psychological problem—etching, not on a copper plate but on a living soul."

He broke off nervously, then, leaning across toward me and picking at my sleeve, he continued:

"I owe you something. . . well, I'll pay you in a story, old man, a piece of human living that will make you shiver. It's what I've been doing the last nine months. Tracking a man over half of Europe, opening his mind and writing across it, spreading out his soul and biting a word into it with acid: one word, *suicide!*"

Hawkins was trembling like a leaf, his eyes starting out of their sockets. No longer conscious of me, he was talking like a drug fiend, making strange short gestures with his free hand. Then he gave that hacking, sobbing laugh again and again.

"Suicide! Ha ha ha! Suicide! Ha ha haaaa!"

To stop him from becoming completely hysterical, I offered him a cigarette and filled the glasses. He calmed down a little at the interruption, then continued:

"You never knew the man. He was my best friend. We studied together for years, shared the same studio, painted the same models, and drank the same liquors. I helped him get his start, and many a time had to do a lot of his work for him while he was out playing the society game.

"In the war he left painting and went into the infantry, while I got in the camouflage corps and kept on studying. After the armistice, when all of us went back into the schools to brush up and get back to serious painting again, what did he do but play around in society and paint silly portraits of actresses and bankers' wives!

"Still we stayed together, though he was getting so stuck up that it was pretty hard at times to live with him. Then, after all I'd done for him, what does he do but snake me—the skunk! Played me dirt on the one thing that would have made me!

"She was one he had missed in his highbrow parties, a stunning looking girl and just crazy for romance, small town beauty from somewhere in Iowa, with lots of money and tired to death of the ogling of a dozen local swains. Simply fell for art and the poor, struggling genius stuff, wanted to be priestess of the living flame, fan it into a blaze with her father's greenbacks, and so forth.

"Believe me, I was all for it, but the family was awful! Sausage factory or sewer-pipe outfit, stick-in-the-muds with a terrible zero-hour sense of morality. You know the kind. They come over here and carry a bottle of Vichy water around for fear someone will offer them a drink.

"Well, we had that all fixed. I knew of a long-winded title I could buy for nothing—Roumanian, and it doesn't mean a thing but it sounds like the angelus put to jazz and Mother-in-law

would have fallen and dragged the bank account along (you know what desperate climbers they are in Middlewestern crossroads towns). Oh, it was spiked for fair, and we were going to run away to Vienna where you can get a fool-proof marriage in a day. Then my friend played his dirty trick!

"I brought her over to the studio one night, and as luck would have it, he was at home. He came, he saw, and he fell, simply lost his head, and believe me, I enjoyed it after his floating about snobbing with the four hundreds of all Europe. There he was at home, simply eating out of her lovely, provincial hand, and the next day we were to be off to Vienna!

"Well, that night we had *some* dinner, ate in all the French we had learned in six years and drank in assorted languages! Somehow, we must have let something drop. Anyway, he got the idea, and it didn't help his disposition. Once or twice he started to say something and nearly choked!

"Then her family burst upon us, found out where I lived and followed us! Wow! The place turned blue—with laws. Morality spouted all over us. Old Sausages started in with a new Iowa edition of the Ten Commandments that made Moses sound like a prehistoric lullaby, and long before he had run out Mother-in-law got her breath. It's a good thing we weren't using candles, for she would have blown every one at the first blast.

"They roared and growled and thundered at us. Really, it was better than the chorus in 'Aida,' and then they surrounded the girl, who was scared half to death, and dragged her back to their hotel. I'm sure they barricaded the doors when they got there and bribed the entire staff of servants not to let anyone come near that hotel for a week. At any rate, the next day I couldn't reach her by telephone, telegraph, or radio. I tried to say it with flowers, candy, and Coty'a Origan, but couldn't get a word through, and what was worse, she couldn't reach me. I hunted her all day and waited that night at the Gare de l'Est and watched the Vienna Express pull out, and then went home.

"Obviously our elopement was off until her ancestors calmed down, so I spent the next few days trying to find her—haunting the Rue de la Paix and the boulevards, shadowing half a dozen hotels (they had changed theirs) and had about decided that they had left Paris when I read of her marriage to my best friend.

"The blackguard had gone over and talked half the night with them, dug up everything I had ever done and made up a lot more, absolutely double-crossed me with the ancients and turned his oily line on the girl. He even had the nerve to give her the same stuff I'd pulled about bearing the flaming torch of genius and being priestess of the sacred fire, told her I was after her money and didn't love her and then swore his disinterested motives and eternal affection.

"The next day he rounded up half of the French and English nobility as references of his angelic character and even got a special dispensation from the prefect of police for a speedy marriage—and there I was without the girl and her money! Married to my best friend, mind you, the man I'd done everything for all his life. Ha ha ha!"

HAWKINS had been getting more and more excited as he ran on, and I tried to stop him, but he silenced me with a gesture that was almost a threat.

"I read the newspapers every morning now," he continued, his hands clutching spasmodically, "the suicide

column! Some day he'll be there! Some day soon. I've followed him from that day to this, through Berlin, Rome, Vienna, Florence, Munich, even to Moscow, always meeting them, always sending him something. He has a collection of the world's weirdest suicide implements—poisons, daggers, pistols, ropes, everything a man could use to kill himself. For nine months now, wherever he goes, suicide stares him in the face. It's working, too. It's getting into his soul. He's come back to Paris at last, to kill."

He broke off suddenly, his whole body twitching and his mouth open. He was staring over my head as if he had seen a ghost. For an interminable second there was utter silence, then a suave voice broke in.

"Hello, Hawkins! Any more curios for my vicarious collection?"

I turned and recognized Jefferson Southworth, whose fashionable portraits I knew well and whom I had met once or twice a year or more ago, standing in the door. He was smiling half quizzically as he watched Hawkins get up, moving painfully as if his muscles had forgotten how to function, and fade out of the room, still staring like a ghost.

"Too bad, that case," Southworth continued as he came over to the table and shook hands with me. "One of these days he'll kill himself if somebody can't help him."

He tapped his shoulder significantly, holding his arms as if in a sling.

"He tried it a couple of weeks ago but didn't have the nerve. Drove up to the American Hospital in a taxi late one night and shot, but only splintered the shoulder blade. Too bad, too bad, for he had talent."

"What's eating him, Southworth?" I asked. "He's been telling me a strange story. Said it was in payment of a debt, and went so fast I couldn't stop him to ask for the money. And the way he went out just now! You knew him pretty well?"

"Lived with him for years before my marriage last year. Not a pleasant chap, but he showed too much promise to let him go to the dogs. He loved only two things, money and painting. But he seems to love money most lately. He has borrowed from everyone. Don't think yourself singled out by fortune. He not only borrows from his own friends, but from mine as well, which keeps me pretty constantly in scrapes. Oh, well, life's little habits."

He waved his hand as if dismissing the matter.

"He told you the story of his best friend?"

I nodded.

"Me," he said after a pause. "But you know the girl could not be sacrificed even to his pictures. It was perfectly clear that once he got her money she would never see him again."

Then he added very gently, as if speaking to himself, "Besides, we loved each other."

He looked at his watch.

"By the way, you'll meet her. She should drop in here soon to meet me—my wife, you know."

He interrupted himself to order two iced *aperatifs* and then went on, speaking slowly and with absolute sincerity.

"It set him off, losing the money after he'd lived pretty close for so long, and this suicide obsession gets worse and worse. I have tried to help him, indirectly of course, because the fixed idea has fastened on me and I am the last person who could help him directly.

"The most eminent physicians merely shake their heads and refer me to the psychiatrists, who talk about the probability of his committing suicide, but

can offer no definite suggestions. It seems a fairly common case, his subconscious mind always suggesting suicide to him and his conscious always transferring the idea to some victim. I happen to be the victim, but if he ever loses his head and the subconscious gets control, they predict he will carry out its wishes: suicide. Poor devil!"

He stopped and sat a moment studying the frosted glasses. Then he looked up as the door by which he had entered the room, opened. At the same moment the peculiar sobbing laugh came from the bar. With a shudder we both recognized Hawkins' hysterical voice. I turned and caught sight of a beautiful girl standing in the door, her large eyes fixed on the passage into the bar. Her face was slightly flushed and her rapid breathing showed that she, too, recognized that laugh.

SOUTHWORTH laid a restraining hand on my arm, but before he could speak a weird figure stood framed in the door. The bandage was torn, and here and there spots of blood mottled its surface. Hawkins was hardly recognizable —his black hair was disheveled and hung in strands like prison bars across the dead white face. The eyes, burning like live coals, protruded from their sockets and the eyebrows were lifted high on the forehead, giving him a racking look of indecision as if his very soul was torn between two impulses. But strangest of all was the mouth, like a gash in his face, curved at the corners into the strangest of smiles, as if the knife that cut it had slipped.

It was the face of an idiot or a demon, but for a second it gave us all the impression of a frightened child about to cry. Then he moved, and we all saw the automatic he held in his free hand. His eyes shifted back and forth constantly between Southworth and the beautiful girl in the doorway. Neither of them moved perceptibly, but the hand on my arm tightened like a vise.

Slowly the automatic pistol came up, wavered across me until it covered Southworth, lingered an eternal moment on him, then crossed slowly back across me until it covered the girl. Then it retraced its silent path back across me to Southworth, wavering a little. I could see the veins at Hawkins' wrist and hand swollen as if they would burst. Back and forth it traveled, and still no one moved. The only sound was the rasping cough of Hawkins' breathing.

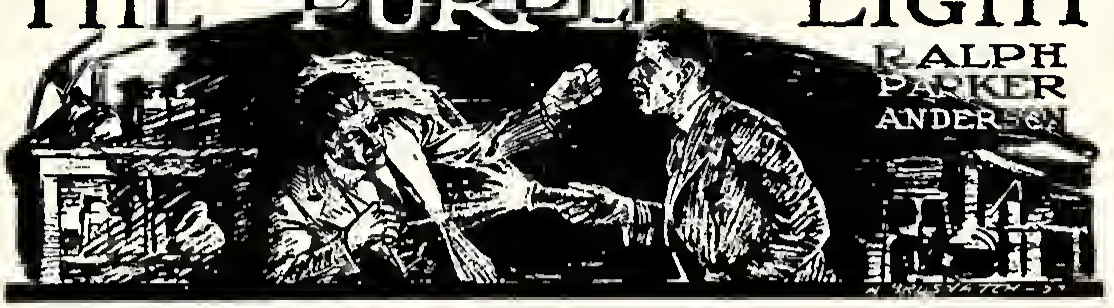
At last he began to talk, whispering hoarsely to himself. Broken phrases reached us.

"Kill him! Pull—the—trigger. Kill her—there she is. Sui—cide!! Stop it! Hold—still. Now—pull—the—trigger. Su. . su. ."

Beads of sweat broke out upon his forehead. His eyes seemed bursting from his head, and the gun moved as if it weighed thousands of pounds. The hoarse whisper became entirely unintelligible and changed gradually into that hacking, sobbing laugh, and suddenly he bowed his head and vanished!

I tried to leap after him, but for a moment my body would not move. Southworth sent the table spinning as he strode toward the girl and then I started down the passageway, but there was a shriek of laughter and a clatter of glass, drowned by the crash of the automatic! Hawkins had paid his debts.

THE PURPLE LIGHT



FOR five years I had loved Lois Howard. Mine was a quiet, sincere love that never found expression in words, for I, a mere inventor, did not pretend to be a sheik. We spent many delightful evenings together and discussed almost every conceivable subject, except that of love. So I should not have been surprised when Lois eloped with John Leighton, an impetuous, romantic young fellow who had been my chum since boyhood days.

But when the news came to me, I felt so intensely jealous that it almost drove me insane. In the solitude of my room, I walked about for hours, cursing and fighting with myself.

As days passed, I learned to take a sane view of the affair. After all, I could not blame Lois, nor would I be justified in condemning Leighton. My love for Lois was so deep that, after the first hours of blind anger, I felt truly glad that she had married my friend, for I knew she would be far happier with him than she could have been with me. When, a month later, I received an invitation to visit the couple in their new home, I felt sufficiently calm to accept.

The home was one of those ideal places seldom found outside of dreamland—a beautiful cottage, set in the midst of a large, luxurious garden with rolling lawns. In the rear was a small grove of trees. The house was furnished in the elegant style that Leighton's wealth permitted, but every corner of it was homelike. In short, it was the sort of home I had told myself that Lois and I would occupy some day.

As I watched Lois moving about the house and observed the affection she displayed for her husband, my fine feelings commenced to disappear. The blind madness of those first few hours returned with doubled force. It wasn't right for Leighton—damn the traitor!—to enjoy these things which should have been mine. He had deliberately taken from me the one thing that would have made life bearable for me: marriage to Lois. I looked at Leighton and saw a cynical devil where before I had seen a friend.

I disguised my feelings, and neither Leighton nor his wife suspected the true state of my emotions. It was an evening of soul-tormenting agony for me, and I was glad when it was late enough for me to leave.

I returned to my house, where an ignorant servant was my only companion. The unattractive rooms, foul-smelling with chemicals that I had used in experiments, were a contrast to the home I had just visited.

I did not sleep that night—nor any succeeding night during the following week. I could not concentrate on work for even a few minutes, although I had almost completed a mechanical invention that gave promise of enormous royalties, and in spite of the fact that I had been engaged in conducting chemical experiments that the scientific world awaited with interest.

Many times I tried to read, but, whether I took a light novel or a technical treatise, I threw the hook aside after a miuute. I tried to find recreation in hunting, but the cold steel of my rifle aroused such thoughts of murder that I did not trust myself. I took long walks, but talked to myself so incessantly and beat my hands so nervously that people whispered to their neighbors, "He has gone crazy."

My face became drawn. Dark circles formed under my eyes, which had acquired a strained, evil expression. My patient servant endured harshness and unreasonableness without complaint. I refused to see any callers. Mail remained unopened, and the telephone rang unanswered.

I lost interest in everything—except revenge. Finally, I sat down and, with paper and pencil, planned various forms of punishment. I did not want to kill Leighton, but intended to devise a plan that would produce the maximum of mental torture and terror.

Some plans were rejected as too common and obvious to suit the scientific side of my nature. Others involved a possibility of detection, which I wanted to be certain of avoiding. Still others were ingenious, but too difficult to carry out.

Eventually, I decided on a plan that pleased me. A load seemed to lift from my mind. For the first time in many hrain-racking days, I experienced a sensation of pleasure. Smiling, I sketched a program for the carrying out of my idea.

That day, I invited Leighton to visit me on Sunday, explaining that I wanted to tell him about a new discovery. There was nothing unusual about this, for I always had described freely to him experiments that I would not have confided to any other living being.

AS SOON as Leighton stepped inside my front door, he stepped hack in amazement.

"You look terrihle, Joe!" he exclaimed.

For a moment, I was disconcerted hy the sympathy evident in his voice.

"You look haggard—all worn out."

"Oh, it's nothing," I said, with a wave of the hand. "Just the result of a little night work, and maybe concentrating a little harder than usual. But listen! You would be willing to forget sleep if you were as close as I am to the most remarkahle invention of ages! In fact, I have already perfected it, and there are just a few details to finish. Sit down, Leighton, and I'll tell you ahout it."

Knowing that I am ordinarily very conservative in all my statements, John Leighton watched me with interest. Always he had been the first to hear about my discoveries, and now it was apparent that he expected something tremendously great.

"I have been devoting my attention to electricity," I started. "After considerable research and countless experiments, I have conceived something that has heen in the back of my mind since I was a boy. And it works—it works! Its usefulness will be great, and its power for evil will be next to that of the devil himself."

"Tell me what it is," Leighton exclaimed impatiently, his curiosity thoroughly aroused.

"I have developed a light—it happens to be purple—which will automatically dissolve anything on which it is turned."

I almost whispered the words.

Leighton, never quick-witted, did not seem to understand. He stared at me.

I repeated the statement, and added, "The power of the light is so great that it will destroy any metal,

body, wood—anything on which it is turned. I suppose I should say that it burns these objects, but the heat is so far beyond any that has formerly been obtained that the word 'heat' gives an exceedingly poor conception of the strength of the purple light. I am proud to say that it is so far beyond any means of destruction yet conceived by man, that there are no words in our language to describe its power properly."

"Why, why, think of the harm it could do!" my ex-friend blurted, understanding at last.

"At present, it is rather unwieldy," I continued, as if I had not been interrupted. "This is necessary, now, because production of the light involves certain chemical reactions at the identical moment when electrical phenomena occur. This must be aided by mechanical means. The resulting contraption occupies almost half my laboratory. But there is nothing to prevent my making the machine compact and portable to the extent that it may be operated anyplace where electricity is obtainable."

"With a few of those machines," Leighton mused, his mind dwelling on the dangerous features, "a handful of men could defy the world. If another war should start, and each side were to obtain the secret of your machine, whole battle lines would be wiped out."

"Not yet," I cautioned. "The machine is still in experimental stages. It will not destroy at a distance greater than six feet, and the surface it can cover is small. However, I have the principles right, and it is just a matter of hours before I can give the light a scope of many miles."

"You mean to say it would be possible to set up the machine a mile from a city and destroy that city in a few hours?" he questioned.

"Not in a few hours, but in less time than it takes me to say this."

"My God! But surely you are joking. That would be impossible. I grant that you may have produced an ultra-powerful light, but one such as you describe would be—well, just impossible."

"Wait!" I said quietly.

I stepped into the laboratory, and a minute later walked out with a few ashes on a piece of transparent glass.

"Yesterday at this time," I explained while Leighton examined the ashes, "that which you see on the glass was a living, breathing animal—a cat. I tied it a foot from the purple light. For an instant, I allowed the light to play on the cat's tail. In that instant, there was a queer puff much like an electrical spark explosion and—the cat was no more! The mere playing of the light on a portion of the animal's tail was sufficient to break up the component parts of its body."

The man I hated had been turning whiter and whiter. Now he handed me the glass weakly and sank back into a chair. He covered his face with his hands and shivered.

As I stood and watched Leighton scornfully, my mind reverted to boyhood incidents. There arose a picture of the time when Johnnie Leighton had fainted at the sight of blood coming from a wound in a stranger's leg. Once, young Johnnie had run screaming from the classroom when our teacher read a gruesome description of a murder. These and other incidents had earned for him the nickname "Sissy," and I had taken upon myself the duty of protecting him. From this had grown our friendship.

Leighton, a man now, but as feminine and excitable as ever, looked up.

"Joe, I suppose I ought to congratulate you, but, somehow, I can't. The whole thing is too gruesome. I—I just want to get out—and think about it."

"You'll come back tomorrow night?"

"Yes," my enemy answered, willing to promise anything in order to get away.

I stood at the front window and watched Leighton leave. He walked down the path toward the street. Several times he stopped, shook his head and seemed about to return. Arriving at the street, he sat on the curb, with his hands over his eyes, for several minutes. I knew that his mind was picturing horrible things that my invention would be capable of accomplishing.

WHEN Leighton called the following evening, my left arm had a handkerchief bandage around it. He immediately expressed concern about this, and wanted to know the nature of my injury.

Jerking off the handkerchief, I bared a horrible burnt spot, several inches square.

Leighton drew in his breath sharply, and tears started to his eyes.

"It's nothing!" I exclaimed laughingly. "The soreness is worth what it taught me. First, I have learned that my purple light does not dissolve a chemically-treated glass of special manufacture. Second, I have learned that, under certain circumstances, it can reflect its power dangerously. You see, this burn was caused by a mere reflection. The portion of heat reflected was almost nothing, so that explains why I am alive today."

I waited for my listener to answer. He had fainted! A little of the proper chemicals placed below his nose quickly revived him.

"Forgive me, Joe," he said weakly, "but you know how I am. Can't stand anything like that. But I must train myself to be different. Go ahead—tell me more about it. I promise you I won't make a fool of myself."

"Sorry I frightened you," I apologized. "There isn't much more to tell. I have added, already, a dozen improvements, and the machine is 50 per cent better. I'll show you what I did today."

I stepped into my laboratory and returned with a mass of metal.

"This metal," I explained, "consists of twelve silver dollars, melted. I arranged for a streak of the light to shoot a few feet. Then I stood above the machine and dropped these dollars. The time during which they passed through the streak of light—considerably less than a hundredth of an inch in width—was sufficient to melt them beyond recognition. The machine was operating under very limited capacity, which explains why the silver was not entirely destroyed. Had I used every feature, the twelve silver dollars would have become so many specks of ash."

"That's certainly remarkable," Leighton managed to say. "I wouldn't believe all this if I didn't see it with my own eyes. How do you explain it?"

"There's no use trying to explain it," I said frankly. "You wouldn't understand. But why is it so remarkable? Aren't you familiar with the almost incredible power of a few grains of radium? Don't you know how quickly a man dies in an electric chair, with comparatively little indication of burning? Don't you know of several chemicals that eat through metals and destroy human skins? I have taken some features of each, and have added devices of my own, the results of years of atomic research. There is nothing miraculous about it. I have merely succeeded in developing an ultra-powerful acid-light, which produces something beyond our accepted conceptions of heat."

"You are never surprised about anything," Leighton said, trying to laugh. "I believe that if you discovered an artificial way of making gold you would be as calm as an iceberg. But, seriously, Joe, I've been thinking about this thing of yours—

this purple light. I really think that you ought to smash up the thing at once. It might do some good—though I don't see how—but it's certain to result in a lot of wholesale killing and vandalism when it falls into the hands of the wrong people. You owe it to the world to forget about it. It's —it's diabolical, and mere Christian decency requires that you destroy it."

I laughed at the nervous man's fears, and switched the conversation to other subjects.

Just before Leighton departed, I invited him to step into my laboratory and view my invention. He refused, shuddering, as I knew he would. I extracted from him a promise that he would call again on Sunday.

When Leighton called on the following Sabbath, he was as much of a wreck as I had been. His eyes were bloodshot with sleeplessness, and his expression indicated the excessive worrying to which he was so susceptible.

As soon as he stepped inside, the man pleaded, "I must ask you not to mention that thing of yours—the light. I can't bear to think about the damned thing!"

"All right," I agreed readily enough.

We went out into the garden, and sat on a bench, discussing old times.

Suddenly, Leighton said, "Joe, I need some nerve, and I'll never have it as long as I permit myself to be a coward. I'm ashamed of myself for asking you to say nothing about your wonderful invention. Tell me all about it—about what you've done with it since I saw you last."

"Step inside and I'll show you an interesting experiment," I invited.

The man on whom I had sworn revenge waited in the library while I spent five minutes in the laboratory.

"I have accomplished what I told you I could do," I explained when I returned. "I have succeeded in focusing the purple light accurately and in casting it great distances. Step over here and watch the purple light have its effect on Pan's Tombstone. You can watch from this window while I go into the laboratory and operate the machine."

Pan's Tombstone was a rock, weighing several tons, that stuck up in an empty field a half-mile away.

Less than five minutes after I returned to the laboratory there was a deafening roar and Pan's Tombstone flew into a thousand pieces.

I stepped back into the library, and found Leighton, breathing heavily, clutching the walls for support.

"I played the light less than a thousandth of a second, and not at full force," I remarked casually. "Otherwise the rock would have crumbled into nothing. I wanted to make it interesting for you."

Color slowly returning to his face, Leighton rushed up to me and shook me.

"Joe!" he screamed. "You must, you *must* destroy that thing! Tell me you will!"

"Of course not," I said quietly.

Without looking at me again, Leighton grabbed his hat and rushed out, running down the path as if the devil were after him.

DURING all that week I was happy. My plans had worked perfectly, and now I was ready. Yes, ready for the revenge that would be worthy of a great scientist! My hate had not lessened in the least, and I looked forward to the occasion with anticipations that thrilled me.

On the following Sunday night, I telephoned to John Leighton.

"Yes?" he snapped, his voice far from cordial.

"I want you to come over this evening."

"Not for a million dollars! You're welcome to come over here, Joe, but I simply can't stand being near that

purple light of yours, and seeing the things it does."

"Oh, forget it!" I laughed. "If that's the trouble, I promise faithfully that I won't mention it, or show you any of its handiwork."

"No, I'm sorry, but I won't come."

"Please come," I pleaded. "I'm lonesome, and, now that you're happily married, surely you owe your best friend that much."

"Oh, well, if you put it that way—I'll come."

I found some letters that Leighton had written me when we were boys. After he arrived, I read them to him. We laughed for hours at the amusing incidents and queer phraseology. I found the old regard for my chum returning, but smothered the feeling.

I excused myself, saying that I wanted to get a drink of water. Out of Leighton's sight, I rushed to the back porch and pulled the switch, putting the house in darkness. While there, I placed an object in my pocket.

When I returned, Leighton, from his comfortable chair in the corner, said, "Funny the way the lights went out so suddenly, wasn't it?"

"Funny, eh?" I snarled, releasing the pent-up hatred of weeks. "I suppose you thought it was funny when you married the girl I love, too, didn't you? Thought you were putting one over on me! Well, Mr. Leighton, your friend Joseph happens to be just a little too smart for you."

A queer little laugh came from the dark corner.

"Joe, another of your pranks! Stop your fooling and turn on the light."

"I'm not fooling," I said evenly. "I always loved, and still love, Lois. All those things I invented—everything I did—was for her. Then you, a wolf in sheep's clothing, came, and you took her away.

"I've thought it all over," I continued, secretly glad that my voice was hard and firm. "I hate you. Therefore I'm going to punish you. It won't be wrong, because no wrong could equal the wrong you have done me—the agony you have caused me—the remorse—"

When Leighton interrupted, I was surprised at the tone of courage in his voice.

"Joe, I didn't know that you loved her. You have been, always, more than a brother to me, and your happiness means more to me than my own. If Lois loves you, pal, I'll gladly step out of the picture. I mean it. If you had only told me—"

For a moment, my anger cooled. How typical of Johnnie Leighton this was—this fine self-sacrifice. I knew, deep in my heart, that he meant every word of it—that he would have died for me. But I gave myself a mental shaking, the moment of saneness was gone, and anger dimmed my brain again.

"You liar!" I screamed. "You hypocrite! You thief! God, how I hate you! You've ruined my life, and now I'm going to take yours in payment. It won't be hard on you—I'm that generous—and there won't be any evidence. Just you, and a purple light, and then only the purple light."

"No! No!" Leighton shouted in trembling tones.

He placed his hands on the arms of his chair and started to get up, but fright had weakened him so that he could not move.

My heart leaped with joy. I could see him dimly, for we were now used to the blackness of the room.

"Yes, just a little purple light," I sneered.

Every word had the effect of the turning of a dagger in a wound, and Leighton was suffering. "A pretty light it is, too. Watch it closely, because it will be the last thing you will see on this earth."

In the gloom I could see that Leighton was staring at me in open-

mouthed terror. I feared that he would faint and so spoil the sweetness of my revenge.

At that moment, I snapped the object I had been holding. A ray of purple light framed Leighton's face—a picture I shall never forget. There was one terrifying scream, and then he fell back, his face distorted in a horrible grimace.

FOR several minutes I stood, stupidly staring at the corner. Then I walked slowly over to the figure in the chair. I shook Leighton, but there was no response—no breathing, no heartbeat. My God, he was dead!

Tears streaming down my cheeks, and crying like a bereaved mother, I fell on my knees before the chair and grasped my chum's hands.

"It was just an ordinary searchlight, with a purple lens!" I cried, raising my voice as if I could pierce his deaf ears if I shouted loud enough.

"I fooled you! I was jealous, and a little mad, and I wanted to make you suffer. Johnnie, Johnnie, I didn't want to kill you! Listen to me!

"I never had any purple light machine! I just took some ashes from the fire and told you they had been a cat. I melted some metal in a hot furnace and told you the purple light had done it. I had my servant dynamite the rock at just the right minute. I burned my arm with a sun glass!"

All through the never-ending night, I sobbed at the feet of my friend. Again and again, I explained—as if explanations would bring him back to life!

At dawn, passersby heard my moans, and called the police. They found me praying at his feet, murmuring: "It was only an ordinary purple light—just a searchlight."

There was an investigation, but I was not convicted. The coroner's verdict was that John Leighton had died as the result of heart failure, occasioned by fright. How could I be convicted for frightening a man?

I presented the entire story to the court in its worst angles. I definitely asked for conviction, feeling that I must suffer for my sin. But how could the court find me a murderer? I was "not guilty."

"Not guilty!" Yes, in the eyes of the law, but in the brighter eyes of my soul I am a murderer—the murderer of the best friend that any man ever had.

My days are torments. My nights are nightmares, with always a twisted face in a purple light.

I can't stand it! I can't stand it! Must I take the law into my own hands and . . .

WEIRD CRIMES

By SEABURY QUINN

No. 7. The Human Hyena

"*MILLE TONNERRES!* Again?"

The prefect of police beat the polished top of his *bureau* with a furious fist and bent a stare of angry incredulity on the *sergeant de sûrète* who stood at attention before him.

"It has happened again, do you say? *Nom d'un nom!* Is a policeman never to sleep again in this accursed city?"

"Even so, *Monsieur le Prefet,*" replied the sergeant imperturbably. "Another of the poor ones has been dragged from her blessed rest—"

"And dismembered, ha?" the prefect fairly thundered.

"Yes, *Monsieur;* dismembered, even as the others."

"*Nom d'un p'tit bonhomme!*" exclaimed the prefect. Then, feeling that "the name of a good little man" was scarcely a strong enough oath for the occasion, he added, "*et nom de Dieu!*"

He drummed a moment on the polished surface of his desk with nervous fingers, regarding his companion thoughtfully. "*Eh, bien,*" he said at last. "A way must be found to lay this sly one by the heels, not?"

"Perfectly, *Monsieur,*" agreed the sergeant.

"Has a guard been placed in all the cemeteries?"

"Not all, *Monsieur;* the city is so unsettled, the gendarmes are sorely needed for patrol duty—"

"Yes, yes; I understand," the prefect interrupted. "We must decide upon some other way. Leave me, I will think this thing over. Something must be done at once. *Pardieu!* 'tis getting so no man can sleep peacefully, even in his grave!"

The sergeant saluted, placed his right foot exactly six inches behind his left, swung round in a perfect about-face, and left the room, closing the door noiselessly behind him.

Alone, the prefect of the Paris police lighted a long, thin cigar and stared fixedly at his office wall, blowing clouds of rancid tobacco smoke from his nose.

The prefect's hands were very full. It was the autumn of 1848, and France was in such turmoil as she had not known since the days of the Directory. That summer the people had risen; Louis Philippe, the last of the Bourbons, had fled to England under the assumed name of Mr. Smith, and a second republic had been declared, with Lamartine, the poet-historian, as its provisional head. But reactionary plots were thicker in Paris than maggots in a cheese, and the gendarmerie were kept busy guarding the life of the infant republic.

Taking advantage of the policemen's political preoccupation, criminals of all sorts and degrees were plying their nefarious trades, often in broad daylight; and no man's life or property were safe. Now, added to this ordinary, run-of-the-mill crime, a new scandal had broken out in the city and environs of Paris.

Several cemeteries within or near the city limits had been broken into during darkness, and many graves had been rifled.

At first the depredations had been ascribed to medical students seeking cadavers for anatomical study, but

brief investigations by the police proved this theory unsound. Had body-snatchers been responsible, the bodies would have been carried away. As it was, the corpses were found lying about the opened graves and broken tombs *in fragments*.

"A wild beast! A hyena escaped from a circus!" people said; but here, again, the clue proved groundless. With characteristic thoroughness, such as ever distinguishes French police methods, the officers had visited every circus and zoological collection within twenty miles of Paris, inquiring if any of them had suffered a loss from their cages.

Once a clue seemed within grasp, for a circus owner admitted having lost an animal, but the missing beast was a panther.

"Had *Monsieur le propriétaire* ever possessed one of those so interesting beasts, a hyena?"

"Alas, *Monsieur le propriétaire* was desolated to inform the gentlemen of the police, it had never been his good fortune to include such an interesting exhibit of Asia's fauna among his collection. Lions? Certainly. Tigers? But of course. Leopards? Most assuredly. Panthers, jaguars, pumas? *Mais oui*. But a hyena? Ah, *non; mais non*. Monsieur the proprietor was grieved and shamed to admit it, but no such splendid animal as a hyena had he ever possessed."

The gendarmes shrugged their shoulders and proceeded with their quest.

ONE morning came an urgent message from the intendant of Père la Chaise cemetery. A most flagrant outrage had been committed the night before. The body of a young matron, buried in a five-year concession, had been taken from its coffin and literally hacked to pieces with a gravedigger's spade.

The gendarmes went to the cemetery, and, inured to shocking sights though their profession had made them, their weather-beaten faces went gray at the spectacle of that poor, violated woman's body. Blows of brutal strength had sheared limbs from torso, the face was mashed to an unrecognizable mass with the spade's long handle, the top of the head had been beaten to a bloody softness with a board wrenched from the coffin's headboard.

And beside the grave, in the mud of last night's rain, were footprints, long, slender footprints, the sort of tracks a well-shod gentleman's boots might leave.

"A clue! At last, a clue!" the detectives exclaimed. But, like all previous ones, this clue led nowhere. The soft, moist earth held the prints up to the cemetery's very gate; but the paving flints of the street outside had no testimony to offer. Even if the miscreant had left tracks of his muddy boots on the stones, the very rain that had made the footprints visible in the cemetery would have washed away all traces long before the officers arrived.

Hard pressed though they were by other duties, the police assigned guards to Père la Chaise, and the depredations ceased—at Père la Chaise.

But another cemetery, less than a mile away, was entered, and the body of a little girl, a child but two years past her first communion, was dragged from a three-year concession and shamefully maltreated.

Journalism, then as now, was avidly on the trail of scandal, and the Paris press began resting from its political tirades to abuse the police. Republican and Royalist papers were in harmony on this theme; one and all they called for the immediate apprehension of the monster who disturbed the repose of the blessed dead or the resignation of an impotent prefect of police.

Yet all efforts were unavailing. When all cemeteries were under dou-

ble guard, the human hyena never put in an appearance. Let the guard be relieved for but a single night, and some poor woman's body lay unearthed and horribly mangled under next morning's sun.

All these things the prefect of police thought of as he smoked his acrid cigar in his *cabinet* and drummed upon the polished surface of his desk. "*Morbleu!*" he muttered. "We must seize this monster, this assassin of the sleep of the dead. We must; we must; *we must!*"

But how? The fellow's knowledge of preparations for his apprehension was uncanny. Almost, it seemed, some unfaithful member of the police establishment was giving him information. How else explain his absence from guarded cemeteries, his inevitable raids upon those not protected with gun and bayonet?

"Ah, ha, I have it!" The prefect sat suddenly forward in his chair and rang for his orderly. "Send for the armorer," he ordered, when his call was answered; "this assassin shall apprehend himself. We will set a trap for him. The plan is formed; now let us to work. *Nom d'un nom!* Why did I never think of this before?"

Rapidly, the prefect sketched his plan for the criminal's apprehension, the gunsmith he had summoned nodding understandingly at intervals. "Can you do it?" the prefect asked, at length.

"Yes, *Monsieur,*" the armorer answered, "I am quite certain it can be arranged."

Hurried preparations took place in the *matériel* department of police headquarters all next day. Before twilight faded into night, the walls of every cemetery throughout Paris bristled with spring guns so cleverly arranged that any one attempting to enter the graveyards except through their gates must necessarily come in contact with concealed wires which, touched never so lightly, would discharge the cocked and doubly loaded muskets. With these automatic sentries on duty before the city's graves, the prefect was able to reduce his human guards to one or two men for each burying ground, leaving some score or more gendarmes free for patroling the troubled city's streets.

AUTUMN ripened into winter. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon the Great, was chosen president of the new republic by an overwhelming vote and was triumphantly inaugurated on the twentieth of December. With a relative of the "Little Corporal" at its head, the young republic felt assured of continued existence, and the Paris police were able to turn their attention from sedition hunting to thief catching. The palmy days of crime were ended, and the press ceased its abuse of the police. But the human hyena was still at large.

Almost with the establishment of the spring guns in the cemeteries, his nocturnal raids ceased, and the prefect was about to relieve the graveyard guards and dismount the guns when—

On a rainy, dismal night in March, 1849, the gendarmes stationed at St. Parnasse cemetery huddled for shelter beneath the pentice of the chapel. The rain, wind-driven between the leafless branches of the poplar trees, beat dismally down upon the age-stained marble tombs and the rough, unsodded mounds of the ten-year concessions. Off by the further wall of the cemetery, beneath their ghastly white wooden signboards, the five and three-year concessions seemed to cower from the storm. These were the graves of the poorer dead, for in France there were four classes of burials besides those of the Potters' Field. First were those rich enough to own their tombs or grave lots in perpetuity. They slept the long, long sleep of death undisturbed. Next

came the ten-year concessionaires, whose relatives had bought them the right to lie in moderately deep graves for a decade, after which they would be exhumed and deposited in a common charnel-house, all trace of their identity lost. The five-year concessions graves were scarcely deeper than the height of the coffins they enclosed, and their repose was limited to half a decade, while the three-year concessions (placed nearest the cemetery walls) were merely mounds of earth heaped over coffins resting on the surface of the ground, destined to be broken down and emptied thirty-six months after their tenants' burial.

"*Pardieu!*" one of the gendarmes swore, sinking lower under his waterproof cape. "What a night—and what a place. Better a thousand times the battlefield than such a patrol. The shout of conflict, the crash of musketry—"

Bang! The report of a discharged rifle cut through his words, and a streak of yellow-red fire tore the rain-drenched darkness above the wall beyond the three-year concessions.

"*Nom d'un coq!*" exclaimed the startled gendarme, leaping to his feet and grasping his sable hilt. "It is he; the *canaille* has come!"

Together the officers raced across the boggy graves, their drawn swords glistening dully in the rain. Impeded in their progress by the mud and darkness, they were in time to see a dark figure in a military mantle leap the wall and disappear in the gloom.

Marks of blood, however, gave evidence the spring gun's bullet had struck its mark, and a scrap of blue cloth clinging to one of the iron spikes with which the wall was topped afforded an added clue to the ravisher of the graves.

"*Un soldat!*" the elder of the gendarmes pronounced. "Alss, that a follower of that noble profession should sink to such a crime!"

Next morning the search was on in earnest. From barracks to barracks the gendarmes went, inquiring if any of the military personnel had reported himself suffering from gunshot wounds.

Almost immediately they found their man in the person of Lieutenant Bertrand, a junior officer of an infantry regiment stationed in the capital. Not only did this young man show such a wound as would match the spring gun's ball, but his cloak was ripped by some sharp instrument, and the fragment of cloth in the gendarmes' possession matched the rent. Their circumstantial case was complete.

The wounded man was confined under guard at Vale de Grâce hospital till his wound was healed, then placed on trial.

In England or America his hearing would have been before a civil tribunal, for (during time of peace) in these countries the civil power is separate from and superior to the military; but France, though a republic, was still imbued with continental European ideas of jurisprudence, maintaining one general law for the citizenry and another, or administrative system, for the military and official classes. Consequently, it was not a civil criminal court, but a court-martial, which heard Bertrand'a case.

The judge advocate was relieved of the necessity of proving his case, for the young lieutenant made a free confession, revealing one of the most amazing stories ever detailed before a judicial inquiry.

He was twenty-three years of age, excellently educated, having been a student at the theological seminary at Langes from early youth until, at the age of twenty, he had entered the army with a junior lieutenant's commission. He was a young man of retiring habits, frank and cheerful to his comrades in arms, and beloved by every member of his regiment from

the colonel to the newest conscript private. Numbers of his brother officers testified to his almost feminine delicacy of refinement, and to the fact that he was, at times, seized with inexplicable fits of depression and melancholy, none of which, however, led to sullenness with his superiors or equals, or churliness with his inferiors.

According to his own statement, made under oath, in February, 1847, as he was walking with a friend in the country, he came to a churchyard, the gate of which stood open. The day before a woman had been buried, but the sexton had not completed his melancholy task of filling the grave, having been interrupted by a sudden storm of rain.

Bertrand had noticed the spade and pick lying beside the partially filled grave, and, getting rid of his friend by a ruse, he caught up the spade and began hurriedly to unearth the coffin.

To quote from his statement:

"Soon I dragged the corpse out of the grave and began to hash it with the spade without well knowing what I was about. A laborer saw me, and I laid myself flat to the ground *(ventre a terre)* till he was out of sight; then I cast the body back into the grave.

"I then went away, bathed in a cold sweat, to a little grove, where I reposed for several hours, notwithstanding the cold rain which fell. I was in a state of complete exhaustion. When I arose, my limbs were as broken and my head was weak. The same prostration and sensation followed each attack."

The prisoner had suffered no further attack during the subsequent four or five months, and had begun to regard his rural experience as a fit of temporary madness—indeed, he sometimes wondered whether it had not been simply a sort of waking nightmare, and had actually never occurred at all.

In the summer of 1848 his regiment was ordered for duty to Paris, and among the sights he visited was the cemetery of Père la Chaise. While walking through the shadowy alleys of this great metropolis, the irresistible craving to mutilate a corpse swept over him like a flood.

That night he scaled the cemetery's wall, disinterred a body and cut it to pieces.

This was the beginning of the mysterious cases of ghoulism which had so baffled and puzzled the police of the French capital.

At first, Bertrand stated, the morbid fits followed an overindulgence in wine (his life at the seminary had been most abstemious); but later they came upon him without exciting cause.

Though police records failed to disclose so great a number, Lieutenant Bertrand stated he had unearthed twenty-five bodies, several of them being men. These last he had "gloated over," but never dismembered, this fiendishness being exercised only upon female corpses.

Army physicians and several eminent civilian practitioners subjected the young man to such tests as science of that day afforded, and pronounced him sane. The finding of the court was, therefore, that he be shorn of his buttons and insignia of rank and his sword broken in the presence of his regiment, after which he be confined in a disciplinary barracks for the period of one year and be dishonorably discharged from the army.

The sentence was carried out.

THE case of this unfortunate young man presents many interesting questions for the medical jurist. Taking his early life and training into account, and remembering how he must have lived almost entirely in unworldly surroundings, apart from wholesome feminine society, it is

not very difficult to imagine the basis of his original perversion. To use a good, though much overworked and loosely employed term, he was the victim of a "complex"; that is, a series of emotionally accentuated ideas in a repressed state.

Like Gilles de Laval, the Sire de Retz, whose case has already been discussed,* the celebrated "Jack, the Ripper," whose crimes mystified the London police a generation ago, and the infamous Marquis de Sade, Lieutenant Bertrand unquestionably suffered from that form of mental derangement known to modern psychiatrists as algolagnia, coupled, perhaps, with what is called coprophilia, or a pathological liking for filth, this last being shown by his desire to associate with interred corpses.

His periods of great excitement while indulging his disgusting mania for the mutilation of dead bodies, and the following periods of profound lassitude, all point plainly to this in the light of modern psychiatry, though these same symptoms were the cause of some odd speculations by several observers of the case.

The late Dr. Sabine Baring-Gould, a profound student of folk lore and anthropology, naïvely suggested Bertrand to be the victim of demoniacal possession; while Elliott O'Donnell believes (or affects to believe) him a werewolf!

To substantiate this surprising theory, he tells of a young French woman, one Constance Armande, who was suddenly seized with an uncontrollable desire to enter a house of mourning, seize the body lying in its open coffin, and eat portions of it. Two cases of lunacy cited to prove one absurd superstition!

Whatever the facts of Bertrand's case, it is not to be denied he suffered a great injustice through the sentence of the court-martial, since the crimes he committed were obviously of a pathological origin, and by his own statement committed under the urge of an irresistible impulse. His moral sense told him he was doing a wrong, but, able though he was to distinguish the criminal nature of his acts, he was unable to resist the dictates of his mania.**

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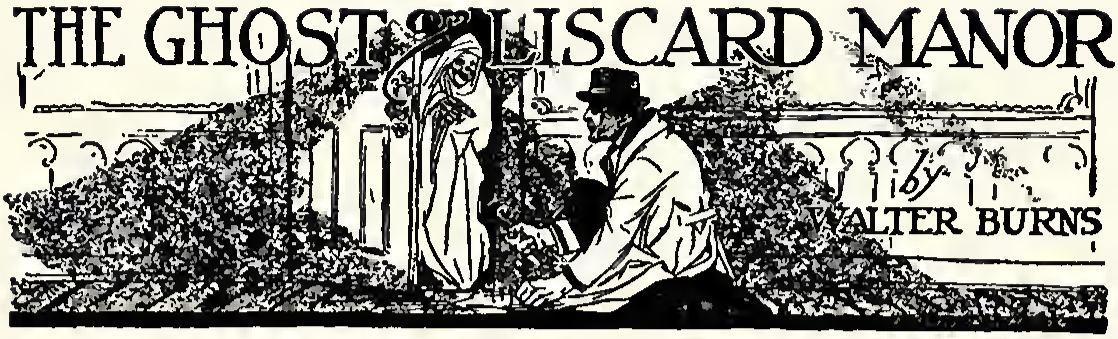
* *See Article I of this series, "Bluebeard," October, 1923, Weird Tales. (This magazine was the first to have the courage to make public the shocking revelations of the original "Bluebeard's" trial.)*

** *In these circumstances, a perfect defense of insanity might have been legally raised. See Clark, or any other standard work on Criminal Law.—S. Q.*

THE GHOST OF LISCARD MANOR



by WALTER BURNS

JACK HARDING shook the water from his rain soaked hat and stood looking at the strong, high, rust-encrusted gates of the main entrance to the grounds of Liscard Manor.

Throughout the three miles of his tramp from the suburbs of the manufacturing town the rain had fallen in sheets, but now, as if it had abandoned the idea of subduing this figure who so persistently stumbled through the mud and darkness, the rain had ceased. Great rifts appeared in the low, scuttling clouds, disclosing at intervals—now long, now short—the silver sphere of the full moon.

Jack Harding felt a momentary shiver pass through his rain soaked frame. It may have been the chill of the wind as it whispered through the naked branches of a nearby oak; and yet his circulation was still strong, his breath was scarcely down to normal. Throughout his three mile walk through the rain and mud he had not paused or slackened his pace, but plodded as one who, having before him an unpleasant task, seeks to have done with it with the utmost possible dispatch.

It seemed hardly possible that two short hours before he had been seated at his ease in the warm, almost luxurious room, the guest of the local Commerce Club of a busy manufacturing town in the County of Lancashire, England.

Jack Harding was in England on business for his firm, Messrs. Franklin & Goldstine of New York, who controlled a chain of department stores throughout the Eastern States.

His business at an end and, having two more days before he could return to New York, he had, at the request of some of the business men of the town, delayed his departure for Liverpool and become a guest at the dinner held in honor of a visiting magnate.

The dinner over, and the last speech made, a party of the younger members had retired to the smoking room of the club. The conversation had turned to the supernatural, for, being free for the time from the cares of commerce, they chose a topic as remote as possible from the usual, as a workman, leaving his work bench, dresses in his best clothes and saunters at his leisure through the residential part of the city.

It was young Saunders (the son of the man who had, early in the evening, spoken at length upon matters more or less of interest to the members present) who first mentioned the haunted manor outside the limits of the town.

"It's a weird looking pile, half ruins," he said, leaning back in his chair, a look of devilment on his slightly flushed, good-looking, boyish features.

"Yes, sir. Precisely at two in the morning, you know," smiled Saunders, turning to Jack Harding. "We rather pride ourselves in having in our ghost something out of the ordi-

nary. None of this twelve o'clock idea, you know—at two o'clock to the minute! With regards to the cause of this phenomenon, I'm afraid we are rather ordinary—the old chap, returning from the wars, finds his thrice beloved spouse in the arms of another—an oath—a scream from the lady—a flash of naked steel, and the ever-widening pool of blood on the floor—and all that, you know."

"And you really believe all that bosh about the lady walking through the room at two in the morning?" Harding asked incredulously.

"Absolutely!" Saunders answered, throwing the stub of his cigar into the open fireplace. "It would hardly be considered the thing not to. There was one chap put in there as caretaker or something; he commenced his duties at three one Saturday afternoon and resigned at five minutes past two on Sunday morning. Old Johnson, the bobby who patrols that part, saw him soon after his resignation. He said he was making remarkably good time, considering the old chap's age and the fact that he toddles round with the aid of a wooden leg."

The company chuckled at the idea of the old man, his whiskers flying in the wind, as he tore hippity-skip down the dark road, with the one idea of putting a great distance between himself and the manor in the shortest possible time.

"But seriously," continued Saunders, as the laughter died, "I for one would not care to wander round the old place at night. I have been round in the day time, and that is quite sufficient."

"And was another caretaker installed after the old fellow quit in such a hurry?" asked Harding, with a smile, half-amused, half-contemptuous.

Saunders sat a little more erect in his chair as he detected the slightly contemptuous tone of the American.

"Yes, sir," he replied, "there have been several who have tried it, some tempted by the offer of a large salary and an easy job; also others have tried it for the love of adventure. Up to date no one has stayed overnight. Is that not so, gentlemen?" he asked, turning to several of the members.

They nodded gravely.

"There is something out of the ordinary about the old place," remarked one of the elderly gentlemen who had joined the party and stood listening. "But as to no one being able to stay in the place over night, I am afraid our young friend here, Mr. Saunders, is rather overdoing it."

Saunders leaned back in his chair, his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets.

"Nevertheless, sir," he answered, "I am prepared to wager any gentleman present that he will not do so."

All eyes turned in the direction of Harding. It was evident that they looked to him for an answer. He was annoyed at the evident trap into which he had fallen. But there was only one thing to do—accept the wager.

Drawing a leather bill fold from his pocket, he addressed Saunders: "And how much will you bet that I don't go there tonight and stay until daylight tomorrow morning?"

Saunders sat upright in his chair joyfully.

"I'll wager twenty pounds, sir—that is, one hundred dollars in your money—that you will not go to the manor alone, enter and remain there until daylight. As proof that you have been there, you are to hammer five large-headed nails into the floor of the room where the ghost is supposed to enter. Is that agreeable to you, Mr. Harding?"

Harding rubbed his chin thoughtfully. It seemed fair enough. He nodded his head.

"Yes, I guess that suits me all right," he answered.

The elder members tried to persuade Harding from his foolish errand, but he felt he could not very well draw out without becoming the laughingstock of the rest.

"My dear sir—this is foolishness! It's raining like the devil; you'll be simply drenched before you are half way there," they remonstrated.

But the younger men pressed forward and outnumbered the reasoning of the elders.

"Oh, rot! Absolutely rot, sirs!" they joined in chorus.

A taxi was called. Harding and Saunders, with as many more as could possibly climb in or hang on, made their way in the taxi to the hotel where Harding and Saunders were staying. It was only a matter of minutes for Harding to change from evening dress to a traveling suit, more appropriate for the business in hand. More from habit than anything else, he slipped the strap of his holster over his shoulder, then a heavy ulster over his suit, and with a soft hat in his hand, joined the others in the bar.

A few more drinks—in most cases, including Saunders, a few too many—and they climbed into the waiting taxi.

"We'll run you as far as the outskirts, old man, and then all you'll have to do is to follow the main road until you come to a signpost, turn to your right and follow the road. You can't miss it," said Saunders.

He thrust an ivory handled revolver into Harding's hand, together with hammer and nails.

"Don't try and hammer the nails with the gun and shoot the ghost with the hammer," he jokingly advised, as the taxi came to a stand beneath the last street lamp of the town.

Scrambling out, they stood shaking hands and slapping Harding on the shoulders.

"Just to show you fellows what business men we Americans are, if I do meet the lady, I'll sell her a dress length of your own cloth," he chuckled.

Leaving the crowd standing under the light of the street lamp, he turned in the direction of the manor and strode at his best pace through the rain.

HARDING shook the gates of the Park, but they were locked and apparently had not been unlocked for years. If the caretakers had jumped the job so hurriedly, it was evident that they had not departed by means of the gate.

The gate was at least twelve feet high and adorned with sharp twisted spikes, once gilded, but now poisonous with rust. Peering through the bars, he watched the shadows of the clouds race across the rank weeds that overgrew the lawn and drives. So rank were they that he could only judge the direction the drive took by the two lines of trees standing like sentinels, their naked branches dripping from the recent rain, swinging and whispering in the wind.

In the distance, when the moon shone its brightest, he could see the dark outline of a large building. This was evidently the manor, and some few yards from the gate, the lodge, where, in the years of prosperity, the lodgekeeper had lived.

Harding could picture it all now as he stood there peering—the stout gatekeeper running forth from the rose-covered door, the huge key of the gate in his hands; the swinging open of the great gates on their well-oiled hinges; the rattle of "milady's" carriage as it swung through; the rocking horses straining at the traces in their eagerness for the warm stable and oats; the postilion holding the horses in with a firm hand, his long curled hair bobbing to the time of the horses' manes.

But now the iron trellis work that had stood before the door of the lodge, rose-covered in summer, spar-

kling with frost and snow in winter, was hroken. Leaning drunkenly against the wall of the house, the eave trough, atill dripping water, was ragged and broken. The glass in the windows was broken or gone entirely. and only the diamond-shaped frames showed green with mold in the moonlight. One never knows how the windows of the houses become hroken, hut they always do. Certainly it was not the boys from the nearhy village; they wonld not have ventured near the manor for all the candy in Mother Brown's shop.

Harding awoke from his revery with a start. Standing mooning here was of no use. He glanced at his watch in the moonlight. One o'clock. He would have to get busy if he was going to drive those nails.

Passing farther along the high atone wall which surrounded the Manor Park. he found an entrance where the lichen-covered wall had crumbled away. Undoubtedly thia was what the caretakers had used as a means of exit. Scrambling over the pile of stonc at the foot of the gap, Harding entered the park.

The shadows of the clouds were still racing across the open, and the wind was gaining in atrength. The trees nodded and clashed their hranches as if in anger at the audacity of this intruder. Harding atood for a moment looking about him. Again that shiver crept over him, in spite of aums in mental arithmetic with which he tried to keep his imagination from gaining control of him.

That shiver cansed him to ahrug his shoulders as if aomething vile had hrushed against him.

As he made hia way along the avenue of trees, his teeth clenched. and adding an imaginary column of figures, he was startled out of control by a huge owl. As it glided on ailent wings ahove his head, it gave forth a mournful hoot.

Harding cringed as if the owl had struck him. His heart ceased its wild heating and leapt into hia throat. Unconscious that he spoke alond, he crouched against the trunk of a tree and gasped: "And nine'a, ninety—now what in blazes was that? Of all the honc-headed stunts I ever pulled, this is the daddy of 'em all."

There was no doubt about it, Harding's nerve was on edge. It had aeemed easy, back there in the well-lit cluh-room, to scoff at the supernatural, but here, alone, with only owls and hats for company—

He pulled himself together with an effort. His hand, thrust into the pocket of his ulster, came into contact with the cold hutt of the revolver—a comforting feeling. There is something about the feeling of a gun which gives confidence to a man and a feeling of power.

He finished the remaining distance to the manor almost at a run, and stood looking up at the high rambling building, its mullioned windows in a worse atate of repair than those of the lodge. The main entrance was approached by a broad flight of atone steps. At the foot of either balustrade, perched on a square column, sat the carved image of aome hideous animal of unknown species, one forepaw balancing a shield that bore the crest of the family.

Somehow, Harding could not bring himaelf to mount those steps and try the massive door. The moon played such tricks with the clouds that the whole building aecmed to be peopled with moving shadows. Oncc Harding thought he saw some one watching him from the shadow of the eastern wing—a still tall form, which beckoned silently with ontstretched arm and hand.

He atumbled hackwards, fcarful of turning his back to that silent figure. Again his hand found and grasped the cold hutt of the revolver. Again that feeling of confidence came to

him, less this time, to be sure, but still sufficient to check him. Courageously he forced himself, step by step, in the direction of the beckoning figure, the revolver in his outstretched hand, the barrel making erratic curves as he advanced.

He was at the foot of the steps when his hand sank to his side and his heart resumed its beating. The figure was nothing but a fallen piece of masonry, the beckoning hand a branch of ivy, its leaves trembling in the wind.

Harding leaned against the stone column and laughed, not the deep hearty laugh of mirth, but the shrill cackle of breaking nerves. Had he been wise, he would have abandoned this foolish stunt right then and returned to the jeers and comfort of his fellow beings. But Harding was too cowardly to be afraid. As much as he wished himself out of the business, he feared the laughter of the others far more.

There was only one thing to do: climb in by some window and find the room. It would not take long to hammer the nails, then he could crouch in some corner, his back to the wall, and wait for the dawn.

The window found, he was soon inside and feeling in his pocket for a match. Such was his haste to obtain a comforting light, that three matches were broken before he obtained it. He could see by the feeble light of the match that he was in a large bar room. The floor was rotting away, the boards crumbling under his feet; on the side farthest from the window was a door.

Another match lit, he carefully passed through and found himself in a large hall. He had been instructed to ascend the broad flight of stairs leading to the upper story and enter the first room on the right. Here he was to hammer the nails and wait for daylight.

He hastily mounted the stairs, on tiptoe, as if fearful of all sound, and stood at the door of the fateful room. It took the last atom of his courage to enter. He leaned against the door, and stood looking round a bare, large room. There was no need for matches here, for the moon shone through the casement as bright as day.

A bat, on silent wings, flew into the room, and after circling round, departed as silently as it had entered. A rat scuttled from a corner, crossed the floor and disappeared behind the wainscoting. That was all.

The silence was so intense that he could hear his heart pounding as if it would burst. The breath in his throat whistled and gurgled and his tongue felt like a piece of parched leather, as he vainly sought to moisten his dry lips.

With trembling hands, he fumbled in his coat for the hammer and nails and forced himself from the door to the center of the room. His one idea, the only idea his fast-numbing brain could form, was to drive home the nails and get his back once more against something solid.

Hastily dropping to his knees, he grasped the hammer with nerveless fingers. The first blow he struck echoed through the house like the boom of a cannon.

For a full half minute he crouched motionless, then, with frantic haste he wielded the hammer. Blow after blow crashed upon his fingers until the blood spurted, but he was not conscious of this.

The wall! Get his back against the wall! That was all he thought.

THE FOURTH nail was driven—it seemed that he had been hammering there for years—when some unknown power made him pause and look about him.

The moon shone directly upon the door—shone upon the oval knob of the handle; and the knob, like the relentless second hand of the watch of death, was slowly turning.

He did not know it, bnt now he was moaning—his reason was fast leaving him. As the handle finished its turning, the door eommenced to open, inch by inch, foot by foot, until it revealed a shapeless, hideous figure, bathed in the sickly light of the moon. Slowly, without apparent effort, it drifted, rather than walked, toward the center of the room. One shapeless arm, which seemed to be detached from the rest of the body, pointed toward him.

He attempted to rise and make a dash for the window — better be dashed to pieces in the courtyard below than cronch there with this thing slowly advancing toward him. But he could not rise—the extended arm seemed to have stricken him powerless. Strive as he might, he could not move. If this thing would only speak or make a sound; but it stood there motionless. Even the rats had ceased their scuffling and remained silent in their holes.

Something like a taut violin string seemed to snap in his brain. Stark madness took the place of fear. Grasping the revolver, he aimed at the silent figure. Again and again he pressed the trigger. The roar of the discharge in that silent house sonnded like peals of thunder. It was impossible to miss at that distance, bnt the figure did not move; it gave no indication of injury, but stood there as shapeless and horrible as ever.

The revolver slipped from his fingers and clattered to the floor. Hot searing panic was tearing at his heart. Mechanically he groped with his hand at his breast and his fingers felt the holster of his automatic. He snatched the gun from its holster, and firing at the figure one last shot, slumped forward unconscious.

THE MOON had sunk behind a distant hill; the light of day would soon be taking its plaee; when the manor rang to the sound of calling voices and the grounds beeame less mysterious in the light of stable lanterns carried in the hands of a boisterous party of searchers.

Whistling and calling, they made their way up the weed-entangled drive. And yet in their laughter and calling one could detect a note of anxiety. Entering the manor, they hastened up the staircase and burst open the door of the haunted room without ceremony. There they stood aghast.

Holding a lantern aloft, the better to see, they entered.

Lying on his back, a hlack-daubed sheet thrown to one side, as if in his death agony he had endeavored to cast it away, lay the body of Saunders, the breast of his shirt saturated with blood. Hastily examining him, they found life extinct. That last shot had entered his heart.

One of the party picked up the revolver.

"I don't understand it!" he stammered. "I loaded it myself—they were all blanks."

They bent over Harding and tried to raise him, but could not do so: in his haste to be through with the hammering, he had driven the nails through the skirt of his long overcoat into the floor and held himself fast.

They tore the nails from the floor and felt his heart. It was still beating, but his lips were slimy with saliva. His open eyes stared with a look of insanity at the light held above him.

As they turned him to a more restful position, the automatic fell from the folds of his coat. Someone picked it up.

"My God! I did not know he had an automatic! I am going for a doctor," he called over his shoulder.

"And the police." someone advised sadly.

As they stood there uncovered, the laughter gone from their faces, the light of dawn slowly commenced to flood the room.

Jack Harding had won his wager.

"Take Thy Beak From Out My Heart and Take Thy Form From Off My Door"
—Poe, in "The Raven"

THE PELICAN

By CHARLES L. FREDERICK

ONE early morning in mid-December we were making slow time up the higher stretches of the Peace River from Fort St. John to Hudson's Hope. The night fog had not lifted wholly and the half-breed pilot ran her hard and fast on to a sand-bar.

The shock tumbled me out of my berth on the upper deck and I heard the captain swearing furiously in the pilot house and calling for full-steam astern, then felt the ship tremble violently as the monstrous paddle-wheel throbbed and grated. We were stuck, and preparations were made to haul her off with cables fastened to shore-bound trees and turned by the power of the capstan.

Four of us who were cabin passengers went ashore in the second life-boat, to stretch our legs a bit. There was Travers, a novelist, out for some northern "color," McGrath, P. and G. trader from Fort Smith, Gerry and myself.

I was by way of being a writer but found fur-buying a good deal more profitable and had a working agreement with Revillon Frères. It was my fourth year north of Edmonton. As for Gerry, he was anything you liked to call him—fur-trader, gambler, heavy drinker, but generous to a fault—would share his last dollar with you, or last drop, for that matter. "Gerry" might have been either baptismal or surname. To my knowledge he had never explained the matter, and no one had ever asked him. He was not a taciturn man, but he gave no confidences and expected none. It was commonly taken that he was a gentleman and had see better days.

I was surprised, then, when, after we had climbed the river bank, and sat down for a smoke and to enjoy the view over the broad stretch of the Peace, to hear Gerry opening in conversation.

"Say," he began, "any of you chaps ever happen to be in a certain place at a certain time and think that you had been there before—same associations, you know, and all that?"

I stared, but Travers, the novelist, nodded his head in understanding. McGrath remained idly curious, throwing small bits of stick at vagrant gulls circling in the water below us.

"It was just such a day as this," Gerry continued in his slow, rather accentuated drawl. "Hot, you know, and extraordinary visibility—"

He cut off suddenly. "Say," he continued, "do any of you happen to believe in the transmigration of souls?"

I was astounded and McGrath turned around sharply, taking his pipe out of his mouth and fixing Gerry with a stare. Travers was going to speak, but Gerry, with his gaze fixed out over the river, went on.

"A day like this, as I told you," he said, "but it was on the Southern Californian coast, a cliff edge, plateau arrangement, y'understand, like this river bank. Only we had the Pacific out in front instead of the Peace. The Peace is wide, but the Pacific goes a long way to beat it.

"I used to paint a bit, watercolor and oils both. You wouldn't know it to look at my hands, I suppose, but that's some years ago. Was roaming down there—seaside hotel—big luxurious place; golfers, other artists, writers—all that sort of thing. There I met a chap named Rider.

"Queer duck, Rider—an artist too: painted damn well, a sight better than I ever hoped to, although he was a younger man and I had the greater advantages—Sorbonne three years, five in Rome—you wouldn't suspect it, I know.

"Well, we came to chumming around, as you will in those places, and finally to going out sketching together, rambling for hours along the coast.

"One day we came upon a lonely stretch about four miles from the hotel. Nothing in sight—not a house—no golfers. I said 'fine' and Rider unstrapped his easel.

"See those gulls circling aronnd there? They think something may be thrown overboard from the boat. We used to see gulls along that coast, too—hnndreds of them—but larger and they cried and wheeled a good bit more. Rider couldn't stand them—said they got on his nerves; cursed me roundly every time I threw them pieces of bread and scraps of meat from our lunch basket.

"Tell you what they have got there though, that you won't see here, and those are pelicans—maybe you have seen 'em too—lumbering, awkward things, with ridiculous looking bills and webbed feet. They fly over the water and when they see the shadow of a fish they drop—plop—like lightning, and have him gobbled up before you can think.

"For three mornings, now, we had been going out to this spot, taking lunch and spending the afternoons until the light grew had. I was painting straight out to sea—not a sunset nor sunrise, or anything conventional like that—just broad noon, as near as I could get it—something different, you know. Rider was facing north, getting a stretch of the cliff and sea both, and said the colors were giving him hell. Between times he'd turn and regard my daub nervously. 'I don't like it,' he would say. 'What's the idea of all that glaring sunshine effect? Who wants to paint high noon, anyway, especially seascape?'

"'I don't like the sea at noon,' he would go on. 'Too still and quiet, then—ominous—and in all this glare, ugh!'

"He was funny that way—strangest things used to irritate him, and sometimes he'd sit there looking straight ahead of him and *laugh*, go on langhing like a fool, and sometimes I'd look around and see him shivering—all of a quake, if you know what I mean—shoulders twitching, and me peeled down to my shirt, and that open with the perspiration fairly rolling off me.

"After he'd had one of these spells he'd usually turn and regard me. I tried not to notice anything wrong—felt it would be prying into business that didn't concern me anyhow, bnt one time I turned and caught him sitting there with a look on his face of such utter listless despair that I wanted to ask him what was the matter. In a moment, however, he caught himself up and I turned back to my work as if nothing had happened. I knew next to nothing of his past, and if he had a secret, it was probably his own business. I felt

it would serve nothing for me to ask for confidences, if you understand my point.

"Well, as I was saying, we had been going out to this place three days. It was right after lunch, and I was throwing scraps to the gulls, who were getting bolder now and advancing to within a distance of four or five feet of us, to retreat when they had grabbed something, as if in a great scare. All of a sudden a big shadow fell athwart the grass where I was lying. I looked up amazed and here was a full-grown pelican, large as you please, alighting not a yard away and pecking at a crust. I could have reached out and touched him with my hand. I called to Rider, to see what he made of it, and he wheeled around in a flash. 'What the hell!' he said.

"I had to laugh, he looked so startled, although I had jumped a good bit at first. Rider got up in a great state, knocking over his easel, but not stopping to pick it up. He rushed violently at the pelican, who bridled at his approach, circumvented a kick and dodged clumsily around me. It set me laughing worse than ever—couldn't help it—the spectacle of this absurd pelican waddling around, and Rider after it, grinding out furious oaths between clenched teeth, his face purple and working in his rage.

"On he came, with this damned creature flapping around me. Rider bore down on the thing like a hawk after a chicken and the pelican uttered a cry. It didn't sound a bit like the squawk they usually make, but I didn't think of that at the time. The sound stopped Rider dead in his tracks, though, and he turned to me with the queerest frightened expression on his face. By that time the bird had taken wing, but instead of vanishing out to sea it circled about and I heard its wings flapping hard close beside us. I cried a warning and the thing turned and flew straight as an arrow, towards us, fast, and with wings closed, like a thunderbolt. It launched itself straight at Rider's head. He threw up his hands to protect his eyes, but the pelican struck with such force as to nearly knock him off his feet. Then the damned thing spread its wings again and without touching ground turned seaward again and disappeared. I looked at Rider and he had a great cut on his forehead where it had been opened with the creature's sharp beak.

"ALL his purple rage of countenance had disappeared and he was white as death. I thought he was going to faint, for he reeled and staggered like a sick man, not seeming to notice the wound until he raised his hand there and brought it away with blood upon it. Blood began streaming into his eyes, but he wiped it away abstractedly, looking bewildered at his hand, and shaking his head, as a dog will do when something is worrying or perplexing it.

"I was pulling out my handkerchief to wipe the cut clean when there came up suddenly a strong gust of wind, and I grabbed my easel to steady it. At the same moment small clouds came scurrying up out of nowhere and hid the sun. It was a squall and I yelled to Rider for God's sake to get his stuff together, because we would have to hurry if we were going to make the hotel before the rain came. He was still standing there, dazed-like, if you know what I mean, and staring at the blood on his hand. I was going to pack up his easel, when suddenly I noticed the canvas was gone, although palette and brushes were there still.

"'Where's your canvas?' I asked him. The wind was howling a gale and he did not hear me. I shouted: 'What did you do with the painting—hey—picture, you know?' The wind was screaming along

the cliff edge now, and the surf was thunderous. Rain began to fall in immense drops. I made signs to Rider, imitating the motions of painting, taking up the palette and dipping the brushes towards it—it was ridiculous. Losing patience at last I bundled our stuff together, poking his easel towards him. He took it mechanically, and catching him by the arm I urged him along the cliff to the hotel at a fast trot. The rain beat upon us, drenching us to the skin, but we never stopped until we reached the hotel. People were out on the verandas, watching the rain, and when we drew in sight they began laughing and pointing. I was wet but hot from the run. The blood was running from the cut on Rider's forehead, and we looked comic enough, I suppose, but the sight of those giggling fools roused me to fury. I urged Rider into the drive and would have made a rush through the front entrance, but he stopped me. 'Come on, you fool!' I said, impatient. 'Get inside and have some iodine put on that cut. Do you want to be poisoned?'

"'The pelican took it,' he said, looking at me fixedly.

"I thought the man was crazy. 'Took what?' I said.

"'Why, my canvas,' he replied, still fixing me with that strange look.

"'You idiot!' I said, although I confess the idea startled me, in its eery suggestion. 'The picture must have fallen into the sea. The wind took it over.'

"'Not the wind,' he returned quietly.

"We went inside then. I looked straight ahead, although I was uncomfortably conscious of the curious stares of everyone in the lobby, over which an unaccustomed silence fell as we passed through. Rider, however, looked directly at them and out beyond, as though he were totally unaware of their existence. We got into the elevator. The attendant did not seem to notice anything amiss and I was relieved. Rider's room was first along the hall, and I pushed him into it, proceeding then to mine. I set down my outfit, dove into my trunk and found no iodine but a bottle of hydrogen peroxide. With this in my hand I went to Rider's room and tried the door. It was locked. I knocked. No answer. I called him by name, once, twice, and at the third time knocked again and then rattled the handle. A reply came in a strained voice: 'It's all right, old chap. I can manage.'

"'I've brought some antiseptic for your cut,' I called.

"'I've washed it out,' he answered, his voice faint and strained through the door. 'It's only a scratch. Please don't trouble.'

"I protested, but receiving no answer I decided to leave the ungrateful wretch to his own devices, and if the wound had poisoned him, so much the better. It would be a lesson.

"AFTER I had bathed and dressed, however, I felt a good deal refreshed, both in mind and body. The weather, too, had cleared, in that capricious fashion which is half the charm of Southern California. The sun was making glorious splendor of setting over the headland whence we had come running through the rain and in the bay some large birds were flying low. 'Pelicans,' I thought, and pulled down the blind.

"On the way to dinner I passed Rider's door and knocked, but received no reply. Through the door, however, I heard deep and sustained breathing and concluded he was asleep.

"Next morning I was awakened early by a knock on my door. I arose and

opened it. It was Rider. His face was pale and he wore a long sliver of plaster across his forehead. His eyes were clear, as if he had slept well, but his manner was diffident.

"He apologized at first. Had been a fool, he said. Unstrung, he supposed. That rain coming, when it ha' not rained for so long, atmospheric conditions upset, what?—and all that. I could see he was anxious not to refer to the absurdity of the pelican incident, and to spare him I began to talk briskly, while disrobing for a shower. He sat on my bed and smoked my cigarettes. I splashed water about and made a good deal of noise. It seemed to make him happier, and when I emerged he was in fine humor and said he had an appetite for breakfast.

"Afterwards we sat and smoked on the veranda. The morning was clear, delicious, with only a few early golfers abroad, calling to each other over the course about half-a-mile distant.

"Rider said the day was an inspiration and he felt he could work. I made some mention about the vanished canvas, and instantly cursed myself for a fool, for opening my mouth, because instantly he went white and straightened in his chair. 'I think I shall begin another,' he said. 'Something new. I didn't care much for the last one, anyway. Sort of got started off on the wrong foot. Stupid of me, wasn't it, to kick over the easel and lose it that fashion?'

"'Why don't you tack down your stuff?' I said, concealing an immense pleasure that he had decided to take the loss in a commonsense manner. He replied evasively, and we went indoors to assemble our outfits.

"As we were leaving the hotel I asked Rider where we should head for. 'Along the cliff, of course,' he replied, eying me steadily. 'You've still got *your* piece to finish, haven't you?'

"I cursed myself again for being a stupid fool, and we began to talk quite cheerily in the course of our walk. When we came within sight of the scene of our yesterday's experience, however, Rider grew silent and *distrait*, biting nervously at the pipe he gripped, unlit, between his teeth.

"I appeared to notice nothing unusual, and, arrived at our rendezvous, I set up my easel, took out palette and brushes and began to work. I occupied myself with detail. It was a perfect morning, the sun dazzlingly bright, the sky absolutely unflecked.

"There was a vague swell on the water, however, as though it were upheaving in response to the urgings of subterranean force, and I began to wonder at the change of tide, when suddenly I glimpsed the moon over my shoulder—a cold, remote object, fixed discernibly in that fleckless blue. The moon in daytime always impresses me, somehow, with a sense of unreality, and I saw that Rider was watching it too, his gaze transfixed and inscrutable. Our eyes met and I turned back to my work.

"Bye-and-bye I ventured a glance in Rider's direction. He had a large canvas out and was painting absorbedly with broad strokes. The contours of the thing intrigued me instantly, and I strolled up for a closer inspection. The subject was a bit of landscape entirely foreign to anything I had seen Rider do, and utterly apart from sight of anything except the imagination. It was dark stuff, with unnatural shading, no highlights visible.

"'What are you doing?' I asked, curious. He laughed nervously. 'I don't know,' he said. 'That is, I can't tell, exactly. I've just been going on, you know—started in on this thing without

the faintest idea of what it's going to be.'

"It was high noon now, and I turned back to work at my reflections. Rider left his easel and came to watch me. 'I can't work now in this light, with so much sun,' he said, in a querulous tone. His voice was pitched a trifle high. I could sense, rather than discern, his gathering nervousness. 'I hate this light!' he added. 'Why do you want to paint in it?'

"Reply was useless. The plaint was familiar, but we sat down to luncheon and the tension eased up a bit. When we were through, and with Rider lying on the grass, pulling at his pipe, I began abstractedly tossing some sandwich scraps towards the sea, when it was borne in upon me that my friends, the gulls, were not here today. I was about to exclaim on this fact to Rider when a shadow fell athwart both of us. A large body interposed itself momentarily between ourselves and the sun, and dropped awkwardly beside the lunch basket, gulping wolfishly at a crust I had thrown there.

"IT WAS a pelican. Rider was sitting up now, wide-eyed and shaking. He pointed to the bird which was gulping the food down the length of its skinny throat and looking at us out of beady, shining eyes, hard and brilliant as sequins. 'It's the pelican!' he said, gasping.

"I will admit the coincidence had me dumfounded for a minute, but the pelican walked calmly towards me and snatched away a crust I was holding mechanically in my hand. I had time to reflect in my subconscious mind that here was the first pelican I ever knew to show inclination for food other than fish diet. Then I was alarmed by Rider rising and going towards the bird.

"The thing sat there stolidly, looking up at Rider with its bright eyes. There was something impudent in the lift of its head with the ridiculous pendent bill. It stood still there as if it had viewed some Medusa-head, which was Rider, and had been turned to stone. It stood still as a carving, seeming to have taken on petrified form before my very eyes.

"Rider stooped to touch it. I wanted to stop him, but something arrested the protest that rose to my lips. He circled his hand, tentatively, about the bird's neck, a strange, fascinated expression on his face. The thing never moved, just stood there looking up at him. I saw Rider's hand close, convulsively, and the bird made a dry sucking movement through its throat. Rider snatched his hand away with a frightened look. The pelican waddled away to forage for more food.

" 'Ugh!' said Rider. 'The thing felt all cold and wet—clammy!'

"I did not know what to reply. I ignored both the bird and Rider and turned back to my work. Bye-and-bye I heard his brush being drawn over the canvas, then a pause, and then a sort of frightened sob from him. 'Well, I'm damned,' he said, hysterically, half laughing or crying, I could not tell which.

"There was that damned pelican, if you will believe me, stationed in front of the canvas, and to one side, in perfect pose for a sitting, and looking up at Rider as if in impudent demand.

"A fury seized on Rider. 'I'll paint you, damn you!' he shouted, sorting his brushes in a frenzy. The pelican remained there, unmoved. Rider grabbed up his palette and set to work like a crazy man.

"I had no doubt then that indeed he was crazy, but the thing had begun to

exercise a strange fascination over me. I found myself trying to laugh—trying to see it as a joke, a burlesque—a pelican, bird of caricature from time immemorial, being painted, sitting there for his portrait, as self-satisfied as you please. The sun shone brilliantly as ever, out of a sky from which the moon had now faded altogether, but in spite of myself I sensed an unreality about the day, and the place, and the sea below us, and a glimpse of the white working face of my friend served to heighten my concern.

"I went back to my reflections, but it was a poor attempt at best. After two hours I heard a quick rush of wings and a muffled exclamation from Rider. I turned just in time to see the bird winging out to sea. Rider was sitting there with a peculiar tense expression on his face, but it was the canvas that compelled my attention.

"There was the body of that pelican painted in a style entirely foreign to anything I had seen Rider do, or any man for that matter. The thing loomed up monstrous against that exotic background, and black as night. The wings were raised, hoveringly, but there was no head.

"'Where'a his head?' I asked, as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

"'His head?' said Rider. 'Head? I didn't get it. I was going to paint it when the damned creature walked around and looked at the canvas, then flew away.'

"'Nonsense,' I said. 'Looked at it?'

"Rider was silent.

"'How did you get him hovering—that effect?' I queried. 'Looks like a bird of ill-omen; and what did you paint him black for, when he's mottled gray?'

"'I painted him black because he's black, damn him!' Rider almost shouted at me. 'Black as night and blacker than the powers of darkness—black as his cursed black heart!" then dropping his voice almost to a whisper: 'I painted him hovering because he looked that way to me. He put his wings up—so!' He illustrated like a child with his hands.

"Like a child, too, I walked him back to the hotel, and he held my hand part of the way, stopping only once to comment on the disappearance of the moon. 'First quarter, isn't it?' he remarked, gazing apprehensively skyward. 'What day is it?'

"'Friday,' I answered.

"'Not the thirteenth?'—with a sickly smile.

"I tried to laugh. 'No, it's the fourteenth. Friday, September the fourteenth.'

"'No! No!' he cried in agitation. 'Not that!'

"'Why, man,' I said. 'What do you mean?'

"He gasped. 'In two days, then. In two days.'

"'Two days will be Sunday,' I said, 'and on Sunday afternoon, as we planned, you know, we are going to Los Angeles.

"(I had some business to transact there and we had wanted particularly to attend a certain play, opening that evening.)

"'To Los Angeles, certainly,' he said, seeming to be relieved. 'But let's get the picture finished first.'

"I thought he meant mine, and replied: 'By all means.'

"WE went back to the hotel, dressed, and had dinner. Rider was flushed and talked a great deal in a rather nonsensical strain. Had he been a drinking man I should have suspected him of being intoxicated, but there was no evidence of this. I went to bed early but woke up once during the night to hear

someone pacing up and down the courtyard outside. I looked out, and as the figure passed by a lighted window I saw it was Rider, walking with bared head, his hands behind his back. 'Rider!' I called. He looked up and to my amazement I saw tears were in his eyes and streaming down his face. He wiped them away unaffectedly with a handkerchief and went indoors. A few minutes later I heard him enter his rooms."

At this point Gerry paused in his story. Dead silence lay upon all of us. Travers, the novelist, motioned for him to go on. He was completely immersed in the web of the tale. McGrath lay quietly sprawled, looking skyward. For myself I was suddenly made aware of the fact that there was a white moon riding very high and remote overhead in a sky of cloudless blue.

"I hardly know how to go on with this," said Gerry, "it seems too absurd, but you will remember what I asked you all about the transmigration of souls?"

We nodded and Travers signaled impatiently for him to go on.

"Well, it was this way," said Gerry, in a matter-of-fact tone, and his drawl had never before seemed so maddeningly slow.

"We set out again next morning after breakfast, but I could see right away that there was something very much the matter with Rider. At breakfast he had asked me twice what was the date, and I told him 'Saturday the fifteenth.'

" 'Of September?' he asked.

" 'Of course,' I said, irritated, and then he had requested the waiter for confirmation, and the man, having heard the query and my reply, was dumfounded and produced a calendar. There it was, Saturday the fifteenth—a crazy proceeding, I reflected, and hardly calculated to start the day off in a sane manner.

"You can understand that by this time I was beginning to feel—well, not exactly a strain—but a sense of something inexplicable intruding itself upon us. Our very surroundings appeared to have taken on an unreal aspect. An ultraclarity of atmosphere which persisted despite the intense heat distorted the semblance of the hills, magnifying them to towering masses, appallingly close, and imparting to the sea a vivid and ominous shimmer.

"Especially so was this true when we arrived at the spot we had chosen. I felt disturbed, without knowing exactly why. There was a small bit of sand near the cliff-edge, and imprinted visibly on it were the marks of webbed feet. I was hoping Rider would not notice them, but he followed my glance and came over to inspect them closely.

" 'Sea-birds,' I remarked, feeling that I should say something.

" 'A large one, a pelican,' he said, as if forcing himself to speak. 'Did you ever see such huge tracks for a bird? What can it mean?'

"The tracks were assuredly large, but not abnormal, and I said so. Rider did not answer. I set up my easel and went to work, but could do nothing properly. Rider set his up also, but turned that terrible canvas with the black bird painted on it away from him and kept staring at the blank whiteness of the reverse side and biting on his pipe-stem until I felt I should go mad.

"It was intensely hot, and just at noontime by my watch I heard an exclamation from Rider. I wheeled around. He was ashen and was pointing skyward. I knew what it was before I looked. That shadow, blotting out the sun a moment, lit by our feet and resolved itself into the pelican.

"The bird was sleek today, and darker, somehow, as if he had taken color

and size, too, from Rider's canvas. I have asked myself since how we should have known it was the same pelican, or whether indeed it was. I never questioned it at the time, I know, but this day the damned thing had a human air about him. He looked at once furtive and impudent. He disdained a crust I offered him. I sat down to lunch, but Rider would eat nothing. The pelican, seeing him at his easel, waddled into its accustomed place, and sat there looking up at him. Entirely absorbed, Rider turned his canvas right side to, and began to paint.

"He painted steadily on, and the shadows began to lengthen before I turned to speak to him. At that moment I heard a ghastly cry, indescribably horrible, and then felt something cold and wet brush past by my cheek. It was the pelican in flight. I rushed over to Rider, who was lying face downwards on the grass, his shoulders shaking in an agony of grief. I tried to rouse him. He only motioned me away.

"I turned to the canvas and my senses reeled. It was a human face my friend had put upon the shoulders of this horrible thing. There it was—half bird, half man. The face was merged into such dark shadows that the expression on the features was not to be clearly defined, but I could discern that it was leering, horrible. The contracted features held a suggestion of such utter malignance that I was revolted, and put up my hands in front of me, to shut out the sight."

Here Gerry paused a second time, and looked with interest at the sun.

"It is high noon, now," he said, and I glanced at my watch for confirmation.

"It is a coincidence," Gerry continued. "That will lend some dramatic effect to the remainder of my story."

"Go ahead," we demanded.

"How we got back to the hotel that night I never will know. It was dark by the time we reached it, and the journey was like a nightmare. Rider insisted on bringing the horrible canvas, although he would not look at it, but wrapped it in the tablecloth taken from the lunch-basket.

"Dinner was a horrible strain, and afterwards I complained of being tired and went to bed. I *was* tired, thank God! and slept soundly, rising only once with the thought that I heard that horrible cry again, but everything was still as the grave. I cursed my fancies and slumbered on.

"Next morning I was awakened early again. Rider entered, flushed high as with a fever.

"'Why, you're sick, man!' I exclaimed. I felt his forehead—it was cold and wet, and his hands, too, were cold.

"'It is Sunday, Sunday the sixteenth!' he cried, his voice quavering and high pitched as with a great fear.

"'We go to Los Angeles this afternoon,' I said, trying to speak reassuringly.

"'Yes, for God's sake!' he answered. 'Let us get away from this horrible place!'

"'Agreed,' I said. 'What about a round of golf this morning?'

"'No, no!' he cried. 'First, the painting!'

"'But it's finished,' I said. 'That is, all except a few touches, and I can do those out of my head.'

"'But the lights—the high light of noon!' he cried. 'How are you going to get that? No, we must go out.'

"I protested that I did not want to go. Some inner sense kept crying me a warning, and I tried to heed it, but Rider grew almost sullen, so that I became afraid he might go off by himself, and at last agreed. He brought out his traps,

with that fearful canvas still wrapped up in the cloth.

"IT was about eleven o'clock when we reached the appointed place on the cliffs. I sat down and forgot about Rider in the joy of my work, which at last was coming right. The day was hot again. The sea had almost a brassy tinge to it. One could feel the scant grass about us burning and wilting beneath the stare of the sun. As for Rider, he did not move.

"He was waiting for that bird.

"It came flopping down before us, just at the stroke of noon. To my astonished eyes it was almost coal-black now. It faced us, hovering with half-raised wings, as Rider had it in the painting, with that ridiculous bill hanging pendulous. It was very real and very horrible.

"I tried to make some joking remark to Rider, but my lips only formed the words. My tongue refused to utter them.

"As for Rider, he was motioning, in a mechanical way for the awful thing to come beside him. He did not speak to it—just motioned—and in response to that grotesque mimicry, the bird hopped along and took up its former position in front of the easel. Arrived there it lifted its head to look at Rider."

Gerry paused again, and glanced at his watch.

"And what then?" demanded Travers, all excitement.

"It was just about the time it is now, nearly half after twelve," said Gerry, consulting his watch. "I tore my gaze away from Rider, painting in the detail of his horrible face, and looking at that frightful bird from time to time as though there was some mesmeric contact between them.

"Finally he called out, loud and clear: 'God Almighty, help me!' and I heard a sound of wings beating. The pelican rushed past me to the edge of the cliff, with Rider after it, his face like death. On the very verge the thing turned and faced him. Rider made a blind rush and stumbled against the bird, clutched it, and went on headlong, sheer over the cliff. An unearthly cry came up from that place.

"I had to run back for a mile before I found an incline that would make descent to the beach possible, and when I came to him he was quite dead, but the pelican was gone, and there were no traces of it—no feathers, even—and yet Rider's hand was clutched as if he still held the neck of the thing and was strangling it through all eternity. I took one look at his face and covered it with my handkerchief."

Gerry paused again—a long pause, and this time we were silent.

Finally he recommenced:

"You remember that first of all I asked you if you believed in the transmigration of souls. We found a clipping among Rider's effects—a newspaper clipping and photograph. The article told of a man's body being found on a Florida beach, at the bottom of a cliff. Murder was suspected. The body was found at 6 o'clock, but the hands of the man's watch were stopped at 12:30. The date of the occurrence was September 16, on a Sunday, ten years ago.

"I had a shock when I looked at the picture in the newspaper. It was blotched, and the paper was yellow and faded, but I could have sworn the features bore an actual resemblance to those Rider painted in on the shoulders of the pelican, and yet it may have been only fancy.

"The painting? That must have blown into the sea, too. . . . Rider never was a man to pin down his stuff."

A Storiette of Real Distinction

THE DOOR

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

Author of "Tea Leaves"

THOSE in the motor car hardly felt the slight, though sickening impact. It was rather, indeed, because of the instinct for something-gone-wrong, than because of conviction that he had struck anything more important than a roll of tangled burlap from some passing moving van, that the driver brought his heavy car to a stop with a grinding of brakes strenuously applied, and went back to see what he had struck.

He had turned the corner almost incidentally; but when he alighted and went back, when the thin gleam of his flashlight revealed to him the heap of huddled pulp which lay there, the driver realized in the throes of a hideous nausea what it was his heavy machine had spurned and crushed.

ROGER PHILLIPS, intent upon the first really decent act of his whole life, hardly noticed what was forward. He had been crossing the street. He continued to be intent on his own concerns. Interrupted only by a kind of cold shudder to which he gave only passing thought as if with the very outer edge of his mind, he did not stop, but crossed the sidewalk, looking up as he had done many times before to reassure himself that the lights were out in the living-room of the apartment up there on the third floor of the apartment house.

They were out, as he had confidently anticipated, and, reassured, he quickly mounted the steps to the front entrance. Some one came out, hurriedly, and passed him as he entered, the rush taking him by surprize. He turned his head as quickly as he could, to avoid recognition. It was old Mr. Osler, his father's neighbor, who had rushed out. The elderly man was in his shirt sleeves, and appeared greatly agitated, so much so that young Phillips was certain he had not been recognized, hardly even noticed, indeed. He breathed an audible sigh of relief. He did not want old Osler to mention this chance meeting to his father the next time he should see him. and he knew Osler to be garrulous.

The young man mounted lightly and hurriedly the two flights of steps that led to the door of his father's apartment. He thrust his key into the patent lock of the apartment door confidently, almost without thought—a mechanical motion. As mechanically, he turned the key to the right. It was an old key, and it fitted the keyhole easily. He knew that his father and mother were at the symphony concert. They had not missed one for years during the season for symphony concerts, and this was their regular night. He had chosen this night for that reason. He knew the colored maid was out, too. He had seen her, not five minutes earlier, getting on a car for Boston. "The coast," as he phrased the thought to himself, somewhat melodramatically, "was clear!" He was certain of security from interruption. Only let him get safely into the apartment, do what

he had to do, and as quietly and unobtrusively depart, and he would be satisfied, quite satisfied.

But the lock offered unexpected resistance. It was inexplicable, irritating. His overtensed nerves revolted abruptly at this check. The key had slipped into the slot, as always, without difficulty—but it would not turn! Furiously he twisted it this way and that. At last he removed it and stared at it curiously. There was nothing amiss with the key. Could his father have had the lock changed?

Anger and quick shame smote him, suddenly. He looked closely at the lock. No, it was unchanged. There were the numberless tiny scratch-marks of innnmerable insertions. It was the same.

Gingerly, carefully, he inserted the key again. He turned it to the right. Of course it turned to the right; he remembered that clearly. He had so turned it countless times.

It would not move. He put ont all his puny strength, and still it would not turn. Hot exasperation shook him.

As he swore under his breath in his irritation at this bar to the fulfillment of his purpose, he became for the first time conscions of a rising commotion in the street below, and he paused, irresolutely, and listened, his nerves suddenly strung tant. Many voiees seemed to be mingled in the excited hum that came to his ears. Bits of phrases, even, could be distinguished. Something had happened down there, it seemed. As he listened, the commotion of spoken sound resolved itself into a tone which, npon his subconscious effort to analyze it, seemed to him to express horror and commiseration, with an overtone of fear. The fear commnnicated itself to him. He shook, as the voice of the growing throng, a blended, corporate voice, came up to him in sickening waves of apprehension.

What if this should mean an interruption? Impatiently wrenching himself away from his preoccupation and back to his more immediate concern with the door, he thrust the key into the lock a third time, this time aggressively, violently. Again he tried to snap the lock. Again it resisted him, unaccountably, devilishly, as it seemed to him.

Then, in his pause of desperation, he thought he heard his own name spoken. He could feel his face go white, the roots of his hair prickle. He listened, intently, crouching catlike there on the empty landing before the door of his father's apartment, and as he listened, every nerve intent, he heard the entrance-door below flung open, and the corporate voice of the throng ontside, hitherto mnffled and faint, came to him suddenly in a wave of sound, jnmbled and obscure as a whole, but with certain strident voices strangely clear and distinct.

A shuffle of heavy feet came to his ears, as if several persons were entering the lower hallway, their footsteps falling heavily on the tiled flooring. They would be coming upstairs!

He shrank back against the door—that devilish door! If only he conld get it open!

Something like this, he told himself, in a wave of self-pity that swept him—something like this, unexpected, unforeseen, unreasonable—something like this was always happening to him!

That door! It was an epitome of his futile, worthless life! That had happened to him, jnst the same kind of thing, a month ago when he had been turned out of his home. The events of the intervening weeks rushed, galloping, through his overtensed mind. And now, as ever since that debacle, there was present with him a kind of unforgettable vision of his mother—his poor mother, her face covered with the tears which she made

no effort to wipe away—his poor mother, looking at him, stricken, through those tears which blurred her face; and there was his father, the kindly face set now in a stern mask, pale and with deep lines—his father telling him that this was the end. There would be no public prosecution. Was he not their son? But he must go now! His home would be no longer his home. . .

He recalled the dazed days that followed; the mechanical activities of his daily employment; his search, half-hearted, for a furnished room. He recalled, shuddering, the several times when, moved by the mechanism of long-established usage, he had nearly taken an Allston car for "home," which was to be no longer his home. . .

He had not sent back the key. He could not tell why he had kept it. He had forgotten to hand it back to his father when he had left, and his father, doubtless unthinkingly, had not suggested its return. That was why he still had it, and here he stood, now, on the very threshold of that place which had been "home" to him for so many years, about to make the restitution that would do something to remove the saddest of all the blots on his conscience—and he could not get in!

The men, talking with hushed voices, had reached the first landing. Young Phillips, caught by a sudden gust of abject terror, shrank against the stubborn door, the door which, unaccountably, he could not open. Then, his mind readjusting itself, he remembered that he had no reason for concealment, for fear. Even though he might be seen here, even though these people should be coming all the way up the stairs, it could not matter. Let him be seen; what of it? He was supposed to live here, of course. It was only a short time since he had actually ceased to live here, and his father had said nothing. No public charge had been made against him. How one's conscience could make one a coward!

Under the invigorating stress of this reaction, he straightened himself, stood up boldly. Realizing that it might appear odd for him to be discovered standing here aimlessly on the landing, he started to go downstairs. But by now the narrow staircase was completely blocked by the ascending group. He stopped, halfway from that flight. The men were carrying something, something heavy, and of considerable bulk, it would seem. He could not see clearly in that dim light just what it was. He stopped, half-way down, but none of the men carrying the awkward bundle, covered with what looked like an automobile curtain, looked up, nor appeared to notice him. Neither did the straggling group of men, and a woman or two, who were following them.

Fascinated, he gazed at what they were carrying. As they approached and took the turn in the stairs, so that the electric light on the upper landing shone more directly upon it, he looked closer. It was the body of a man! It hung, limp and ungainly in their somewhat awkward grasp as they shouldered up toward him.

Something about it seemed vaguely familiar, the details presenting themselves to his fascinated gaze in rapid succession: the trouser-ends, the shoes.

THE men turned the last corner in the winding stairway and came into full view. As they turned the corner, the leather curtain slipped and the face of the dead man was for a moment exposed to view. Roger Phillips looked at it, fascinated, horrified. Then one of the men, halting for an instant, drew the corner of the curtain over the face again, and he could no longer see it. The head

rolled. The broken body had been grievously crushed.

Roger Phillips, utterly distraught, cowered, a limp heap, against the unyielding door of his father's apartment. He had looked for one horrific instant into his own distorted, dead face!

The men, breathing hard, reached the landing. One of them, gingerly shifting his portion of the burden upon the shoulder of another, stepped forward to ring the bell of the Phillips apartment. No one answered the ring, and the man rang again, impatiently, insistently. The bell trilled inside the empty apartment. The men stood, silently, shifting uneasily from one foot to another. Behind them, a thin mutter came from the waiting stragglers who had followed them, moved by an inordinate curiosity.

"Here's a key sticking in the door," said the man who had rung the bell. "Guess we'd be all right if we opened the door and took the young fellow in. There doesn't seem to be anyone home."

A murmur of assent came from the other men.

He turned the key to the left, then to the right, and the door opened. They carried the broken body inside and carefully laid it out on the sofa in the living-room.

SINCE the Black Republic won its freedom from the French it has been ruled by a line of tyrants and monsters, until the timely intervention of Uncle Sam.

History and legends bring down to us tales of Toussaint L'Ouverture, a man with the courage of his convictions, who banded the black slaves together and instilled into their hearts the will to overthrow their masters. The tale of Toussaint is a tale of beastly lust, brute aggrandizement, freedom from restraint for men with the passions of wild animals, the strength of the savage, and the blood-lust of followers of the green serpent. The story has it that the French masters paid for their cruelty to their slaves with their own blood, which ran down the rock-walled gutters of Cap Haitien in crimson streams which had their origin in the public square where the French were slaughtered by those whom they had ruled.

Following L'Ouverture came Christophe, self-named Henri I, Emperor of the North, whose black consort became his Empress and whose children —those of whom Christophe admitted fatherhood—were known as Princes of the Blood. He created a royal family of color that made him the most ridiculous figure in the history of his time. He was a monster who killed for the love of killing. He marched a whole company of soldiers over a high cliff to prove to a visiting minister that his discipline was iron-bound. He caused to be slain those who dared to look upon his face without permission. There is no word in the English language by which this great black brute may be properly classified. A slave who ruled his fellow-slaves as no one since his time has been able to rule them, who scarcely knew how to read and write, yet who created monuments to himself that puzzle the best engineers of today—his Citadel a few miles from Cap Haitien, and his castle of Sans Souci.

He was filled with despair at last because he could not overthrow President Petion, at Port au Prince, and so make himself emperor of all Haiti. He killed himself with a silver bullet because he felt that no lesser metal might come in contact with that divine brain of his.

There were other monsters who came after him, some to rule for a day, some to rule for a year, each one dying violently when his time came, all too suddenly. Not until a few years ago did an ex-president peacefully look on at the inauguration of his successor. L'Ouverture, Christophe, Petion, Dessalines—a line of ruling monsters such as may not be found in the history of any other country.

Then came Guillaume San, beside whose evil deeds the combined brutalities of all these others grow pale and insignificant.

He was a mulatto, yellow-skinned, pimply-faced, suffering from some inherited organic disease that pinched his features into a mask of perpetual

pain. His brow was forever covered with the dew of internal suffering, which he bore with what fortitude he could muster. When the pain became too great for him to bear all Haiti knew it, for he seemed to believe that the blame for his suffering lay with his black subjects. He sent his ragged soldiers through the highways and by-ways, with orders to slay without mercy, and the soldiers gloried in carrying out those orders.

Guillaume had spies in every place in Haiti where there were more than half a dozen persons banded together. These spies kept him informed of every word and act of his subjects. Did a man, woman, or child speak an evil word concerning his royal person, Guillaume knew it as soon as a swift messenger could reach Port au Prince with the tidings, which meant short shrift for the guilty one, and an unburied body bloating in the sun. Up through the sunny air of Haiti went the stench of uncovered bodies of those who had been slain, directly or indirectly, by the evil hand of Guillaume San.

Innocent perished with the guilty, for if a spy had a grudge against a neighbor he had but to go to Guillaume San and bear false witness—and that person's corpse lay shortly alongside the road, to be passed by natives with averted heads.

Guillaume San became president under auspicious circumstances. He led the rioters who entered the palace and bore his predecessor forth to be slaughtered in the street outside the palace courtyard. It was his genius which led to the hewing in pieces of the dead president, and he caused those pieces to be impaled upon the iron points of the fence which circled the palace. A tactful warning to the populace!

Thus began his career of bloodshed which was to continue and end in a trail of crimson.

Now to his story and the words of the prophetess.

GUILLAUME SAN lay ill in his bed in the palace. The head doctor had given him but a few hours to live. Guillaume cursed the doctor and commanded that he be beheaded at once and his head brought to tho sick room as a warning to the other doctors who were in attendance.

Once Guillaume raised his head and looked forth from a window which gave on to the Champs de Mars. He saw that the heat-blighted plaza was black with milling multitudes. Murderous shouts went up in the afternoon air and came, subdued by distance, in through the president's window. He shuddered as he recalled the fate of his predecessor. Then he saw that every yard of the iron-fenced palace grounds was patrolled by double sentries, the black soldiers who were the pride of Guillaume's heart. Not even that great multitude would dare the gleaming points of the sentries' bayonets! He knew that they, the multitude, but waited for word from the palace to the effect that Guillaume had fallen into a coma which would give him into their hands. Even those soldiers could not hold them then. They might even join the black birds of prey who clamored for Guillaume's death!

"Look at them! Waiting like vultures for the corpse to cool!"

He shook a feeble fist at the window.

"I'll fool them all!" he cried, "I'll die in my bed as a president should!"

He sank back and wiped the cold dew from his forehead.

An orderly entered and salaamed in the royal presence.

"What is it, Adan Tebo?" demanded the president.

"Chal Yac, one of his Excellency's agents, waits without, sir!"

"Tell him to send in his report."

The orderly withdrew, and re-entered a moment later.

"He says, your Excellency, that Divue Sal is spreading the story that the great Guillaume is dying. He has gathered together many followers, and is trying to persuade them to rush the palace and he revenged upon you before death cheats them of their rights!"

"Give orders that Divue Sal be hewn in pieces and the pieces scattered to the mongrel dogs in the streets!"

The orderly withdrew.

A few minutes later a terrible cry arose from the Champs de Mars. The orderly re-entered the sick room.

"His Excellency's orders have been obeyed," reported Adan. "You can hear the cries of the mob in the plaza, sir. They cry aloud for vengeance!"

"Give orders for the soldiers to fire upon the mob!"

The orderly withdrew.

Sounds of intermittent rifle fire. Shrieks, moans of the dying, shouts of black beasts who lust for blood. There was a clatter of footsteps on the stairs outside the palace.

The orderly rushed in once more.

"The mob has rushed the courtyard, your Excellency, and the soldiers have fallen back to the doors of the palace. Many of them have fallen!"

The orderly wiped the fine dew from his own forehead. The explosion of rifles was deafening now, and the odor of powder smoke invaded the sick room.

"Take courage, Excellency," said one of the doctors. "You shall cheat them yet!"

He did not mean what Guillaume thought that he meant. The doctor saw the approach of the grim reaper. Guillaume, with the doctor's words, saw the white-robed figure of hope, and began to plan the revenge he would take when he was once more well of his sickness.

Sounds of a scuffle at the door of the palace. Shouts and curses of the soldiers. The crash of rifle butts upon the flagstones.

The ragged, leprous, filthy form of an aged black crone stood for a moment in the door of the sick room. Over her bent shoulders Guillaume San saw the figures of two soldiers who were coming to take her. She saw them as she turned her head for an instant. She stepped inside the room, whither she knew they dared not follow. Her scraggly, rope-like hair hung in filthy wisps about her unspeakably wrinkled old face. A red bandanna, greasy and foul, was wrapped about her head, to fall in two red tails down her back.

"Know you, Guillaume San," she shrieked, "that I am the mother of Divue Sal, whose body you caused to be thrown to the dogs in the street? His soul cries aloud to its God for vengeance. I come to tell you that vengeance shall be satisfied. Know you, monster of all the evils, that before the rising of tomorrow's sun, your own blood will stain the very flagstones of the palace! You are dying, but the soul of Divue Sal may not be cheated."

The wrinkled old hag turned to leave.

"Wait, old woman!" cried Guillaume San. "I wish to prove to you that you lie. I tell you that I am dying, that I shall be dead before the mob can win through my faithful soldiers. I know your meaning now, doctor, when you told me that I would cheat them all. I see the grim reaper at the bedside. Make haste and prepare the casket. When I have gone, cause my body to be placed in state just inside the door of the main salon, so that the mob may see—and know that I have fooled them at the very last."

They left him then. Only the hag remained and looked on. Several times she broke out in cackling laughter.

"He! he!—he! he! he!—he! he!"

She turned away at last, calling back over her shoulder to Guillaume San:

"Remember what I tell you, that your evil blood will yet stain the flagstones of the palace!"

Guillaume San was left alone to face his Maker.

Once he started up, terrible strength in his muscles for a single moment.

"Who calls?" he cried. "Who whispers the name of Guillaume San?"

Only the silence of the sick room gave answer. Guillaume smiled to himself—a terrible smile—and wiped the dew from his forehead.

The orderly entered, with the doctors behind him.

"Is everything ready?" whispered Guillaume San.

They nodded and looked fearfully behind them, where darkness was falling over the city, and only the lights before the door of the palace showed the black and yellow faces of the mob.

"Everything is ready, Excellency, but the mob is rushing the palace!"

"Even so, I have cheated the vultures!"

Guillaume San fell back and died.

The orderly and the doctors started and looked at one another as a weird noise came in to them from the darkened salon:

"He! he!—he! he! he!—he! he!"

The vaulted dome of the palace gave back the sound in weird and terrible echoes:

"He! he!—he! he! he!—he! he!"

Even as they placed the body in state in the casket in the main salon, the roar which had been continuous outside for many hours increased in volume. The soldiers gave back a few paces into the palace, looking fearfully behind them at the strange shape on the raised dais in the center of the main salon—a shape that was even more strange because of the flickering light cast upon it from the torches held high above the heads of the leaders of the mob, whose faces were crowding the doorway as they fought for entry.

"Flee! Flee for your very lives!"

The orderly ran, with the doctors at his heels. The soldiers heard the order, but knew not whence it came. It seemed to come from that long, black shape outlined in the flickering glow of the torches. They obeyed, as they had always obeyed, what they took to be the last command of Guillaume San. They fled, giving over the palace to the ghouls.

Instantly there was roar upon roar of musketry as the mob emptied its rifles into that long, black shape in the main salon. A kind of sigh came out to them through the holes in the coffin which the bullets had made. Torches were dashed to the floor as the superstitious blacks, eager before to enter the palace, were now many times as eager to win free from some nameless and terrible presence. Once more the palace was in darkness as the mob fled, scattering to its dives and runways in the capital city of the Black Republic.

AFTER a time a weird shadow moved in the gloom of the silent palace. Two small lights glistened as the old hag, mother of Divue Sal, placed a candle at either end of the casket which contained all that was mortal of Guillaume San. She stood back in the gloom, rubbing her hands together as if washing them. Her wrinkled face came into view and receded again as the candles flared up and died down.

"He! he!—he! he! he!—he! he!"

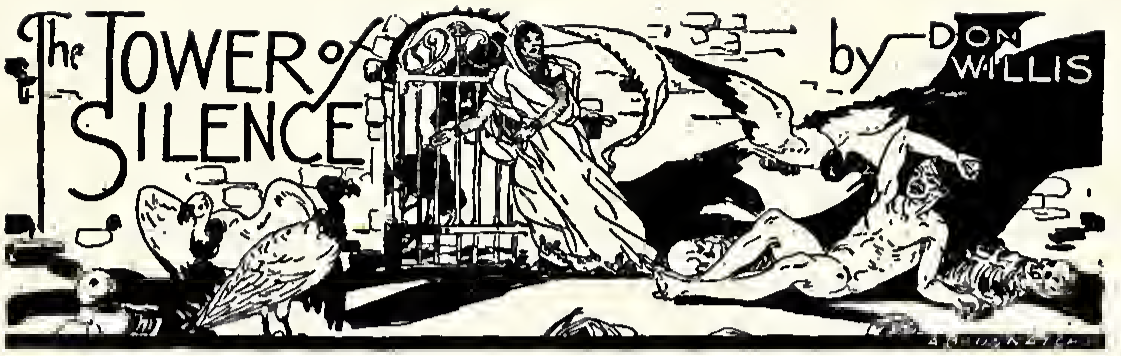
The old crone cackled and washed her hands.

Her greedy old eyes were alight with evil fires. For she listened to the soft drip! drip! drip! which was slowly widening the dark pool on the flagstones beneath the casket.

The prophetess had spoken.

The Tower of Silence

by DON WILLIS



WE HAD been messing around in the hottest part of southern Persia, with snakes and Arab sheiks and sand fleas all pestering us to the full extent of their various abilities. Greaves was obsessed with the idea that we had located what was once the backyard of one of the ancient Assyrian kings, who used to race his two-wheeled chariots up and down the highways of those parts. On my side, I was not so sure about it. But I was certain that some food, other than the hard bread and canned meat which we had been living on for the last six weeks, would taste good.

Our map showed a native town about sixteen miles to the east. We tossed up a penny to see whether both of us should hike over, or whether I should chance it alone, and bring back whatever could be found in the way of fresh meats and vegetables. The penny fell heads up, and I was off alone. Not exactly alone, though, because old Mizrah, one of our native bearers, was persuaded to go with me. It took quite a bit of urging to get him to come along, and I wondered what was in his mind. He acted like a man who has seen a ghost in a grave yard and does not care to go back that way unless it is a matter of dire need. From what I could gather, it was neither the town nor the journey that made him afraid. I laid it to some native superstition and dismissed it from mind.

Before he would start, Mizrah insisted on daubing a little smear of black mud on my forehead, and he muttered a few guttural words in his native tongue as he did it. He was in dead earnest, so I shrugged my shoulders and let him have his will in the matter. In fact, I had come to look upon some of the strange native customs as the natural outcroppings from the mysterious country in which they dwelt. I had long adopted their loose cotton robe and sandals, because I found these more comfortable than the close-fitting shoes and shirts and trousers of civilization. The sun, and the burning winds, had tanned my skin a deep copper brown, so that, even when stripped naked, I was scarcely to be told from the men of the desert who made up our small retinue of bearers and handy-men.

It is hard to let the man who is unfamiliar with that country understand what the path was like. Underfoot, the earth was a fire-box coated with a layer of baked dust from three to twelve inches deep. Beneath that lay a bed of rotten sandstone. Here and there the sandstone cropped out in ledges, solid masses of raw red, or slashed in twisted green stripes like pools of blood with green snakes writhing on the surface.

It was late afternoon when we started. Even before the sun set, a great, sallow moon crept into the eastern sky, as if to make sure that the features of the unholy country about us should not for a moment be hidden.

On and on we puttered through the dust. The trail seemed fairly well marked, and, once on the way, I did not think it necessary to look again at the map which I had brought with me. For this carelessness I was later to pay, and pay dearly.

Mizrah made no sound, except to grunt occasionally as we passed over some unusually forbidding stretch of ground. After several hours of tramping, I glanced at my watch, only to find that it had stopped. Oddly enough, the hands stood at five o'clock, the exact hour at which we had left camp. When I pointed this out to Mizrah, he appeared shocked by the news and was for turning back at once. To him, it was an ill omen, and from the look in his eyes, he might have been expecting the moon to stay its course in the heavens, or leap down and devour us. I smiled at his childishness, but there was an odd sense of portending trouble shadowing my mind which I could not altogether down.

With no way to gage the passing of time, except by the height of the moon, it was not now so easy to estimate the distance we had traveled. At last it seemed to me that we must be nearing the end of our journey, and I began to look about for signs of human habitation. Except for an occasional jackal flitting in and out of the shadows by the rocky ledges, nothing living was to be seen.

We finally mounted to the highest point on one of the ledges, and by the light of the moon I unrolled my map and tried to locate our position on it.

The next I knew, Mizrah had hold of the sleeve of my cotton robe, and was jabbering and pointing. I looked, and saw a tiny light, scarcely bigger than the faintest stars which hung against the sky-line. It went out of sight, then reappeared then vanished again. It looked as if some one were carrying a lantern along a winding path among the ledges. I decided that the town lay in that direction, and we struck out for it across the open desert.

If the going had been nasty before, it was terrifying now. The sandstone formations humped themselves up in the moonlight like ungainly beasts in all manner of fantastic shapes, and a slight breeze swirled the dust in shimmery veils across them, till even my nerves began to get jumpy. Mizrah was soon in a state of quivering terror, and shivering like a man chilled to the marrow of his bones. Drops of sweat broke out on his brow, and I had to smile at the strange way they shone in the moonlight, like little glass beads.

AT LAST we reached a well-trodden way, and it seemed we were nearing the town we sought. I began to feel relieved and to conjure up the meal I was soon to eat.

Then, without warning, came a sight which sickened me and erased all thoughts of eating from my mind. On a wooden cross, set up about twenty paces from the wayside, was nailed the corpse of a naked man. He had been horribly mutilated. At either side of him sat two huddled figures which I at first thought to be dead also, until I saw their eyes shining under their red turbans.

We left that part of the trail behind in a hurry. Evidently this was not a healthful country for certain people, and I was not at all assured of our own standing in the community.

It may have been ten minutes later when the road made a sharp turn, and right in front of us there loomed the shape of a huge stone idol, squatting cross-legged on a circular platform, with a lighted lamp in his outstretched hand, and a red turban swathing all his head above his green jade eyes. The grounds about him were well tended, and I looked right and left to discover the whereabouts

of the priests who served him. But there was no one to be seen.

Telling Mizrah to wait, I ventured up on to the platform. The lamp looked interesting. Stretching on tiptoe, I reached out my hand and touched it. With a splash and clatter it tumbled on to the floor, and just at this moment I heard a shout. I saw Mizrah turn and run headlong down the road in the moonlight. Then I leaped from the platform and dashed after him. Right at our heels rushed a good dozen of the red-turbaned figures, like the men we had seen sitting at the foot of the crucifix.

In my college days I did quite a bit of running. That night, if a stopwatch had been held on me, I am sure any mark I ever made before would have been bettered by a big margin. I overtook Mizrah in the first two hundred yards. The poor fellow was swaying drunkenly, and even now I can recall the sound of his breath as it hissed in his parched throat. The path branched, and, out of the tail of my eye, I saw him take the turn to the left and then flounder from sight. The priests took no notice of him, and this made it certain that it was my foolhardiness in tipping over the lamp that had drawn them in pursuit of us. No doubt my act had been first-degree sacrilege. The crucified figure again took shape in my mind, and, if possible. I ran even faster.

How long this kept up is not certain, but my heart was bursting, and they still held relentlessly to the trail. The path ran across a slight hillock. I struggled up it, and over the crest. One thought began to rule all my faculties. I must stop running. I must stop. Stop! The rise of ground hid me momentarily from my pursuers. Before me loomed a long circular wall. There was a vague recollection of having run like this before, a childhood memory perhaps, or a subconscious vision from the stone age. Almost without thinking, I hugged close to the base of the wall, and instead of following the path I circled around it. I had almost completed the circuit, feet dragging, staggering at scarcely more than a walk. when a ditch stretched across my way, and I tripped on the brink and shot headlong into it. What little breath I had left was jarred out of me, and I lay as one dead for about ten minutes.

The air in the ditch stunk so foully that I was almost nauseated by it. It was darker now, and the moon was evidently setting. Finally I scrambled to my feet, and. with my head on a level with the ditch bank, looked about me. Far down the road. I could see the priests coming back from the chase. They no longer all held to the roadway, but some were spread out fanwise in couples, and quartering the ground like a pack of foxhounds. It was well for me at the moment that the shadows covered me.

What could I do? They would be certain to find me if I remained where I was. and I shuddered at the recollection of the figure on the cross, limp, mutilated, evidently tortured cruelly before he died. To one side of the ditch was a mound of earth, apparently heaped there when it had been dug. There were also several loose planks. It was a choice of scaling the wall and chancing what might lie in wait for me inside, or of being captured.

As swiftly and quietly as I could, I slipped from the ditch and crawled to the summit of the mound. Two of the planks were fairly heavy timbers, and these I placed at a slant against the wall, and after a deal of effort clambered upon them. My fingers, luckily, then reached to the top of the wall.

With a jumping kick I knocked the timbers over, and they thudded to the soft earth. Then I exerted every ounce of strength which I could muster, and despite the fact that the rim

of the wall was slimy with the droppings of birds, in one final effort I scrambled over it and swung my body inside. As I let go with my hands, the last thing I saw was a faint, rosy glow in the east, where dawn was just spreading across the sky.

It must have been twenty feet sheer that I fell before my feet struck on something soft and slippery. I inhaled a deep breath of the most putrid and nauseating air man ever smelled, skidded backward, and struck my head on the wall, and must have been knocked nnconscious.

MY SENSES. drifted back to me gradually. First, I was dimly conscious of the horrible odor that pervaded the place. Next, I noticed that the sun was tipping the upper edge of the wall with gold. Then I looked beside me at a huddled figure, its face and eyes partly pecked away. With an indescribable thrill of horror, I crawled on hands and knees, away from the wall and into the center of the paved courtyard. My head slowly cleared, but the stenches turned my stomach, so that I was seized with spasms of vomiting. These were the more racking because I had eaten nothing in many hours, and my stomach was bare of food. It was evident that I had stumbled into one of the horrible charnel pens, or Towers of Silence, in which the strange sect known as the sun-worshipers disposes of its dead.

In one section of the circular wall stood a great wooden gate, closed, and apparently faatened from outside. Without it, I heard a murmur of voices. I had picked up enough of the various native dialects, during my two years in Persia, to understand part of what was said. The hunt for me, accursed defiler of their god, was to go on, and tortures were already being planned against the hour when I should be caught.

I had but two choices. Either I could give myself up at once, or I might secrete myself somewhere about the enclosure and await my chance to escape. You may think it strange, but I was on the point of giving myself up, when I again thought of the figure on the crucifix, and that decided me on concealment.

Although I searched the enclosure carefully, I could find no place to hide. The floor was just a great circular stone pavement, with a walk running around the edge of it, and iron gratings on which the naked dead bodies were laid out. Finally I hit upon the plan of concealing my clothes in a crack between two paving stones, and lying naked upon the grids among the dead bodies: of course, I could sit up or walk about, so long as no one came into the enclosure. I got my robe and sandals off, and took a position such that I could stretch myself on the grid in a hurry, if any one entered.

About that time I noticed a speck or two, drifting in mile-wide spirals down the stretch of sky above me. Vultures! Soon the sky was flecked with them. One alighted on the wall. Others came to rest beside him.

Soon, with a hoarse chuckle, they hopped off of the wall and plumped down on the iron grating. Then their ghastly feast began. I can still see their smeared beaks, rending and tearing, and their snaky, featherless necks, which contorted as they bolted chunks of flesh as big as my fist. They stunk almost as bad as the corpses, and big gray lice scooted about on patches of their scaly skin, where bunches of feathers had fallen out.

Weakened as I was by lack of food and by the strenuous events of the night, it is small wonder that my mind began to wander amid this inferno of abominable stenches, gruesome sights, and horrible noises. I took no note of time. Even in the hot sunshine, my body felt cold; and the pangs of thirst moved me little.

The first break in my misery came when a clamor of wailing voices hroke through my reeling consciousness. It seemed inside my own head. Londer it grew; chains rattled; ruaty hinges creaked; I saw that the gate was opening. There was just time to stretch myself on one of the grates before a funeral procession filed slowly in.

Through half-closed lids I watched them; saw them pile six bodies, which had been borne in on straw mats, upon the grid next to me; saw them stand with bowed heads while several vultures, drawn by thia new supply of food, started their feast by pecking out the eyes of the corpses. Then the procession, with the red-turbaned priests in front and a few sorrowing women lagging in the rear, made a circuit of the walk and wound out through the gate.

Last to pass me was a young woman of about twenty-four, beautiful despite her tear-stained cheeks. I kept my eyes upon her—God! What damnable carelessness. With a blow of my fist I knocked one of the huzzards from the grid, just as his beak was descending toward my eyes. The woman saw my move, and with a fearful little soh ahe threw her veil topsy-turvy over her face and hurried on without looking back. To her, I must have been a dead man trouhled by evil spirits.

Truth to tell, at that moment I wished myself dead, and the horror ended. As the day wore on, I felt that my senscs were wandering and I was alowly going mad. I muttered at the vultures. I pounded on the stone wall with my naked fists. I bit my nails till the hlood dripped from the tips of my fingers. And the agony went on, endless as time.

Evening found me stark mad, and raving. I was no more human than the vultures. A recollection haunts me of taking a short ruñ along the stones and then jumping into the air and flopping my arms, just as the vultures fanned the air with their wings when they rose to flight. But when thcy had all flown away I was still going through my mad antics, still a prisoner.

As the air cooled, and darkness set in, my senses partly came hack to me. Hardly more alive than the half-devoured corpses, I stretched myself on the stone pavement and fell into a restless doze, marked hy delirious visions of all the fantastic shapes of hell. A clammy weight was creeping np and down my naked chest. A red hot forceps was tearing off one of my thumbs. Then I awakened, and, if my throat had not been heyond all power of speech, I must have screamed in a frenzy of agony. Rats! More horrible even than the vultures! Plump, well-fed ones, they had come for their share of the ghoulish feast.

I staggered to my feet. From then on, nothing is clesr. I waa a mad man among the dead who would not let me rest. The spirits of all the dead that had ever rotted there returned to torment me. They wore red turhans, and had vulture heaks, and their tonch wss clammy. After the moon had climbed well into the heavens, one of them sailed across the sky in an airplane and threw a grinning skull at me, which struck at my feet and then was nothing but a paper-white shadow in the moonlight. I lived through all the hell of all eternity. To escape the ghosts, I pounded on the wooden gate with my bare hands and tried to shout, hut my voice sounded in my ears like the croaking of a frog. At last the priests outside heard; voices debated, the chains rattled.

CAME a blinding flash, and an explosion that ripped the base from a section of the wall. The upper part swayed once, twice, then thudded to the ground, and a fan of dust belched high into the air. A second fiash, more distant, and another explosion.

(*Continued on page* 182)

Do You Believe a Memory Can be Inherited? Read This Startling Tale

John Caroll, Legionary of Rome

By **B. WALLIS**

Author of "The Abysmal Horror"

THERE was the sound of many voices and loud laughter around me as I awoke to the stage of consciousness which precedes full possession of one's faculties. For a moment the sounds impinged upon my ears without arousing any particular emotion. Then with a snap I was awake and staring at a scene which left no room for any sensation save speechless amazement.

It could not have been more than half an hour back, I should imagine, that I, John Caroll, American citizen, had fallen asleep on the crest of Coomber Head, which lies some 1,500 feet above the village of Coomsbury on the North Devon coast in England, where I had been spending the first few days of my vacation and first visit to the land of my ancestors.

Although no later than the end of May the weather had been most infernally hot the last few days, and the top of this headland had appeared to me the most comfortable and airy spot for an after-dinner snooze that could be found. Here I had lain down upon the pleasant springy heather that covers the walls of the great circular earthen enclosure known locally as "Caesar's Camp."

"What the deuce!" I said aloud in the act of opening my eyes. And then instantaneously I became merely a registering machine incapable of any connected or logical mental process. For what I registered was utterly beyond all human experience, and as incredible as an objective reality. And yet every one of those astounding figures by which I was surrounded was as obviously flesh and blood as I was myself!

The entire enclosure to the crest of the walls was covered with a mass of humanity. Hundreds, thousands of them there must have been. Some were in motion, but the majority sat or reclined on the bare earth, for so, unconsciously, I noted the ground upon which I lay appeared to be; not a blade of grass or a twig of heather could be seen, nothing but brown, bare, fresh-turned soil. In the center stood a number of large, flat-roofed tents, and several fires near by were burning vigorously and appeared to be the stage of immense culinary operations.

These things I noted almost as unthinkingly as a sensitive plate records the detail of a scene exposed for but a second, and by the same process it was impressed upon me that all the figures were arrayed in the most fantastic manner, outside of a pageant, it is possible to conceive. Yet there was a naturalness and ease in their wearing of these strange trappings which instinctively impressed me with the conviction that these were the right and customary habiliments of the wearers; and yet I knew that in

such fashion were clothed the legionaries of Rome of twenty centuries gone by! Detached assertions welled up from my subconscious self and formed themselves into mental images of words such as "Romans!" "Legionaries!" "Impossible!" "Insanity!" and so forth.

How long this dislocation of mentality prevailed I cannot say; I only know that the condition was suddenly broken into by the laugh of a man close beside me, a laugh as solid, as jovial, as gross, as any I had ever heard. Moreover, it was emphasized by a sounding slap upon my shoulder, delivered with the weight of a brawny arm. I turned with a convulsive start. And then I realized that I was surrounded by at least a dozen of these impossible beings, who were sitting or reclining within a few feet of me, as a knot of friendly men might gather together, and the nearest had his tawny thick fingers resting on my shoulder!

"Ha! Carolus," he said in a loud, boisterous voice, which, though rough, was good-natured and friendly. And there followed some sentences in a tongue which, though I did not grasp the meaning of the words, yet I recognized at once as being intimately related to the Latin I had knowledge of. Mind you, I so nearly recognized the words that their meaning seemed hazily intelligible to me, or rather, I seemed on the edge of it, yet imperfectly so. All I clearly realized was that he asserted I had been asleep and was chaffing me upon it.

As he spoke I was staring in unbounded astonishment. He was clothed in the same simple barbaric fashion as the rest of that astounding throng. A leather, sleeveless tunic and short kilt partly covered with plates of dangling metal of a reddish hue (probably bronze), lower limbs faced by ridged strips of a similar metal and attached by thongs of leather, and crested metal headgear completed their simple wardrobe, though many lacked both helmet and leggings, which lay everywhere in neat little piles. Some wore rough hide sandals and others lacked any foot covering. Weapons—short, thick bladed swords, spears, and bows—were stacked in symmetrical lines on the slopes of the enclosure. My mind registered these things with almost photographic accuracy, while totally devoid of the least comprehension of my connection with it. And when my amazed gaze happened to alight upon my own recumbent limbs, a sudden faintness came upon me; for each member of my body was arrayed in the same inexplicable fashion, while my person, familiar to me as a broad, well-built individual, a little exceeding the average stature, had undergone a metamorphosis as startling as my costume. What I stared at now were the limbs and sinews of a giant, a Hercules among men! This huge individual was nearly seven feet in height and his arms were thicker than a strong man's legs! And his skin was as tawny as the fingers which still held their rough friendly grip on my shoulder.

In sudden terror I closed my eyes; I would shut out this impossible nightmare. Moreover, I now realized that an extraordinary sensation had been with me since I first awaked, a sensation of great languor, which increased distressingly each moment and now had become an actual physical torture. Something seemed to be leaving me, even dragged from me. There was an inward turmoil, a spiritual strife between myself and a relentless force that was invading every cell in me. Flashes of strange memory, words, images alien to me stabbed my brain in abrupt waves of thought, increasing rapidly in vividness and stability.

For a moment the strife grew so intense that I felt my senses reeling into unconsciousness and I was falling,

falling, into a bottomless black abyss. Then suddenly I was free from the sickening pain, and as in relief I drew into my lungs a great draft of sweet heather-spiced air my eyelids opened slowly. And it seemed to me that in body I was feeling quite at my ease, and in mind aware and satisfied with many interests unknown to John Caroll. Though this thought only came as the flicker of a half forgotten dream, it did not arouse in me the slightest confusion. There I was as before (though of that past I had no thought), lying on the brown, fresh-turned soil, and the fingers still gripped my shoulder and their owner was still speaking to me in his deep, good-natured voice. Only now I understood perfectly and without effort every word he uttered. I felt very solid, very material, and very much alive. And though something in me hazily wondered at these things, yet a stronger identity accepted every word and detail as natural and fully in accord with the place, time, and previous happenings, and this identity was much the stronger and more persistent, so that the man who had fallen asleep but half an hour back could by no means arrive at full consciousness or assert his identity, though there was a nebulous mental awareness of the desperate strivings of this subdued personality, but each moment they grew weaker as I, a soldier of Imperial Rome, sat lazily listening to my good comrade, the lusty trencherman Clodius.

"Carolus, a mighty sleeper you, by the gods, and the sport no more than started. Wake up, man! Were you not so ill-tempered I would spare a clout for your curly head."

As he spoke a flash of memory stabbed through the brain of this dominant Carolus, and overpowering him for a moment, to me was born the thought: "Illusion! All illusion! My hair is as straight as a board!" and "What is this? Sounds like Latin, but it's not the Latin I was taught. Illusion! Nothing but illusion!"

The words seemed flashed and imprinted on my brain, without thought in their conception or ensuing recognition of their import. It was a second's flash and then the picture had vanished and I, the tawny giant, was speaking.

"Clout away, old Clodius, my curly head is as hard as yours."

"Nay, lad, nay. Would sooner smite a ramping lion on the snout. With one like to you the stroke must be a death one or none, and as yet I have no ill feeling sufficient to nerve the blow. But truly, lad, prop your lids open for a space; our captain has a cunning skill in these things and is like to give us some fine sport with that strapping wench you brought in over your shoulder this morning. See how she stands facing old Fabius. I doubt me he would fare ill, were the barbarian loosed."

As he spoke he pointed towards the center of the enclosure, and I stared with interest there, for now quite naturally I recollected finding this fair savage in a clump of scrub while I was foraging fuel for the camp. How she had bit and scratched, as laughingly I pinned her to the ground with one arm and then, heaving her over my shoulder, had brought her to old Fabius, our senior centurion, for him to examine and squeeze out some little news of the enemy.

"Ha! Well done, Carolus!". (I was known to high and low in our legion.) "You will command a cohort one day yet," he exclaimed as I lowered her to the ground, though keeping a grip on her hands, for I had no mind to have my eyes plucked out, as had happened to more than one of our men. And I remembered that, though pleased by his words, I had somehow a distaste to see two of our hardly human Gaulish slaves roughly handle her limbs as they bound her with thongs.

Well I knew what lay in store for this poor savage. I had seen others as defiant and hardy to withstand torment as she promised to be, yet in a little they had been willing to unload their very souls to escape the attentions of his Gauls. True, this was not the first fair islander I had viewed so close. Barely twelve months back we had landed for the first time on these shores, but, we being few in numbers and the barbarians numerous, we had penetrated hardly two days' march inland and then returned to our long ships and sailed for the msinland. During this short stay I had seen many of their young women and girls, fighting alongside as bravely as their men. Several we had captured, and after disclosing sll that they knew (under compulsion), then had they been mercifully slain. Without exception they had been personable women, clean-limbed and active as young deer, fair-haired and blue-eyed, but very stubborn and hard to persuade.

This maid, our first catch for many days (we were here to build a permanent post for the use of the legions now on their way) had a chiseling of feature and a something in her clear fine eyes that marked her as one apart from the ordinary, likely enough a king's daughter as such go in these parts; and as I gazed it came to me that if I could recall the deed it would be odds that the maid escsped. And at this point for the last time John Caroll telegraphed to the usurped brain the words. "It's all illusion! Abominable madness! It's got to be stopped!" Yet not for a moment did the gaze of Carolus cease to dwell on the fair flesh he had lightly doomed to suffer the merciless cunning of old Fabius. And the words of John Caroll were no sooner imprinted on the heedless brain that once was his. than they were swept into oblivion by the fast growing intensity of regret and unrest that had come upon the spirit of the giant Carolus, an alien of aliens, nevertheless myself.

There she stood about a hundred paces away, while Fabius, Licinius, the captain of my cohort, and several others of rank sat a few feet sway on rude benches our artizans had built. Holding the maid, one on each side, stood a couple of our Gaul slaves. From the hand of one drooped a length of thin, knotted cord, and the other fellow was watching attentively a long, slender rod of iron lying in the center of a smsll, red-hot fire of fagots that burned beside him.

THE scene was not novel to a single man among us. For nearly two years in a score of wild lands we had sojourned, and in that time fought many times that number of battles and an almost daily quota of minor skirmishes. Many had been the captives we had seen standing just as this maid now, a few to earn their abrupt dismissal from their misery by sn early willingness to unburden themselves of a response to certain questions, the majority to travel a longer and even harder road to the same sharp end, and a few to the last as silent as if deaf and dumb. A stern, hard age was ours, yet we did but as others dealt to us. We were even the more gentle, for once the object was attained a happy dispatch was granted without delay to the captive, while our foes tormented a man for mere love of the game and assiduously kept the spark of life alight so long as it might be endured by one of our brave lads. Therefore was there no surplus of pity spilled among us at the fate of captive, man or woman; yet this one had taken my fancy and I was beginning to look with disgust and anger at my comrades, who could find amusement in the scene.

"I have a small opinion of your sport," I said somewhat sourly and sneeringly. "It is a simple matter to rack a maid to death."

"So!"

He stared at me in surprize.

"Carolus has a soft, gentle heart in his brute's body," he replied jeeringly, "though the first I have noted of it. Yet truly she is pleasing to the eye, a fine-looking wench, and might lighten some days of a hard life."

Several other remarks he delivered himself of, but they were in the main unprintable (as I think now). These evoked a rough denial from me, though in a somewhat lazy, indifferent manner, as was my way in these wordy combats with my comrades. The brawny ruffian laughed and called to those immediately around.

"Lads, cast an eye on our little Carolus. Already he repents of not keeping the wench hid to himself. Does he not make a sweet, simpering lover? Mayhap he would even yet snatch his catch from old Fabius and depart to savage lairs to raise a brood of cubs!"

"I have a mind to crack your skull," I said darkly.

"And have your nose slit for it," he said jeering. "You may call to mind that such was my promise for the next who spoilt a good soldier."

In this he was speaking truth; Fabius had a short, sharp way with any who depreciated his treasure, the bodies of his soldiers. Yet the men around me laughed but moderately. Brawny and hard though they were, and the victors of a hundred desperate battles, yet I, Carolus, was a giant, and tales of my huge strength were told in many a distant legion.

Every eye was upon that little group in the center, and between us and them there lay a vacant apace in which no man set foot unhidden if he valued his life; for such was the custom and discipline of a legion on foreign soil. An interpreter (we had several, renegades from the tribes) was plying the girl with short, sharp questions in their uncouth tongue. She answered now and again merely a single word in reply; and there could be no least doubt of what that word was, for the calm strength of her set hard face and the quiet force of the utterance spelled "No!" as plainly as if she had spoken in our noble Roman. It was clear that here lay a high spirit of great endurance and stubbornness.

As I watched, my uneasiness of soul increased vastly each second, and more and more I disliked the image of what I knew would shortly befall that fair flesh. Fire and twisted cords are grievous things. It seemed abominable, evil, that such a sightly form should be warped and shriveled in this ignoble manner. Yet though I felt great concern I was also angry that the matter should so appear to me. Many had I witnessed, young and fair too, who had suffered and cried in anguish in the hands of the tormentors; but, knowing that within their lips were likely the lives of brave soldiers, and bearing in mind those murdered honest lads of ours, I had never troubled overmuch at the stern necessities of war. But this was different; why, I could not tell; it was as if some invisible bond stretched between the maid and myself.

Ah! they had ceased to question her. Now was her time come. Silently and fervently I prayed the gods that the anguish might conquer her will and with a few short sentences she would earn her dismissal. For that was our way; we dared not let them go to report our weakness, so a merciful thrust was the solution. On second thought, this did not please me either; I had small wish to witness the maid a lifeless clod thrown into a shallow trench with a few shovelfuls of soil as an eternal covering.

A thin, scrawny brute, a Gaul from the great marshes of the mainland, snatched a short iron rod from the glowing embers with his rude pincers while his companion roughly whipped the hide rope from her shoulders. Instantly the red iron was clapped to

her back and a spurt of brown smoke shot upward while distinctly I could hear the sizzle of scorching flesh. The naked, beautiful bosom heaved convulsively and a shiver sped through the limbs. Yet not a sound escaped those tight-set lips, and the features were set with a marble fixity.

At once the iron was shifted a little space higher, for the cunning of the tormentors had taught them that nerves racked too long suffer death before the body. Again the spurt of smoke and the convulsive start. Her breath came and went in panting drafts, and though I was too distant to hear it, I could see that from her moving lips escaped a moan. And at the sight a deep, cold rage took hold of me, a black hatred of myself, my comrades, and of the gods on high who could placidly survey such an abomination. The world between us twain lay blurred in a mist and my raging gaze alone saw the girl standing, naked to the waist, in the grip of the two gloating ghouls, and the wisp of smoke now slowly stretching upwards from her tortured flesh.

AS I stared in thunder-charged silence, a thought from the void leapt upon me and sank its shaft deep into my spirit; and hardly was it a thought, but more of a primal desire, as unbidden and uncontrollable as thirst, or fear, or love; and translated into speech it was the fierce, reckless determination that come what might I would pluck her from the clutches of that carrion and with one shrewd stroke release her brave, enduring spirit. Then those around, slave or centurion, should swiftly pass into eternal darkness, sped by the strongest arm in all the Roman legions. Blindly, madly, I lusted to slay and slay—with every stroke to hurl a dozen souls into the halls of the gods, to pile a mound of blood-stained corpses about me, until mine own lay still and riven beside them. Duty, discipline, the pride of race, all had crashed with that little anguished moan, and I was a mere straw in the mighty torrent of fierce desire and unleashed wrath. Yet, though spilling over with the mad lust of vengeance and slaying, I had the minute cunning and alert instinct which a wild beast betrays to accomplish its end. Therefore, I arose quietly and at no great pace made my way towards the innermost ring of watching, laughing men. Had I followed my immediate raging impulse to rush upon them with naked sword and cleave a red-stained path to the lodestone of my desire I had wit enough left to realize that a hundred blades would flash to meet me and even Hercules himself would have fallen before that encircling ring of flickering death.

I must move slowly to my goal. Yet something in my face and posture must have betrayed the demon who dwelt within me, for the voices of my companions broke out in surprize and rough jesting before I had stood squarely on my feet.

"What has vexed our puny dreamer?" asked one.

"Our unseemly rejoicing has spoilt his slumber. The gods be kind to us," said another with mock gravity.

"Do you see his face? He would slay his own shadow." drawled one further out.

"Sit down, little sweet one, we have need of your happy converse," asserted his neighbor.

I heard them but as voices muffled by the roar of a mountain stream—the stream of the rage which filled my soul.

As quickly as I dared, as slowly as my insensate craving to slay would allow me, I edged my path through the press and to that inner ring. Everywhere I heard words of jest and welcome, as the greetings given to a marked man, and one somewhat of a favorite. Strangely, as I went, little images, memory pictures of bygone

days, flickered before me: but flashes, unrelated fragments of things that had passed, such as a former landing on these shores, the streets of Rome, the Appian Way, a mighty throng, miles upon miles of wildly cheering people showering flowers upon us, a travel-stained legion marching slowly between the endless crowds, the fair-haired captives in the rear, led in leashes like dogs, our second landing on this coast and the fierce struggle to beach our boats. In no wise, however, were these pictnres a connected story of my life; they simply came and vanished; consciously my mind had no concern with them. All I knew was that I, Carolus, had a work in hand which the might of the whole world could not stay.

Soon I was right in the forefront of the inner circle, which held its rigid line as if a fence forbade further advance; and that fence was the stern discipline of the camp, the decree that whosoever encroached unbidden a foot within the vacant area need say farewell to life. Though I knew that, as simply as the fact that night followed day, yet I cared as little for the mandate as for the inevitable consequences of breaking it. Now bnt twenty paces distant stood the maid, her head bravely, resolutely, held on high, her lips clenched tight, and her gaze fixed in stony defiance upon some far distant point. Old Fabius sat a pace away upon a low, skin-covered bench, watching her calmly, impassively, as one might idly consider the writhings of an impsled insect. To him she was but a message in cipher which he was essaying to translate. Beside him stood or reclined some half a dozen of our officers watching with similar indifference the work of the Ganls. Two I overheard wager fifty sesterces whether she would speak now or under the eord. The men around me were mostly in low tones dilating on her person in the plain-spoken mode of our rank.

Rage, red and consuming, coursed my every fiber. That I hsd so amused myself on other similar occasions did not trouble me. I was divorced from reason or thought. One emotion alone possessed me and that was a devouring, burning flame of wrath. "Strike and slay! Each blow a red slash of death! Slay! Slay!" sang and thundered madly over and over again through my brain. This girl was mine. I did not understand, or try to, the why of this. I only knew that she was mine, and these dogs were marring, cracking this fair flesh, making a mock and a thing of scorn of mine own. By the gods! I would spill life like water, and by the road of red, screaming death she and I wonld enter the gardens of the gods; stark naked sonls should be the steps of the ladder we would scale.

"Twenty paces, Carolus!" warned a voice behind me, and a grip was laid on my arm. "Are you tired of life?"

I spun around to face the speaker, and then I mistily realized that I was a good pace in front of the foremost rank.

"Yes, greatly am I wearied of it," I said slowly. "And you? There—it is aped!"

As I uttered the words I snatched my sword from my belt and ran the blade from neck to waist, and a red cavern opened, from which his spirit fled. And then I leapt. In two great bounds I cleared that vacant area and was beside the maid. My work was the movement of a lightning stroke. One slash, and the two Gauls were twitching corpses on the ground. They had no time to run; I doubt if they saw me until my blade in the same sweep had caught one in the throat and the other across the ribs and slashed him nigh in twain. Wheeling round, I faced the maid. Coolly, squarely, steadfastly her eyes met mine: it was but the flick of a second our eyes met, yet in that tiny instant

I read that she knew of my purpose, and awaited, serene, unfearing, the release I brought with me. As I turned, I had my arm drawn back, crooked at the elbow for the thrust. There was no more than the beat of a hawk's wing between her and the great darkness when in the instant my purpose was shattered, and I knew that not mine was the arm to speed that noble spirit on its airy flight. I did not think; there was no time; with one single sweep I gathered her into my left arm and flung her across my shoulder so that she lay in the curve of my raised arm. As I caught her up I wheeled in a circle with arm as rigid as the blade the fingers gripped, and the swish of several sinews and the crackle of cloven bones smote my ear as the closing circle of shouting men changed their wrathful cries to sobbing gasps and spilled their lives on the bare brown earth. I had no scrap of heed where my blade bit: be it slave man, or centurion, it was one to me. Simply was I a raging engine of destruction to every living thing that came within my reach; I would have slain the gods themselves had they been there.

Again and again I wheeled and slashed, and it seems to me that ever just behind there raced a red mist which ran as a shadow chasing the flash of my raking blade. Faces came and vanished; only one have I a clear memory of, and that is Fabius, his eyes glaring rage and incredulous amazement as he fell forward in a welter of spurting blood from a gaping gash that had come close to severing his trunk in two.

I see the image of these things, and I hear again the thunder from a thousand throats, and I know that I was raging and pressing swiftly toward a certain set point, the great open gateway which every night was barred with many hundred earth-filled sacks, but during day had naught but a few sentries to guard it. Swiftly was I pressing toward it, for I think as yet not half the camp had awakened from their blank astonishment at my sudden madness. Every motion had been so sudden that I was half way to the gate before more than a score had essayed to block my path, and discovered their error. And then I saw the hundreds on either side rushing to intercept my way.

That way was hopeless; mere weight of numbers must stay my steps and I should be overwhelmed, even as the huge aurochs was overcome by a pack of wolves. What I hoped to gain by this unthinking urge of flight I knew not. I had neither plan nor hope for the future; my actions were the result of mere instinct, the blind rush and madness of a fleeing animal. Abruptly I swerved at right angles and made for the encircling barrier of earthwork. By some chance the way here was open and it seemed that I might top the crest before the racing streams to the gateway could retrace their steps and cut me off. Only had I the horde behind to reckon with, and, save a few, there lay many paces between us. A dozen, more or less, I cared naught for—one swinging slash when within reach and the foremost would be writhing on the bare ground a gory mess of passing life. Since manhood it was said that by much was I the strongest man in all our glorious legions. Certainly never had I met one in sport or earnest who caused me to doubt the truth of the tale. Now was I a god! Men melted away from me as if riven by the mad rage that flamed within me. The picked men of the finest army the world has ever seen were but puppets and playthings for my wrath.

Then I had reached the great earthen wall and there was none to stay my steps in front; and I knew that my long limbs had more than held their own with the press behind, in spite of the burden I carried, which then I heeded no more than a single

straw. Likely enough I had encountered a number of isolated stragglers, for I had a blurred impression of sudden fierce lunges of my sword arm and a scream or so, as if wrung from anguished sundering of flesh and spirit; likely such happened. In a moment I was cresting the ridge; several figures (sentries, I think) leapt to meet me. There was the clang and clash of stricken metal, and I had crashed through them. With a single bound I leapt from top to bottom of the steep outer slope, and my feet trod the bare, lonely hillside. Though the pursuit would by no means be relinquished, yet my soldier's training told me that no considerable body of men would be permitted to run thus in disorder over this hostile country in my wake. So there was granted to me a breathing space in the momentary confusion of selecting the huntsmen; at least I could search a spot to guard my back, and mayhap by the favor of the gods hold them off until darkness fell, some cleft or corner where arrow could not wing its barb and but few at a time could oppose me. Out here in the open the stream of thought flowed afresh and the desire to live flickered up once again, and though reckless and caring but little which way the dice came to rest, yet the thought of life was not unpleasing.

Darkness was not so long distant, the sun had been rapidly nearing its couch before I had left my comrades on the slope to deliver my message of incredible mutiny and red destruction. Now the light was greatly softened and the sun was sliding to the purple ridge of mountains far across the water; but the half light is a lengthy affair in these northern islands, and possibly it lacked an hour yet to complete darkness. Much might happen, would happen, in that short hour. I had no high or vain hopes of evading the mighty, relentless arm of Rome.

These thoughts came to me as I raced forward, making for the broken, rugged country of the coast about two miles away. Inland was a vast stretch of open moorland devoid of cover. Now I had time to wonder how it fared with my burden; neither sound nor movement betrayed that life rested within the tight grip of my encircling arm. Though dreading, yet fervently I trusted that such was the case, for the thought of fulfilling my original purpose lay as a black horror upon me, yet I knew I had but delayed the dreaded moment. Strange! I, whose blade yet dripped with the blood of a score and more of good comrades, could not nerve my mind to contemplate one single stroke of mercy.

POSSIBLY I had covered the best part of a mile when the first faint sounds of pursuit came to my ears, and glancing quickly over my shoulder I could see a dark stream of running figures pouring after me. I quickened my pace; when the end came I would not be shot down in the open like a dog. By the gods, no! My back should be against a wall, the way narrow and crooked. Face to face, I cared not how many came to the merry meeting before I sank to my last deep slumber; and in the heat of the blood-letting it might be that I could discover the spirit for that stroke which I dreaded more than anything I had ever known.

There must be such a spot within my reach, could I but find it, down where the hillside swept to break away suddenly in one deep wild leap of naked frowning rock to the foaming surge hundreds of feet below. In that space of towering crag and deep ravine it should not be so hard to alight upon my goal.

On I sped; now the ground was fast breaking away in rugged ridges and chasms to the final sheer descent. I knew I was holding my own in spite of my burden; had I not for wager of a

centurion once heaved to my shoulder the carcass of a bullock and with never a stumble circled the camp? Therefore, it was no strange matter that, though she was a well-built maid, my burden was but a jest, yet the dearest, deadliest jest I had ever borne, and I regretted not one second of the years which would have been mine but now were snatched from me. I had to do as had befallen, and that was all I knew.

Right by the edge of the sheer cliff I found what I craved. A long, narrow ledge, barely two paces in width, ran gradually downward and inward so that the rock above leaned over, and the far end of the ledge was roofed half way across. A great beak of bluff at that part gave a sharp turn to the few final feet of the shelf, which there terminated in a wall of sheer rock rising to the overhanging crest some twelve feet above. Once the entrance to the shelf was beset, there was no returning or escape for one so trapped. Yet a man such as I, standing at the bend, might hold that way against a thousand, for I could not be harmed save from the front, and there no more than two or three could assail me at a time. It was a trap, but the trappers could in no wise snatch therefrom their prey. The end was of course but a matter of time, but meanwhile there would be much blood spilled.

My decision was made on the instant, though it sealed my fate; but sooner or later they would have cut me off in the open and shot me down from a distance with never a blow of mine to repay them.

I strode to the end, and gently lowered my fair burden to the bare rock. There remained a little space yet before the first of my pursuers might arrive. I could not hope that my flight down here had been unobserved. I knelt beside her and sadly, gravely, gazed into her eyes, which were open, and calm, and brave. Lacking a word, I gazed deep and long into the soul that lay behind the lovely eyes, gazed until her lids drooped and a ghost of color crept into her cheeks.

Some message, unspoken, untranslatable, passed between us. In a second my arms were round her and her head was lying on my shoulder and my Roman tongue was pouring words of love into ears of which I knew not even the owner's name! But a flame of recognition had leapt from the soul of us twain, and meeting, words mattered not. Time, and the bonds of race and speech, had ceased to vex the soul. Had we dwelt side by side from birth to white-haired decay we could not have been welded more closely together or known greater love. And death was pressing close and sure upon us; life had need to spread its pinions to the summit of the soul's ecstasy and tread the shining heights. Good need, for as I clasped her and rained kisses upon her sweet, willing lips something damp and warm crept down my arm and meandered across my shoulder. For a moment I stared, not understanding. Then I knew!

Quickly, gently, I released myself from the weak grasp of those clinging arms, and softly raising her head and shoulders caught sight of the cruel, gaping gash that some accursed blade had torn in that dear flesh. One look was enough. Of wounds and their meaning I had a wide and very sure knowledge. She was even now dying! As she lay in my arms the spirit wings had already spread for the flight across the black gulf. The marvel of that great enduring spirit! Through the wild struggle and mad race never a move or a gasp had told me of her mortal hurt. Yet it was better so, though madly I pressed my lips to hers in despair and met the fast-failing response of the fleeting soul. One last flicker of love—and then I was alone.

"Thanks, oh gods! Thy last great gift. Hail, oh gods! Now to reap the

harvest for thy granary;" I called aloud, rising to my feet.

My blood, my brain, were as ice; no pain, grief, or care had home in me; my spirit had finished with such. Nothing remained to me but to die, and very calmly, very grimly, I resolved to set about the business; my ending should be remembered so long as one lived who witnessed it.

I had not long to wait. The sound of many hastening feet could be plainly heard. I drew close to the abrupt bend in the ledge. Nearer and nearer came the sound. Now they had come to the ledge itself, and I could hear the voice of Licinius, captain of my cohort.

"Take him with a rush, lads; he has no room for rough play down there."

"Not overmuch, Licinius," I called back quietly, "yet it will suffice for some merry sport. Tarry not, my comrades, I am waiting."

And in neither heart nor voice was there a grain of bitterness.

"You fox, Carolus, a pretty chase you have led us, and we are hungry men," came back a roaring grumble.

It was Quintus, a roystering old blade who loved his rations most mightly.

"Could you not have waited by the gate and held converse there?" he grunted, as with two others of my cohort he swung around the bend and leapt straight for me.

As I have said, hardly could three breast that narrow way, and hardly had the words left his lips when three had vanished from the ledge and went hurtling to the moaning water fully five hundred feet below. One lacked his head and the other two doubtless died before the water closed above them. As they fell my arm whipped back the road it had traveled, and two more old comrades fled through space.

Then there came a pause and sundry growling murmurs.

"It is a fool's game," declared one.

"Our little pet could make corpses of the whole legion if we encounter him thus," called another.

"That water has an evil, sour look about it," grumbled one very close to the bend.

In my mind I could see them craning their necks to watch the falling corpses in the gathering dusk cleave the dark water and mark their entrance by the high-thrown jets of white spray.

Death—clean, blood-letting death—held no great terrors for the soldiers of Imperial Rome: not by weaklings or the pen had she conquered and broken the mightiest nations of the world. Yet few men ever attain the height of calmly surrendering life if there rests no little chance of accomplishing some set end; therefore, the moments passed and no more turned that corner. Though I knew that for me the end was the same, yet to this I was utterly indifferent. A great weariness and distaste had come upon me for all human concerns, and each moment that I waited, this melancholy sank deeper and deeper into my soul.

"Of what avail this wanton slaughter?" I thought. "Glory, the little day of a memory? A few more years and it, too, will have passed. Weariness all!"

And as I pondered, all desire for strife and honor fell away from me and with calm indifference I awaited the end.

"Carolus, surrender yourself," a sharp clear voice broke through the mutterings of the men.

This Licinius, though a fop in Rome, yet on the march earned the respect of all as a skilled soldier and a leader.

"Your end is sure, and I grudge these men. Already over a score are dead, and who knows how many more the leeches will send to join them? A thousand curses on all madmen!"

For a moment he paused as if his wrath had strangled his utterance.

"But a good soldier you have ever been, Carolus," he continued more calmly, "and on mine honor I promise you shall die as a soldier, neither by fire, nor rope, but only the swift flight of a blade. Come now; I have passed my word. Surrender. But if not, you starve until, a shadow, the guard nails you to a cross to die as a thieving slave. You were ever a brave soldier; your cohort would have your end an honest one."

As he spoke, the calm logic and fairness of his words sank home to my already relenting spirit. Truly I had worked evil enough upon my brave comrades, and the end was as certain as it would be welcome. Yet I had a mind to suit myself as to the manner of it. Always I had been the victor in combat and I had little liking to relinquish the rôle. Abruptly a solution flashed upon me.

"Noble Licinius, I thank you for your gracious words. But I have another thought which commends itself to me; therefore I reject your offer and now proceed upon my way. Farewell, noble Licinius; farewell, good comrades!" I called suddenly in a loud cheerful voice, as in a few rapid steps I retreated to the end where lay the silent figure.

Taking it very tenderly in my arms I whispered softly:

"Are you already waiting, beloved? But a moment, and even in your steps my feet are racing. A flight with your dear shell, and then—what? The gods and you alone know."

As the last word fell from my lips I took one step to the vast sheer drop and there leapt straight out, my burden and I.

A RUSH as of some huge wind sped by and upward, roaring and screaming, while I, like a seamew, lay floating motionless in its clamorous violence. So it seemed to me. The noise of that mighty blast drummed upon my brain with a deafening insistence beyond all speech; I had never conceived the possibility of such an immensity of sound. It penetrated every particle of my flesh; it crashed through every atom of space; and yet I hung motionless and unmoved amid it. Nor dread, nor care, nor regret lay upon me. I was as a lone god, supreme in nothingness, and I dwelt serene and untroubled for eons upon eons amid formless chaos, dwelt carefree until from an immense distance there seemed to drift the sound of a faint whisper, and in spite of the stupendous roaring it clove its path to me and would not be stayed. Louder it grew and more insistent, calling without pause and urgently, as if in some terrible distress. Whether I would or not, I had to listen, though I was aware now of a faint annoyance that my ineffable peace should be invaded. Louder, still louder and nearer it came. Something within me stirred, and as the voice grew more distinct, the clamor that had filled the universe sank and sank, until only a thin murmur of a passing breeze remained.

"Help! Help!"

I heard the words distinctly, as they were repeated over and over again in a woman's high pitched note. And now I was curious to discover the origin of the outcry, though as yet I had no wonder or desire to reconcile the happening with my past or the present. I leaned my head forward unconsciously, as one will in such circumstances; and there was I, John Caroll, on my knees, bare gray rock beneath me and a foot ahead the edge of a vast precipice that sank sheer and grim for hundreds of feet to the sullen surge that beat against its base! And the strangest thing about my position was that it caused me no astonishment or the least confusion of thought. From the second my gaze alighted on that figure hanging desperately to the face of this awful descent, my whole mind and energies were wrapped up in re-

leasing the girl from her frightful peril. For it was a girl, and even in that terrible moment I realized she was a very lovely one, too.

Only a few feet below me she lay, held in the cleft of a large slab that had cracked away from the main body of rock and so exposed a wide crevice slanting inwards. By some providence one leg had caught and been wedged tight into this cleft, holding her secure for the time, though in a most painful position; for with one limb dangling over the fearful drop, she lay with her back resting on the sharp crest of the slab and so was utterly unable to aid herself or even ease her torture. Indeed it was probably well that such was the case, as the slab appeared but very uncertainly attached to the cliff, and any movement might have completed the separation. I could almost swear that the crack widened a shade as I stared. How she came to be there, how I came to be staring down at her, I could not imagine, and had no time to realize the astonnding position. I must act without a moment's delay.

"Don't move an inch! I'll get you up somehow," I exclaimed.

My brain was working at top speed, but coolly, logically. She lay no more than four feet below me, but quite out of my reach for retaining the necessary leverage to sustain her weight in my grasp. Hastily I whipped off my stout leather belt and, removing my jacket, slipped out of my soft silk shirt. In a second I had tied the sleeves together at the cuffs, forming a wide noose; through this I wove my belt.

"Pass the noose under your arms," I called as I lowered it to her. "Be very careful! Don't move an inch you need not. That slab is only just balancing now."

I was lying full length on the ledge, for it was but a narrow ledge some ten feet below the broken crest of the cliff. My knees were bent, and my feet, raised upwards, were desperately striving to discover some projection that would afford a purchase to work upon when her full weight lay on my arms. Sheer strength only could rescue her, and there was no chance of using my own weight to assist me. Fortunately I am a six-footer and, being somewhat of an amateur athlete, I was in fair condition, but knew that every ounce of strength I possessed would be required, and then the result was but a gambling chance. Anxiously I watched; she was very cool and collected and was following my instructions carefully, moving her arms and body with the utmost deliberation.

"Quickly! Get it under you! Hold tight! The slab's going!" I called in a tense voice of horror.

There could be no mistaking the fact—the crevice was widening! Slowly but perceptibly the crack was opening, and at any second the slab might leap forward and go crashing down. In a flash she had raised her body and slid the noose into place. I heard a little gasp; now she could see the movement herself, even note that she was slowly being carried outward from the face of the cliff. Her eyes were lifted to mine in pitiful entreaty. My God! Where had I seen those eyes before? And that gaze of trust in my succor?

"Hold tight! Don't struggle!" I shouted as I strained upward on the belt, the end of which was doubled around my left wrist and both hands gripped with the clutch of steel below. Thank heaven, my feet had found a little projecting knob of rock on the face of the cliff behind me! Had it not been for that I do not think I could have raised her. As it was, with cracking sinews I lifted her clear from the cleft and with the one huge heave had her level with the ledge, which immediately she caught at, thus taking a little of her weight from my arms. I drew myself rigidly backward and slid her fairly on to the ledge.

It was all over in a minute, and not a second too soon, for as she reached my side there came a loud cracking, a grinding screech, and by the convulsive shudder which sped through the form lying beside me I knew that she realized the narrow margin of her escape from a frightful death.

For a little we lay panting and exhausted. Then, recovering, I aided her to a sitting posture. She was deathly pale, but betrayed no trace of hysteria. Indeed she was the first to speak.

"I thought you would never find me."

Her tone was almost reproachful, though her voice was singularly gentle.

"You wandered and wandered; I could see you in the distance before you got close, and the cliff hid you. I suppose it was difficult to find me, and you were running so quickly, too."

"I—I don't quite understand," I said, staring at her. "I never heard your cry for help until I leaned over the edge. Running? Where? Good heavens! So I was—"

And then I stopped. I suddenly remembered perfectly that I had been running, and very vividly every incident of that desperate flight to—why, it was to this very ledge!

I stared around in dumb amazement. There could be no doubt of it. Here it was that I, Carolus, legionary of Rome, had taken my last stand. A few feet away lay the sharp bend behind which had stood Licinius and his men. I could hear his voice again: "You were ever a good soldier, Carolus." Surely those words had been spoken no more than a few minutes back! There at the end of the ledge was the very spot where had laid a silent figure, for whom I had forsaken and slain my comrades and leapt—but what was this madness I was thinking? There was some gulf, possibly of insanity, which had opened in my life, and I could not explain or understand it. At any rate, for the present I must hold the secret, though in my mind confusion and bewilderment ran riot. And now, how could I explain my hasty statement?

"You didn't hear me until you came to the edge?" she queried in astonishment.

"Well, not exactly that. The fact is—"

I hesitated, groping blindly for some plausible story, and it came to me.

"I have had some trouble with my hearing lately—strange noises—been under a specialist; and I hardly knew if your cry was due to this or not. In fact, until I came to the edge I could not be certain," I replied rather lamely.

"Yes, that explains it," she said quietly, but the words were so ambiguous—to my ears—that I was thankful to escape at the price. "How can I thank you? But for you I should have been hanging there now; perhaps even already—"

She paused and shivered as her glance went in dread to the void beyond the ledge, and as her head turned slightly in that direction I noticed what in the confusion of my mind had escaped my attention until now. Her dress was ripped clean across the shoulders, and on the light blue of her blouse lay a band of deep red.

"I say, do you know your shoulder is hurt?" I exclaimed anxiously. "I must see to it at once."

She looked a little startled and hesitated, but being evidently a sensible girl offered no objection to my services. Gently I drew back the torn blouse. There was cause enough for that broad, deep stain. She must have suffered the injury when arrested by the rugged sharp edges of the slab. The flesh between the shoulders was lacerated badly.

"I did not feel it in the least at the time," she remarked as I bound it

with strips torn from my shirt; "though now my shoulders are aching. It cannot be very serious, is it?"

"Serious enough; that is to say, you will have to get it attended to properly directly I get you home," I replied shortly.

I hardly knew what I said. Just such another wound, only a terrible, mortal one. I had gazed at this very day; and the lovely dying girl had been the image of this living one!

"Oh, my God! What is the meaning of it all?" I cried out suddenly.

The girl looked up with startled eyes.

"What is it?" she asked, and there was a little fear as well as wonder in her voice.

"Am I hurt so seriously? I hardly feel more than an aching."

"It's not that!" I exclaimed, and I could have bitten my tongue off with anger at my involuntary burst, but my nerves were on edge and I was really hardly accountable at the moment. "It's not that. It's something so extraordinary that it's incredible. I cannot say more now. But my being here is a miracle, as your being here is to me inexplicable. I am sorry, I did not mean to alarm you; let us forget everything else for the time except your safety."

The gravity and forced calm of my voice seemed to allay her astonishment, for she replied quite simply.

"Yes, I think, too, that my rescue was a miracle. As I lay down there I knew that days might pass before anyone caught sight of me, if ever. No person knew of my coming here, and I was in such a little spot among these awful rocks. Thank God, I did not know that cleft was spreading! Then I saw you, and I called and called, though I felt my voice could not reach you, for you were quite a long way off and running very quickly in another direction, until suddenly you turned and came straight to me. Do you know when I could no longer see you because the ledge hid all close to me, it seemed as if I heard you talking; I could not understand the words; but of course it must have been the wind or my imagination."

The last few words were in the tone of a query, but I chose to ignore it.

"Now the main thing is to get you home. Do you live in the neighborhood, I mean within walking distance? I fear there is no chance of getting any aid, and I do not like to leave you to do so."

"No, please do not leave me alone in this awful place—I am sure I can walk quite well with your assistance," she cried very eagerly. "I live at Brendon Hall; perhaps you know it? About two miles from here. I am Elaine Lestrange. My father is General Lestrange," she added quite simply and paused as if waiting for me to introduce myself.

"And I, Miss Lestrange, am John Caroll, American, civil engineer, of no fixed abode, merely a visitor to your country; my people, I believe, came from Devon some two hundred years ago, therefore I am not entirely an alien," I replied, smiling.

The statement was minutely accurate, though I had not mentioned that, having lately inherited a considerable fortune, I was fulfilling a long suppressed desire to visit the land of my forefathers.

"Now if you will direct me we had better be on the move; as you see, the sun will soon be setting." (I had not noted this before, so occupied had I been with my thoughts.) "If you will take my arm until we reach the road, possibly you can manage fairly well."

So saying, I helped her to her feet, and with her arm linked in mine we immediately started on our way. After the first few yards we got along very well, though naturally the pace was slow. As we cautiously made our way along the widening ledge to the safer though more broken ground above, we

passed the sharp bend which "no more than three could breast," and so vivid was the memory there invoked that I could have sworn I heard the mutterings of the soldiers of Imperial Rome.

NOW whatever befell from this moment would interest few and probably bore many. Let me briefly state that within twelve months from that day I had wedded the only girl in the world for me. Before we became engaged I narrated the entire circumstances of my astounding experience to her, though with great douht as to its reception. In the cold light of everyday practical life it appeared as rank insanity; yet I could not divest myself of the conviction that I, Carolus, legionary of Rome, had lived those tense, reckless moments as certainly as I, John Caroll, civil engineer, was a living denial of this conviction.

A plausible solution is the one offered by an old friend of my college days, Professor Hyland, the eminent American psychologist.

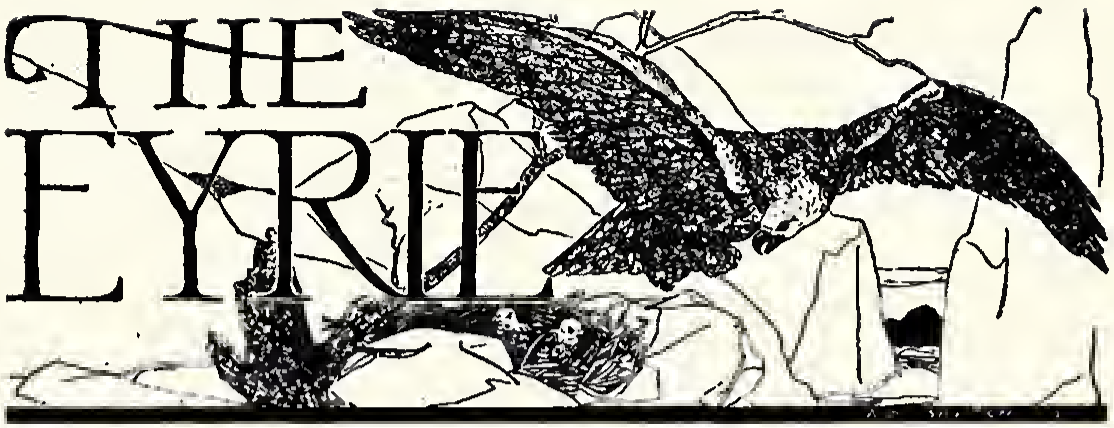
I cannot recall his exact words or even pretend to follow his very exhaustive delving into the working of the machinery of our mentality. But in its essence the following, I gathered, was a brief synopsis of his explanation. In every living person there lies dormant a mind or self which, for lack of a better definition, one can regard as a hereditary mind, a something which is handed down from generation to generation and which has stored up within it the experiences of all the past generations. In the vast majority of persons this mind never rises into the conscious mentality of the individual, but nevertheless it is there, and is the sonrce of the very common impression of recognizing certain previously unknown localities. It is possible, he stated, that, favored by obscure and abnormal conditions, this legacy from bygone ancestors might assert itself so vigorously as for a short space to usurp completely the functions of the conscious brain and present its memories as veridical happenings in the plane of the living individual.

The origin of these abnormal mental conditions, or how induced, was a matter so far beyond us. Apparently, as evidenced in examples of lost memory and dual alternating personality, neither warning nor predisposition to such lapses was observahle. They simply occurred, and neither time, location, sex, nor age had any bearing upon their sudden appearance; that was as far as science had reached from available data.

He considered, however, that environment may have been a factor in vitalizing my subconscious ancestral memory, the proofs of some previous knowledge of the locality heing irrefutahle. He had small doubt that the episode had been an actual experience of one Carolus, an ancester of mine. Though this assumption of course presumed that he had survived the final leap from that awful height, and bearing in mind that he was an exceptional man and the water below of great depth, the supposition is by no means out of reason. So strongly had this ancient memory been revived that one might affirm the hygone giant legionary had relived those tense moments as truly as if once again enacting them in the flesh.

Now whether this solution is the correct one I cannot say, hut it appears to me most plausihle. If so, from the depths of my soul I tender my gratitude to that fierce, reckless spirited, giant ancester of mine, who has been dust for more than two thousand years, yet deathless from generation to generation. To him I owe a life's happiness, with the life I brought hack from the open gates of death. In reverence I salute him across the chasm of the centuries: "Hail! Carolus, Legionary of Rome. Hail!"

THE EYRIE



THE editor of WEIRD TALES has something on his mind about which he wants advice from the readers. Just what do YOU think of horror stories—we mean really strong stories, such as "The Hermit of Ghost Mountain," by C. Franklin Miller, in this year's March number, and "The Loved Dead," by C. M. Eddy, Jr., in the Anniversary Number?

"The Hermit of Ghost Mountain," as those of you who have read the story will remember, told of a hermit who solved the secret of long life by a diet of human blood, mixing the various kinds—young blood, bold blood, old blood—in jars so that he could regulate his diet according to the characteristics of his victims. It was a masterpiece of gruesome literature, but it called out many letters of protest from the readers. "The Loved Dead" described the mania of a young man for exhuming and eating the bodies of his relatives.

One reader writes (anent "The Loved Dead"): "Why will you give us such sickening stories? I read Eddy's yarn late at night. It nauseated me, but I could not stop reading, for the story was fascinatingly told. My eyes must have bulged in horror as I read, for when I finished I was covered from head to foot with clammy sweat, but wild horses could not have dragged me away from WEIRD TALES before I had read through to the end. But please, please—why *will* you feed us such disgusting themes? Surely you can give us mystery thrillers, and even strong horror stories, without making us sick at the stomach. Poe did it, in such weird masterpieces as 'Ligeia' and 'The Tell-tale Heart,' even though he also was sickeningly disgusting in 'The Case of M. Valdemar.' Ambrose Bierce's best story is that eery thing of wonder and beauty, 'An Inhabitant of Carcosa,' but one hates to read a volume of Bierce for fear of stumbling upon some such nauseatingly morbid tale as 'The Death of Halpin Frayser.' Give us all the 'Ligeias' and 'Tell-tale Hearts' you can find, but for the sake of all that is sweet and wholesome, spare us any more stories such as 'The Loved Dead'."

Readers, the editor puts it up to you. Do you want an occasional story such as "The Hermit of Ghost Mountain" or "The Loved Dead," or shall we purge the magazine of all strong horror? If we find a nauseating story

as well handled as these two stories, shall we print it anyway? The editor wants to hear from you on this question, and he will follow your advice.

In the meantime, to show what we think of Mr. Eddy and Mr. Miller, we are going to print two excellent stories of prehistoric men by Mr. Eddy, which will hold your interest without making you even the least bit sick; and in our January number we are going to give you an unusual story called "Fog," by Mr. Miller. This last is an eery, fascinating tale of exploration in Patagonia, and tells of a strange prehistoric beast that yet survives in the caves of that little-known region, and whose breath rises in dense fog that enmeshes and—but you will have to read the story to learn more. The editor's advice is that you do not read it at night, alone in your room, lest you suffer the horror that fell to the lot of the intrepid explorer of the story.

And now the editor wishes to call your attention to two authors who are new to the readers of WEIRD TALES. These are Frank Belknap Long, Jr., author of "The Desert Lich," and Estil Critchie, author of "Thus Spake the Prophetess." Both stories are found in the present issue.

When the manuscript of "The Desert Lich" was received in the office of WEIRD TALES, the editor read it and then uttered a loud cry of "Eureka." The story was accepted so quickly that it must have made Mr. Long's head swim. And he has written other stories for you, which are quite as wonderful as the present one: "Death-Waters", which will be printed in the next issue; "The Dark God," and "The Ocean Leech." Mr. Long is a young man (he is only twenty-two), but he has a style as distinctive as Rudyard Kipling, and an originality, an invention, an insight into human motives, and a gift of story-telling that set him in the small circle of the greatest story-tellers. It would be as impossible to imitate Mr. Long's individual style as it would be to duplicate Kipling or Daudet.

Estil Critchie gathered the material for his weird narratives in Santo Domingo and Haiti while he was in the intelligence service of the United States marines during the American occupation of the two republics of that island. "Thus Spake the Prophetess" will be followed by another Haitian story, "Voodoo," in the December issue of WEIRD TALES, and then will follow a series of six "Strange Tales From Santo Domingo," which are little masterpieces.

Robert Lee Heiser is another author who makes his bow to the readers of WEIRD TALES with the present issue. Those who read his "Adventure of Souls" will watch for his name in future issues. His utterly fascinating occult story of crime, called "The Dreamer," will be published soon.

Greye La Spina, whose story, "The Tortoise-Shell Cat," you have enjoyed in this issue, has also written for you an absorbing tale about a scientist who tried to determine the physical weight of the human soul. The story, called "The Remorse of Professor Panebianco," will be published soon.

You will be glad, also, to resume acquaintance with your favorite writers of past issues. H. P. Lovecraft, a master of the weird in fiction, has written

additional stories for the readers of this magazine. John Martin Leahy, author of "Draconda," has written for you a short, powerful novelette of crime and ghosts called "The Voice of Bills"—a ghost story with a rational explanation. Otis Adelbert Kline, author of "The Cup of Blood" and other thrillers, is represented in this number by "The Phantom Rider"; and Seabnry Quinn adds the seventh of his remarkable series of "Weird Crimes." Mr. Quinn, whose work has been one of the most admired features of WEIRD TALES, has other good things in store for you. Besides several remarkable short stories, he is writing a series of "Noted Witch Cases" as a companion group to his "Weird Crimes."

"In looking over the translations from the German from which I obtained my data for the 'Magic Mirror Murders'," Mr. Quinn writes, "I ran across one of the most remarkable stories ever connected with judicial procednre. If the thing didn't have the stamp of the court's finding on it I'd be inclined to believe it a romance. It has every essential element—the be-you-tee-ful girl, the villain, a rejected suitor, the real lover, who happens to be a noble in disguise, the false accusation of witchcraft, the trial. and darn near the execution, with the hero riding up in time and running a boar spear through the villain not three minutes before the hour set for the young witch's turning off on the gallows."

You have a series of monthly treats in store from the authors you have learned to look for in WEIRD TALES, and you will also be given some remarkable stories by young authors whose work has never before appeared in these pages. Just a word about Arthur Thatcher, whose serial, "The Valley of Teeheemen," begins in the December issue. You have never heard of him? Well, perhaps not; but we will bet our bottom dollar that if you once start "The Valley of Teeheemen" you will eagerly await the appearance of the next issue so that you can go on with the absorbing tale. The only reason we are waiting until December is that we do not like to have more than one serial running at a time, and "The House of Dust", by L. A. Borah, holds the boards until then.

WEIRD TALES, almost alone among fiction magazines, cares nothing for big names. What it wants is good stories, and the editor gets a greater thrill out of finding a crackerjack of a weird yarn by John Jones or Molly Murphy, of Kokomo, or Milpitas, than he could possibly get out of a new yarn by Kipling. "The Tower of Silence", by Don Willis, in this issue, is the author's first story, and yet few incidents in fiction are more dramatic than that scene in the house of the dead where the naked man on the grid slaps off the vulture as it thrusts down its ugly beak to peck out his eyes, and the mourning woman rnns ont thinking she has seen a dead man tormented by evil spirits.

This magazine will print the finest weird fiction that it can get, regardless of whether the authors are known or unknown. But it needs the constant advice and help of its readers. This is your magazine, and anything you have to say, either in praise or in blame, will be listened to with eager attention. Address your communications to The Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, 325 N. Capitol Avenue, Indianapolis, Ind.

And tell us which story you like best in the present issue. We intend to take a poll each month to find out what stories are the most popular with our readers.

THE TOWER OF SILENCE

(*Continued from page* 162)

Running feet. Shouts. A hand on my arm. An English voice. A short walk through the breach in the wall. Then I fainted dead away.

The next I knew, I was in my own tent with Greaves standing beside me and an English doctor sitting at the edge of my cot. It seems that Mizrah had seen me scale the wall, and had then made his way back to camp with the news. Greaves wired the information on to the British at a coast fort, some two hundred miles away. A plane was dispatched at once to our camp. Greaves went up with the pilot, and they succeeded in locating me, in fact they threw me a note, evidently the paper that I mistook for a ghostly skull. They flew back to camp, and a council of war was held. It was decided to try and dynamite the wall of my prison. Luckily we had dynamite on hand for our excavating work. For good measure, and to divert attention, they also stuck a couple of sticks, with a time fuse attached, behind the big idol. The plan worked, as you already know. The natives were frightened half to death and lost no time in getting out of that vicinity. There was already a plague of some sort among them, and they no doubt considered the whole affair as a direct expression of the wrath of their god.

Today, although I am still a young man, my hair is perfectly white. The only other visible mark I bear of my experience is a tooth-scarred thumb, which, I explain to curious acquaintances, was caught in the jaws of a rat-trap. I hope my friends who read this will understand and will withhold any further questions on the subject. I have had enough of adventure. Even talking of it displeases me. Some time I hope to sleep without morbid nightmares goading my body into a clammy sweat of fear. That is not now.

The Brain in the Jar

(*Continued from page* 35)

alive in his special fluids various parts of the human body. And I was to be the subject of his crowning experiment, an attempt to keep the human brain alive *and functioning!*

"Can you imagine the horror of that scene to me, a living, normal man? Can you picture that dim room, its atmosphere heavy with the odors of disinfectants and anesthetics, with the white-robed figures of doctors and nurses, shrouded to the eyes, flitting about silently as ghosts, as they prepared the instruments and anesthetics for this frightful crime? It was almost more than the human mind could endure, and I nearly lost my self-control. Then I read the meaning of the evil grin on Dr. Jaeger's face and knew that he was waiting for me to break down and beg for mercy. What pleasure so exquisite for him as to refuse it and perhaps make the torture worse in some way for the mere pleasure of gloating over my suffering? I gritted my teeth and swore that come what might no cry, no sign of quailing would they wring from me.

"Dr. Jaeger stared long and piercingly into my eyes. What he saw there must have convinced him of my determination, for he made an abrupt sign of disgust and gave the order for the anesthetic. I held myself rigid and taut as the ether nozzle was placed over my nose and mouth, shutting out from my lungs forever the oxygen that gives life. But I breathed deeply of the lethal fumes, for oblivion was heaven after that scene of hell.

"I WILL never know, I suppose, just how long my consciousness was suspended. I do not think it was more than a few days, but again it might have been weeks. My first sensations were too frightful for descrip-

tion. I can give but a poor idea of the agony I endured. But it was all in one place, seemingly within my cranium. Alas, I did not know then that my cranium was reduced to ashes! A million demons might have been stabbing at my brain with red-hot needles. Darkness, a terrible roaring, were all about. Is this the end? I thought. Am I in the abode of the damned? For the torture of those moments seemed to me impossible except in the place taught by the faith of my childhood to be the final home of evil. Thought, concentration, were impossible. I have only the memory of the sensations. The noise increased, grew unbearable. A cracking, shricking roar, mounting higher and higher, seemed about to split the ear drums I no longer had. Then oblivion for another indeterminate period. With returning consciousness the symptoms gradually subsided, and at length I was able to observe an alternate change of light to darkness and darkness to light occurring about once every two minutes. During the light periods I became able to distinguish objects, and slowly I regained my normal power of vision. I saw that I was in a large and fully equipped laboratory—the room in which you are sitting tonight. But what was my horror to perceive in a mirror on the opposite wall, not myself as I had been in life, but this glass jar wherein you see me, and within it my own brain and eyeballs attached thereto by their nerve cords. And then I knew that Jaeger's accursed experiment had succeeded. I, my living brain, was functioning in his liquid. Far better, I thought, had death claimed me.

"From then on I lived in a world devoid of all sensations of sound, odor or feeling. My first terrible agonies had been due to the irritation of the ends of the severed spinal cord and sensory nerves. Nothing was left me now but my sense of sight—thanks to

the surgical skill of that ingenious fiend.

"The eternal silence was oppressive, maddening. I prayed for death in vain, for I possessed no material body with which to execute self-destruction. My mind and personality were helplessly chained to this lump of clay called the brain.

"Then I found something to live for.

"Every day comes the doctor to work long hours at his experiments, sometimes with chemicals, test tubes and retorts, sometimes with tissue and microscopes or again with strange photographic apparatus. And every night before he leaves he comes and stares at me for many minutes. He knows that the tissue of my brain lives, but he has as yet found no way of determining whether or not it functions. And it pleases me to keep him in ignorance, for the day of my vengeance is very near. That is what I have found to live for.

"I have learned a great deal since my incarceration here, among other things, that Dr. Jaeger, whatever may be his nature and personal character, is one of the world's great scientists, a specialist in many things, in all of which he excels. I have learned, too, something of the manner in which I am kept alive here. The tube leading into the jar from above connects with the nickel tank, which contains a supply of the secret fluid. The valves are arranged to let the fluid pass very slowly through the jar, finding egress through the lower valves and out through the tube which they control. The liquid is nutritious and at body temperature. A subtle, periodical chemical reaction causes the color change, designed to protect my naked eyes from the light. Beyond the fact that the fluid has a chemical similarity to human blood and contains a colorless compound carrying oxygen, I have no knowledge of its composition.

"But I have learned much more

than this. With nothing to do, week after week, I have worked at the one thing that was left to me. I have developed my will power. From the will of an ordinary man I have increased its strength till my powers now would astound any psychologists—even those who suspect the possibilities of the human will. And I have used it to the harm of the enemy, though my only aim now is my personal vengeance on Jaeger. In the last week there have been twelve murders, six suicides and eight insanity cases, all of noted German officials of the worst type. Among them was Colonel Von Uhlman. These acts were all caused by the hypnotic suggestions which I have made by telepathy.

"And I have advanced even farther than this. I have done what has never been accomplished before. Today my will is so highly developed that by simply exerting it I can move small objects. The suspended flask you saw last night was a demonstration. Were I to continue, the time would come soon when nothing would be impossible for me. My powers would be such that I might rule the world through strength of will. But I have no desire for that. Existence is misery, and when I have accomplished my revenge I shall be glad to leave life, in earnest this time.

"It is by means of my telepathic power that I have thrown you into the hypnotic trance which now claims you, and, using your hand, have written down my story. If you would witness my vengeance on Dr. Jaeger, conceal yourself in the small room behind the guinea pig cage tomorrow night. Be there by nine o'clock as Jaeger, whose mind I read, will come soon after."

THUS ended a manuscript which surpassed by far in grisly horror, gruesome detail and stark improbabil-

ity anything that Eldridge had ever imagined possible. He passed the day as though in a trance, his mind running constantly on the extraordinary communication. He had no doubts, after the first natural questionings of his mind, as to the authenticity of the strange message, and so nine o'clock found him concealed as directed, with his automatic ready.

He had not been long hidden when Dr. Jaeger entered from his office and without looking around set about his work. He began slicing, for microscopic examination, tissue from a living human arm taken from one of the jars. A half hour or more passed, broken only by an occasional cough or exclamation of satisfaction from the doctor as the examination proceeded, apparently to his complete satisfaction. Eldridge did not grow impatient. The uncanny affair held him enthralled.

Then a slight movement above the doctor's head caught his eye. For the first time he noticed a huge wax bottle of hydrofluoric acid on a shelf directly over that section of the table whereon the scientist was engaged. Jaeger had been using the deadly stuff for certain silicon determinations of the tissue.

Again the slight movement, and now Eldridge saw that it was this bottle sliding forward a few inches. Slowly, all but imperceptibly, so as not to alarm the worker below, it slid forward toward the edge of the shelf. Unconsciously Eldridge estimated the distance it must fall to reach the doctor—some five or six feet. Involuntarily he was tempted to warn the unsuspecting physician, but the glittering eyes of the brain seemed to render his will powerless.

The bottle was now projecting some inches beyond the edge of the shelf. Eldridge started to cry out, but found himself unable to speak. He tried to rise but was unable to move a muscle. Suddenly the doctor looked up, perhaps warned by some premonition of

his impending doom. If so, it came too late. Into his eyes came the look of a hunted animal as he saw the jar of deadly acid poised directly over his head. The bottle came hurtling downward as he started to rise and struck him full in the face, smashing to bits, while the acid gushed over his body. He fell to the floor writhing and shrieking in his death agony. The vengeance of Jean Perrin was accomplished.

Meanwhile the acid vigorously attacked the woodwork and glassware and flames soon sprang up from the heat of the reaction. A bottle of sodium exploded and row after row of bottles came crashing down, their chemical contents adding fuel and impetus to the flames.

Eldridge's escape via the corridor had been cut off from the first, and the scene held him fascinated. He made no attempt to leave through the doctor's office as he might have done at first. His present position had become one of great danger, owing to the explosive nature of some of the chemicals which had not yet been touched by the flames. The laboratory was rapidly becoming a raging inferno. High above all stood the jar and its contents, which had brought this thing to pass. The red eyes of the brain glittered triumphantly through the smoke and flames. Jaeger had become motionless. Then suddenly the shelf gave way and brain and jar crashed into the fire and disappeared. Long tongues of flame shot up to the very ceiling. Then came a bursting roar; a flying bottle struck Eldridge on the temple and oblivion descended.

WHEN Eldridge returned to consciousness, he found himself swathed in bandages on board a hospital ship bound for New York. His wife was with him, also his friend and co-worker, Felton, of the secret service, who, with a detachment sent from the American Army of Occupation,

Your Glands Wear Out!

100% Test Actual Gland Substance, Directly Absorbed. Look and Feel Young at 70. Science Has Solved the Secrets of the Glands and Now for the First Time Shows You the True Way to Keep or Regain Your Mental and Physical Vigor by Replenishing the Most Important Glands.

DEMONSTRATION TREATMENT SENT FREE

RESULTS IN A DAY

Good Gland "Tablets" Have Been Found too Slow in Results When Used Alone. The Lewis System Is Therefore a Combination Treatment and Does Not Depend Upon Any One Form of Gland Replenishment for Sure and Quick Results.

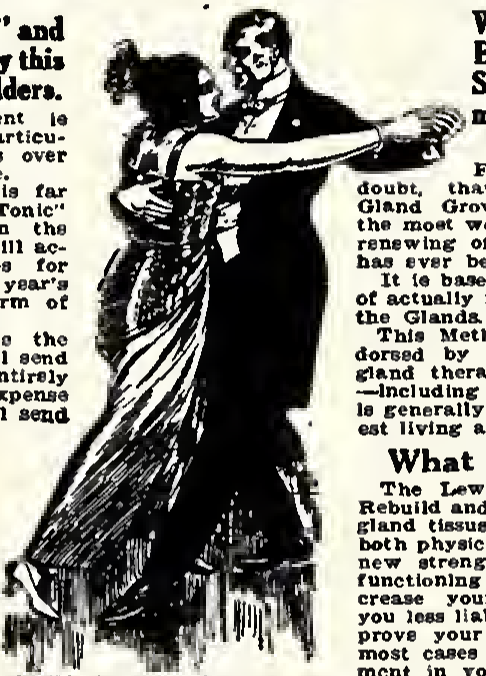
You Owe It to Your Own Manhood (or Womanhood) to at Least Try the LEWIS SYSTEM of COMBINED TREATMENT, Especially as It Is NOW OFFERED TO YOU FREE FOR TRIAL, With No Obligation Now or Ever.

Throw Away Your "Tonics" and Alcoholic "Medicines." Try this Greatest of All Health Builders.

The Lewis Gland Treatment is absolutely original in every particular and nothing like it has ever been known in medical science.

This Combination Method is far ahead of any "Medicine"—"Tonic"—or stimulant ever used in the past. In one week's time it will accomplish more in the cases for which it is intended than a year's doctoring with any other form of treatment or drugs known.

And in order to introduce the Lewis Method quickly, we will send Demonstration Treatments entirely FREE without one penny of expense now or ever to those who will send for them.



Build Up Your Glands and You Build Strength and Endurance.

The LEWIS Treatment Almost Never Fails

If you have tried many other forms of medical treatment without relief and have despaired of finding anything helpful then you are the very one above all others to whom we will most gladly send one of our Demonstration Treatments. All you are asked to do is to Test this new Method in your home and at our expense. Surely you will not permit any doubt or prejudice to stand in your way when such a liberal offer as this is made you.

A Special Combination Treatment for Women Also

You will notice in the coupon that we ask whether the treatment is intended for male or female.

This is necessary because the two treatments are absolutely different as to formulas. The female treatment is particularly recommended for the ailments to which women are most commonly subject. Any Physician will testify as to the wonderful value of Lutein for women's troubles and will also understand that this substance would be of no benefit if administered in a treatment for men. We mention this one point of difference to emphasize the fact that the Lewis Treatment for Women is especially prepared for that sex.

A Private, Personal Home Treatment Superior to Anything Ever Before Known

We Prove the Truth of Every Statement by Sending These Treatments Absolutely Free.

We will prove to you FREE beyond reasonable doubt, that the Lewis Method of Gland Growth and Rejuvenation is the most wonderful treatment for the renewing of strength and vigor that has ever been conceived.

It is based entirely on the principle of actually renewing and rejuvenating the Glands.

This Method is advocated and endorsed by the leading students of gland therapy throughout the world—including Dr. Arnold Lorand who is generally conceded to be the greatest living authority on this subject.

What You May Expect

The Lewis Method will positively Rebuild and Replace worn and wasted gland tissue. It will increase vitality, both physical and mental. It will renew strength, especially as to the functioning of the glands. It will increase your endurance and render you less liable to fatigue. It will improve your general health, and in most cases cause a marked improvement in your appearance. Your appetite will increase and you will almost surely gain in weight if you are at present in a "run-down" condition.

It is especially recommended to men for Prostatic troubles, Liver, Kidney and Bladder disorders and Rheumatism, both muscular and joint.

Send for your Demonstration Treatment Now. *All our correspondence and all packages sent by us come to you in plain, sealed containers.*

This Coupon Entitles You to a DEMONSTRATION TREATMENT Absolutely FREE

LEWIS LABORATORIES,
549 Lewis Bldg., corner Market and Washington Streets, CHICAGO, ILL.

Please send me at once one of your Demonstration Treatments for the Replacement by Renewal of Worn or Wasted Glands.

My age is_____

This, to be sent me in plain wrapper and entirely without cost or obligation on my part. I wish treatment for

(Mark a cross before the one you wish.) _____Male _____Female

Note:—(If you wish, please enclose 10 cts. for postage and packing.)

Name _____

Address _____

Town_____ State_____

had effected his rescue from the burning hospital.

To them he related his weird tale, and with shattered nerves and seared body resigned himself to his wife's loving care. Her love alone can efface from his mind the effects of the memory of the vengeance of the brain in the jar. THE END

Why TRY to Treat Piles from the Outside?

You Can Not *Possibly* Reach the Real Trouble With Ointments, Salves, Dilators or Other Local Treatments—They May Ease for the Moment, But Can Never Heal Where They Can Never Reach

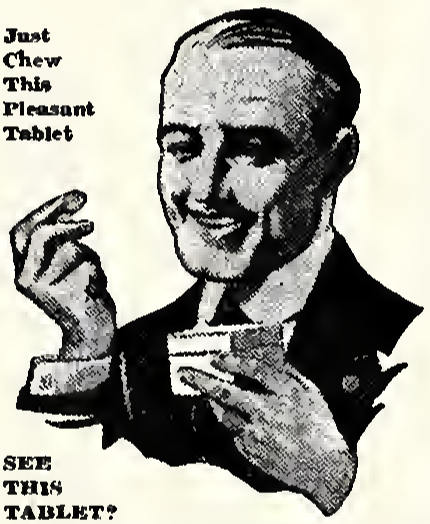
Don't Submit to an Operation—
Until You Have Tried Our Easy and Senaible Treatment

No matter how severe your case may be, or of how long standing. The old stubborn cases, that are supposed to be "incurable" are the very ones we like best to write to ue—for we can nearly alwaye count upon those people to be our best friends and boosters after this treatment has made them well.

Neither does it matter where ynu live nor what your occupation may be—we are as near to you as your mail box, and if you are trouhled with piles, thie method will give you quick relief and within a ehort time you will have joined the ranks of the thousands who write us that tbey feel themeelvce to be permanently cured.

We want you to underetand that the Page Methnd is DIFFERENT from all others end that it is the ONE MOST RELIABLE and SUREST remedy for the bomo treatment of piles Send the coupon NOW whilo you have the matter in mind and this offer before you.

Don't let any one pereuade you to submit to an operation until you have at least given thie internal method a trial and a chance to cure you. A few days' delay will not make your case much harder for the eurgoon, and you may not need him at all.



Just Chew This Pleasant Tablet

SEE THIS TABLET?

It Is Worth Many Times Its Weight in Gold to a Sufferer From Piles.

We Can *Prove* Every Statement That We Make

There is only one senelhle, eure and Safe way to treat piles and prevent them from coming back every few weeks to annoy and pain you again. This ie by permanently healing them with the **Page Internal Treatment.** While the Page treatment includes both an ointment and bowel regulator, we tell you frankly and honeetly in our directione that these will givo but temporary relief—**But that Permanent Benefit will come from the Page Pile Tablet.** Thie ie a very pleasant tasting tablet and you will enjoy chewing one or two aftor meale. This **System for the Cure nf Piles** hae been sold for **More Than a Quarter of a Century** and is endorsed in Thousande of Letters Reporting the Cure of cases that seemed beyond hope of relief:

Let Ue Send You a Trial Package Absolutely Free. Just Send Ue Your Address and Name on tbo Coupon.

Thie mcthod of treating Piles, from the INSIDE inetead of the OUTSIDE, is not a new idea or something thet has not been given a thorough test. We quote below a letter received from a patient who suffered from piles for 15 years before trying our method of treatment.

Cured After 15 Years

E. R. Page, Mgr.

Dear Sir:—I am surely pleased for finding your treatment for the piles. I suffered with them for 15 years and was cured by using your treatment. I certainly will alwaye speak a good word for your treatment and you can use my name in any way you wish.

Sincerely youre,

Box 73, Cliffview, Va. WILEY HILL.

Case of Long Standing

E. R. Page Co., Marshall, Mich.

Dear Sir:—Mrs. Vincent can't thank you enough, for you have got the very medicine to cure Piles. Mrs. Vincent has had bleeding piles for 40 years. I am glad we eaw your ad and got the medicine, for it is a eure cure when it will cure a case like my wife had.

Gratefully, M. J. VINCENT.

1140 Drake St., Madieon, Wie.

Something Wonderful

E. R. Page Co., Marshall, Mich.

Gentlemen:—I received your eample of the Pile remedy and was very well eatisfied with it But as my brother had somo of your remedy he let me use it eo I did not have to send for any. Your remedy bas cured me of my piles It sure is something wonderful. I alco thank ynn for the eample. Your remedy helped me and I will advortise it as a very wonderful remedy. Yours truly,

Lakefield, Minn. LOUISE ZISHKA.

Coupon for Free Proof Package

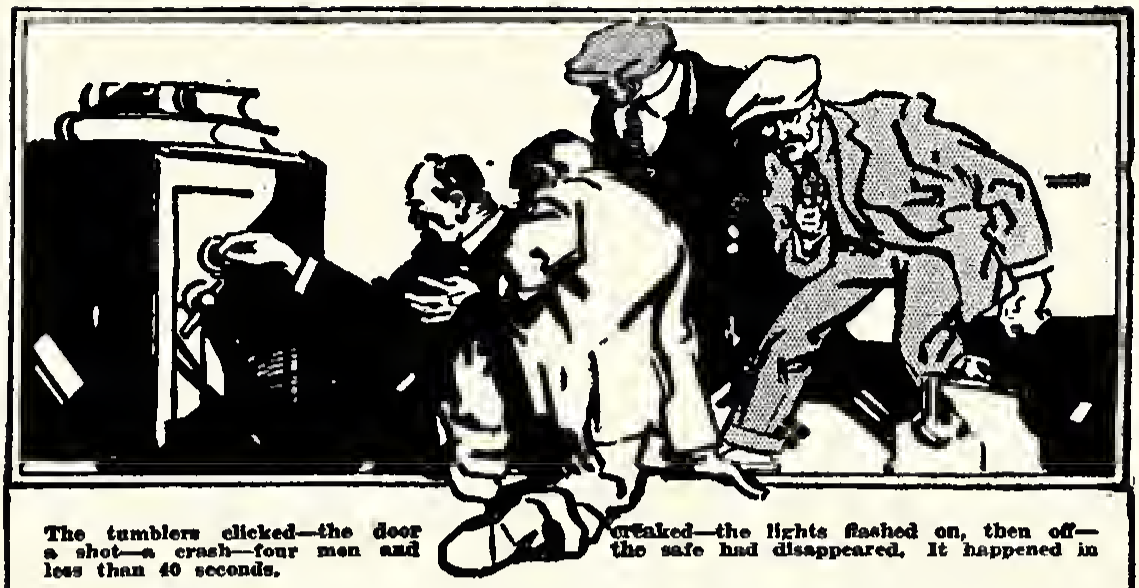
E. R. Page Co.,
337C Page Bldg., Marshall, Mich.

Without any cost or obligation on my part, please send me a trial package of your Combination Treatment for Piles.

Name _____

Address _____

Town _____ State _____



The tumblers clicked—the door creaked—the lights flashed on, then off—a shot—a crash—four men and the safe had disappeared. It happened in less than 40 seconds.

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TEDDY ROOSEVELT was a great lover of detective tales.

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Enclosed find $2.50. Please enter my subscription for Real Detective Tales and Mystery Stories for 1 year—12 consecutive issues. Start with big current issue.

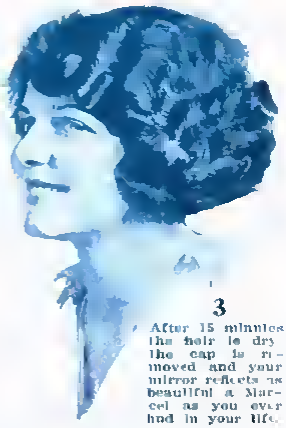
Name _____

Address _____

"Patent Pending"

1 After moistening hair with Spanish Curling Liquid, furnished free with every Curling Cap, place cap over the head and pull the hair forward through the rubberized cross pieces with the fingers.

2 The hair is held in "waves" by the cross pieces and allowed to dry in this position. Meanwhile you can read or finish dressing.



3 After 15 minutes the hair is dry. The cap is removed and your mirror reflects as beautiful a Marcel as you ever had in your life.

Marvelous New Curling Cap Marcels Any Hair

Startling New Invention Makes Marcelling Quick and Easy

HERE'S the best news you've had in many a day! You no longer have to spend long hours in a Beauty Shop—and lots of money—keeping your hair in the Marcel that style demands. Now you can Marcel it yourself in the privacy of your boudoir, as simply and quickly as you formerly combed your hair when it was long!

It makes no difference how you wear your hair or what condition it is in—whether it's soft and unruly or stiff and fluffy, thick or thin, bobbed or even long—this great new beauty invention will transform it into a mass of lovely ringlets, waves and curls in 15 minutes' time. And we guarantee it!

Like all great inventions, McGowan's Curling Cap is very simple. There is no complicated apparatus. Nothing to catch in your hair or get out of order. It is a simple device that applies the principles of the curling iron, using a specially prepared safe and harmless curling fluid—Spanish Curling Liquid—in the place of water and heat.

You can see at a glance how the Curling Cap works. Elastic bands hold the six rubberized cross pieces in place. The hair is held in "waves" by the cross pieces until it dries, when the Curling Cap is removed and you have a beautiful Marcel that would cost a dollar or more at a Beauty Shop and take about an hour's time.

A timely aid to beauty

There never was a more timely invention than this, when nearly all girls and young women are wearing bobbed hair—and wondering how they will keep it curled through the summer. Tennis, golf, boating, swimming and other sports always have played havoc with Marcels and make it nearly impossible for the average woman, girl to keep her bob looking as smart as it should. But now she can laugh at her former worries, for with McGowan's Curling Cap and a bottle of Spanish Curling Liquid she can have a fresh Marcel every day in less time than it took to comb her hair when it was long.

Curly hair's the thing now

No matter what style of bob you favor, or even if you wear your hair long you've got to keep it curly and wavy if you want to be in style. There never was a style more universally becoming and there never was one more rigidly demanded by the arbiters of fashion.

It makes no difference, either, whether you prefer the wave running across your hair or from front to back. The Curling Cap is adjustable either way. When not in use the Cap may be folded and carried in your handbag.

Read this amazing offer

If you are familiar with the price of other curling devices—none of which is to be compared with the Curling Cap—you would expect this one to cost at least $10 or $15. In fact, when Mr. McGowan first showed his invention in his friends many of them advised him to sell it for that price because it is easily worth it. But Mr. McGowan wants every girl and woman to get the benefit of his great invention so he decided to put the price within reach of all. By selling in tremendous quantities it will be possible for him to make a price of $2.87 for the entire outfit which includes a large sized bottle of Spanish Curling Liquid as well as the newly invented Curling Cap.

Send no money—just mail the coupon

You don't even have to pay for this wonderful curling outfit in advance. Just sign the coupon and in a few days the postman will deliver the Curling Cap and Spanish Curling Liquid to you. Simply pay him $2.87 plus postage—and then your Marcel worries will be at an end. If you don't find it the greatest beauty aid you ever used—if it doesn't bring you the most beautiful of Marcels just as we promised—if you are not satisfied with McGowan's Curling Cap and Spanish Curling Liquid in every way, just return the outfit and your money will be refunded.

---COUPON---

THE McGOWAN LABORATORIES
710 W. Jackson Blvd. Dept. 615, Chicago

Dear Mr. McGowan: Please send me your hair curling outfit which includes your newly invented Curling Cap and a bottle of Spanish Curling Liquid. I agree to deposit $2.87 (plus postage) with the postman upon its delivery. If I am not satisfied with results in every way I will return the outfit to you and you are to refund my money.

Name _____

Address _____

Note: If you expect to be out when the postman calls, inclose $3 with your order and the McGowan Curling Outfit will be sent postpaid.