

Clark Ashton Smith
Weird Tales Collection
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BERSERKER

BOOKS



THE DEATH OF ILALOTHA

Black Lord of bale and fear, master of all confusion! By thee, thy prophet saith, New power is given to wizards after death, And witches in corruption draw forbidden breath And weave such wild enchantment and illusion As none but lamiae may use; And through thy grace the charneled corpses lose Their horror, and nefandous loves are lighted In noisome vaults long nighted; And vampires make their sacrifice to thee — Disgorging blood as if great urns had poured Their bright vermilion hoard About the washed and weltering sarcophagi.

-- Ludar's Litany to Thasaidon.

According to the custom in old Tasuun, the obsequies of Ilalotha, lady-in-waiting to the self-widowed Queen Xantlicha, had formed an occasion of much merrymaking and prolonged festivity. For three days, on a bier of diverse-colored silks from the Orient, under a rose-hued canopy that might well have domed some nuptial couch, she had lain clad with gala garments amid the great feasting-hall of the royal palace in Miraab. About her, from morning dusk to sunset, from cool even to torridly glaring dawn, the feverish tide of the funeral orgies had surged and eddied without slackening. Nobles, court officials, guardsmen, scullions, astrologers, eunuchs, and all the high ladies, waiting-women and female slaves of Xantlicha, had taken part in that prodigal debauchery which was believed to honour most fitly the deceased. Mad songs and obscene ditties were sung, and dancers whirled in vertiginous frenzy to the lascivious pleading of untirable lutes. Wines and liquors were poured torrentially from monstrous amphorae; the tables fumed with spicy meats piled in huge hummocks and forever replenished. The drinkers offered libation to Ilalotha, till the fabrics of her bier were stained to darker hues by the spilt vintages. On all sides around her, in attitudes of disorder or prone abandonment, lay those who had yielded to amorous license of the fullness of their potations. With halfshut eyes and lips slightly parted, in the rosy shadow cast by the catafalque, she wore no aspect of death but seemed a sleeping empress who

ruled impartially over the living and the dead. This appearance, together with a strange heightening of her natural beauty, was remarked by many: and some said that she seemed to await a lover's kiss rather than the kisses of the worm.

On the third evening, when the many-tongued brazen lamps were lit and the rites drew to their end, there returned to court the Lord Thulos, acknowledged lover of Queen Xantlicha, who had gone a week previous to visit his domain on the western border and had heard nothing of Ilalotha's death. Still unaware, he came into the hall at that hour when the saturnalia began to flag and the fallen revelers to outnumber those who still moved and drank and made riot.

He viewed the disordered hall with little surprise, for such scenes were familiar to him from childhood. Then, approaching the bier, he recognized its occupant with a certain startlement. Among the numerous ladies of Miraab who had drawn his libertine affections, Ilalotha had held sway longer than most; and, it was said, she had grieved more passionately over his defection than any other. She had been superseded a month before by Xantlicha, who had shown favor to Thulos in no ambiguous manner; and Thulos, perhaps, had abandoned her not without regret: for the role of lover to the queen, though advantageous and not wholly disagreeable, was somewhat precarious. Xantlicha, it was universally believed, had rid herself of the late King Archain by means of a tomb-discovered vial of poison that owed its peculiar subtlety and virulence to the art of ancient sorcerers. Following this act of disposal, she had taken many lovers, and those who failed to please her came invariably to ends no less violent than that of Archain. She was exigent, exorbitant, demanding a strict fidelity somewhat irksome to Thulos; who, pleading urgent affairs on his remote estate, had been glad enough of a week away from court.

Now, as he stood beside the dead woman, Thulos forgot the queen and bethought him of certain summer nights that had been honeyed by the fragrance of jasmine and the jasmine-white beauty of Ilalotha. Even less than the others could he believe her dead: for her present aspect differed in no wise from that which she had often assumed during their old intercourse.

To please his whim, she had feigned the inertness and complaisance of slumber or death; and at such times he had loved her with an ardor undismayed by the pantherine vehemence with which, at other whiles, she was wont to reciprocate or invite his caresses.

Moment by moment, as if through the working of some powerful necromancy, there grew upon him a curious hallucination, and it seemed that he was again the lover of those lost nights, and had entered that bower in the palace gardens where Ilalotha waited him on a couch strewn with overblown petals, lying with bosom quiet as her face and hands. No longer was he aware of the crowded hall: the high-flaring lights, the wine-flushed faces, had become a moonbright parterre of drowsily nodding blossoms, and the voices of the courtiers were no more than a faint suspiration of wind amid cypress and jasmine. The warm, aphrodisiac perfumes of the June night welled about him; and again, as of old, it seemed that they arose from the person of Ilalotha no less than from the flowers. Prompted by intense desire, he stooped over and felt her cool arm stir involuntarily beneath his kiss.

Then, with the bewilderment of a sleep-walker awakened rudely, he heard a voice that hissed in his ear with soft venom: "Hast forgotten thyself, my Lord Thulos? Indeed I wonder little, for many of my bawcocks deem that she is fairer in death than in life." And, turning from Ilalotha, while the weird spell dissolved from his senses, he found Xantlicha at his side. Her garments were disarrayed, her hair was unbound and disheveled, and she reeled slightly, clutching him by the shoulder with sharp-nailed fingers. Her full, poppy-crimson lips were curled by a vixenish fury, and in her long-lidded yellow eyes there blazed the jealousy of an amorous cat.

Thulos, overwhelmed by a strange confusion, remembered but partially the enchantment to which he had succumbed; and he was unsure whether or not he had actually kissed Ilalotha and had felt her flesh quiver to his mouth. Verily, he thought, this thing could not have been, and a waking dream had momentarily seized him. But he was troubled by the words of Xantlicha and her anger, and by the half-furtive drunken laughs and ribald whispers that he heard passing among the people about the hall.

"Beware, my Thulos," the queen murmured, her strange anger seeming to subside; "For men say that she was a witch."

"How did she die? " queried Thulos.

"From no other fever than that of love, it is rumored."

"Then, surely, she was no witch," Thulos argued with a lightness that was far from his thoughts and feelings; "for true sorcery should have found the cure."

"It was from love of thee," said Xantlicha darkly; "and as all women know, thy heart is blacker and harder than black adamant. No witchcraft, however potent, could prevail thereon." Her mood, as she spoke, appeared to soften suddenly. "Thy absence has been long, my lord. Come to me at midnight: I will wait for thee in the south pavilion."

Then, eyeing him sultrily for an instant from under drooped lids, and pinching his arm in such a manner that her nails pierced through cloth and skin like a cat's talons, she turned from Thulos to hail certain of the harem-eunuchs.

Thulos, when the queen's attention was disengaged from him, ventured to look again at Ilalotha; pondering, meanwhile, the curious remarks of Xantlicha. He knew that Ilalotha, like many of the court-ladies, had dabbled in spells and philtres; but her witchcraft had never concerned him, since he felt no interest in other charms or enchantments than those with which nature had endowed the bodies of women. And it was quite impossible for him to believe that Ilalotha had died from a fatal passion: since, in his experience, passion was never fatal.

Indeed, as he regarded her with confused emotions, he was again beset by the impression that she had not died at all. There was no repetition of the weird, half-remembered hallucination of other time and place; but it seemed to him that she had stirred from her former position on the wine stained bier, turning her face toward him a little, as a woman turns to an expected

lover; that the arm he had kissed (either in dream or reality) was outstretched a little farther from her side.

Thulos bent nearer, fascinated by the mystery and drawn by a stranger attraction that he could not have named. Again, surely, he had dreamt or had been mistaken. But even as the doubt grew, it seemed that the bosom of Ilalotha stirred in faint respiration, and he heard an almost inaudible but thrilling whisper: "Come to me at midnight. I will wait for thee... in the tomb."

At this instant there appeared beside the catafalque certain people in the sober and rusty raiment of sextons, who had entered the hall silently, unperceived by Thulos or by any of the company. They carried among them a thin-walled sarcophagus of newly welded and burnished bronze. It was their office to remove the dead woman and bear her to the sepulchral vaults of her family, which were situated in the old necropolis lying somewhat to northward of the palace-gardens.

Thulos would have cried out to restrain them from their purpose; but his tongue clove tightly; nor could he move any of his members. Not knowing whether he slept or woke, he watched the people of the cemetery as they placed Ilalotha in the sarcophagus and bore her quickly from the hall, unfollowed and still unheeded by the drowsy bacchanalians. Only when the somber cortège had departed was he able to stir from his position by the empty bier. His thoughts were sluggish, and full of darkness and indecision. Smitten by an immense fatigue that was not unnatural after his day-long journey, he withdrew to his apartments and fell instantly into death-deep slumber.

Freeing itself gradually from the cypress-boughs, as if from the long, stretched fingers of witches, a waning and misshapen moon glared horizontally through the eastern window when Thulos awoke. By this token, he knew that the hour drew toward midnight, and recalled the assignation which Queen Xantlicha had made with him: an assignation which he could hardly break without incurring the queen's deadly displeasure. Also, with singular clearness, he recalled another rendezvous...

at the same time but in a different place. Those incidents and impressions of Ilalotha's funeral, which, at the time, had seemed so dubitable and dream-like, returned to him with a profound conviction of reality, as if etched on his mind by some mordant chemistry of sleep... or the strengthening of some sorcerous charm. He felt that Ilalotha had indeed stirred on her bier and spoken to him; that the sextons had borne her still living to the tomb. Perhaps her supposed demise had been merely a sort of catalepsy; or else she had deliberately feigned death in a last effort to revive his passion. These thoughts awoke within him a raging fever of curiosity and desire; and he saw before him her pale, inert, luxurious beauty, presented as if by enchantment.

Direly distraught, he went down by the lampless stairs and hallways to the moonlit labyrinth of the gardens. He cursed the untimely exigence of Xantlicha. However, as he told himself, it was more than likely that the queen, continuing to imbibe the liquors of Tasuun, had long since reached a condition in which she would neither keep nor recall her appointment. This thought reassured him: in his queerly bemused mind, it soon became a certainty; and he did not hasten toward the south pavilion but strolled vaguely amid the wan and somber boscaje.

More and more it seemed unlikely that any but himself was abroad: for the long, unlit wings of the palace sprawled as in vacant stupor; and in the gardens there were only dead shadows, and pools of still fragrance in which the winds had drowned. And over all, like a pale, monstrous poppy, the moon distilled her death-white slumber. Thulos, no longer mindful of his rendezvous with Xantlicha, yielded without further reluctance to the urgency that drove him toward another goal... Truly, it was no less than obligatory that he should visit the vaults and learn whether or not he had been deceived in his belief concerning Ilalotha. Perhaps, if he did not go, she would stifle in the shut sarcophagus, and her pretended death would quickly become an actuality. Again, as if spoken in the moonlight before him, he heard the words she had whispered, or seemed to whisper, from the bier: "Come to me at midnight... I will wait for thee... in the tomb."

With the quickening steps and pulses of one who fares to the warm, petal-sweet couch of an adored mistress, he left the palace-grounds by an unguarded northern postern and crossed the weedy common between the royal gardens and the old cemetery. Unchilled and undismayed, he entered those always-open portals of death, where ghoulish-headed monsters of black marble, glaring with hideously pitted eyes, maintained their charnel postures before the crumbling pylons.

The very stillness of the low-bosomed graves, the rigor and pallor of the tall shafts, the deepness of bedded cypress shadows, the inviolacy of death by which all things were invested, served to heighten the singular excitement that had fired Thulos' blood. It was as if he had drunk a philtre spiced with mummia. All around him the mortuary silence seemed to burn and quiver with a thousand memories of Ilalotha, together with those expectations to which he had given as yet no formal image....

Once, with Ilalotha, he had visited the subterranean tomb of her ancestors; and, recalling its situation clearly, he came without indirection to the low-arched and cedar-darkened entrance. Rank nettles and fetid fumitories, growing thickly about the seldom-used adit, were crushed down by the tread of those who had entered there before Thulos; and the rusty, iron-wrought door sagged heavily inward on its loose hinges. At his feet there lay an extinguished flambeau, dropped, no doubt, by one of the departing sextons. Seeing it, he realized that he had brought with him neither candle nor lantern for the exploration of the vaults, and found in that providential torch an auspicious omen.

Bearing the lit flambeau, he began his investigation. He gave no heed to the piled and dusty sarcophagi in the first reaches of the subterranean: for, during their past visit, Ilalotha had shown to him a niche at the innermost extreme, where, in due time, she herself would find sepulture among the members of that decaying line. Strangely, insidiously, like the breath of some vernal garden, the languid and luscious odor of jasmine swam to meet him through the musty air, amid the tiered presence of the dead; and it drew him to the sarcophagus that stood open between others tightly lidded. There he beheld Ilalotha lying in the gay garments of her funeral, with half-shut eyes and

half-parted lips; and upon her was the same weird and radiant beauty, the same voluptuous pallor and stillness, that had drawn Thulos with a necromantic charm.

"I knew that thou wouldst come, O Thulos," she murmured, stirring a little, as if involuntarily, beneath the deepening ardor of his kisses that passed quickly from throat to bosom...

The torch that had fallen from Thulos' hand expired in the thick dust...

Xantlicha, retiring to her chamber betimes, had slept illy. Perhaps she had drunk too much or too little of the dark, ardent vintages; perhaps her blood was fevered by the return of Thulos, and her jealousy still troubled by the hot kiss which he had laid on Ilalotha's arm during the obsequies. A restlessness was upon her; and she rose well before the hour of her meeting with Thulos, and stood at her chamber window seeking such coolness as the night air might afford.

The air, however, seemed heated as by the burning of hidden furnaces; her heart appeared to swell in her bosom and stifle her; and her unrest and agitation were increased rather than diminished by the spectacle of the moon-lulled gardens. She would have hurried forth to the tryst in the pavilion; but, despite her impatience, she thought it well to keep Thulos waiting. Leaning thus from her sill, she beheld Thulos when he passed amid the parterres and arbors below. She was struck by the unusual haste and intentness of his steps, and she wondered at their direction, which could bring him only to places remote from the rendezvous she had named. He disappeared from her sight in the cypress-lined alley that led to the north garden-gate; and her wonderment was soon mingled with alarm and anger when he did not return.

It was incomprehensible to Xantlicha that Thulos, or any man, would dare to forget the tryst in his normal senses; and seeking an explanation, she surmised that the working of some baleful and potent sorcery was probably involved. Nor, in the light of certain incidents that she had observed, and much else that had been rumored, was it hard for her to identify the possible

sorceress. Ilalotha, the queen knew, had loved Thulos to the point of frenzy, and had grieved inconsolably after his desertion of her. People said that she had wrought various ineffectual spells to bring him back; that she had vainly invoked demons and sacrificed to them, and had made futile invocations and death-charms against Xantlicha. In the end, she had died of sheer chagrin and despair, or perhaps had slain herself with some undetected poison... But, as was commonly believed in Tasuun, a witch dying thus, with unslaked desires and frustrated cantrips, could turn herself into a lamia vampire and procure thereby the consummation of all her sorceries...

The queen shuddered, remembering these things; and remembering also the hideous and malign transformation that was said to accompany the achievement of such ends: for those who used in this manner the power of hell must take on the very character and the actual semblance of infernal beings. Too well she surmised the destination of Thulos, and the danger to which he had gone forth if her suspicions were true. And, knowing that she might face an equal danger, Xantlicha determined to follow him.

She made little preparation, for there was no time to waste; but took from beneath her silken bed-cushion a small, straight-bladed dagger that she kept always within reach. The dagger had been anointed from point to hilt with such venom as was believed efficacious against either the living or the dead. Bearing it in her right hand, and carrying in the other a slot-eyed lantern that she might require later, Xantlicha stole swiftly from the palace.

The last lees of the evening's wine ebbed wholly from her brain, and dim, ghastly fears awoke, warning her like the voices of ancestral phantoms. But, firm in her determination, she followed the path taken by Thulos; the path taken earlier by those sextons who had borne Ilalotha to her place of sepulture. Hovering from tree to tree, the moon accompanied her like a worm-hollowed visage. The soft, quick patter of her cothurns, breaking the white silence, seemed to tear the filmy cobweb pall that withheld from her a world of spectral abominations. And more and more she recalled, of those legends that concerned such beings as Ilalotha; and her heart was shaken within her: for she knew that she would meet no mortal woman but a thing

raised up and inspired by the seventh hell. But amid the chill of these horrors, the thought of Thulos in the lamia's arms was like a red brand that seared her bosom.

Now the necropolis yawned before Xantlicha, and her path entered the cavernous gloom of far-vaulted funereal trees, as if passing into monstrous and shadowy mouths that were tusked with white monuments. The air grew dank and noisome, as if filled with the breathing of open crypts. Here the queen faltered, for it seemed that black, unseen cacodemons rose all about her from the graveyard ground, towering higher than the shafts and boles, and standing in readiness to assail her if she went farther. Nevertheless, she came anon to the dark adit that she sought. Tremulously she lit the wick of the dot-eyed lantern; and, piercing the gross underground darkness before her with its bladed beam, she passed with ill-subdued terror and repugnance into that abode of the dead... and perchance of the Undead.

However, as she followed the first turnings of the catacomb, it seemed that she was to encounter nothing more abhorrent than charnel mold and century-sifted dust; nothing more formidable than the serried sarcophagi that lined the deeply hewn shelves of stone; sarcophagi that had stood silent and undisturbed ever since the time of their deposition. Here, surely the slumber of all the dead was unbroken, and the nullity of death was inviolate.

Almost the queen doubted that Thulos had preceded her there; till, turning her light on the ground, she discerned the print of his poulaines, long-tipped and slender in the deep dust amid those foot-marks left by the rudely shod sextons. And she saw that the footprints of Thulos pointed only in one direction, while those of the others plainly went and returned.

Then, at an undetermined distance in the shadows ahead, Xantlicha heard a sound in which the sick moaning of some amorous woman was bent with a snarling as of jackals over their meat. Her blood returned frozen upon her heart as she went onward step by slow step, clutching her dagger in a hand drawn sharply back, and holding the light high in advance. The sound grew louder and most distinct; and there came to her now a perfume as of flowers

in some warm June night; but, as she still advanced, the perfume was mixed with more and more of a smothering foulness such as she had never heretofore known, and was touched with the reeking of blood.

A few paces more, and Xantlicha stood as if a demon's arm had arrested her: for her lantern's light had found the inverted face and upper body of Thulos, hanging from the end of a burnished, new-wrought sarcophagus that occupied a scant interval between others green with rust. One of Thulos' hands clutched rigidly the rim of the sarcophagus, while the other hand, moving feebly, seemed to caress a dim shape that leaned above him with arms showing jasmine-white in the narrow beam, and dark fingers plunging into his bosom. His head and body seemed but an empty hull, and his hand hung skeleton-thin on the bronze rim, and his whole aspect was vein-drawn, as if he had lost more blood than was evident on his torn throat and face, and in his sodden raiment and dripping hair.

From the thing stooping above Thulos, there came ceaselessly that sound which was half moan and half snarl. And as Xantlicha stood in petrific fear and loathing, she seemed to hear from Thulos' lips an indistinct murmur, more of ecstasy than pain. The murmur ceased, and his head hung slacklier than before, so that the queen deemed him verily dead. At this she found such wrathful courage as enabled her to step nearer and raise the lantern higher: for, even amid her extreme panic, it came to her that by means of the wizard-poisoned dagger she might still haply slay the thing that had slain Thulos.

Waveringly the light crept aloft, disclosing inch by inch that infamy which Thulos had caressed in the darkness...

It crept even to the crimson-smeared wattles, and the fanged and ruddled orifice that was half mouth and half beak... till Xantlicha knew why the body of Thulos was a mere shrunken hull... In what the queen saw, there remained nothing of Ilalotha except the white, voluptuous arms, and a vague outline of human breasts melting momentarily into breasts that were not human, like clay molded by a demon sculptor. The arms too began to change and darken; and, as they changed, the dying hand of Thulos stirred

again and fumbled with a caressing movement toward the horror. And the thing seemed to heed him not but withdrew its fingers from his bosom, and reached across him with members stretching enormously, as if to claw the queen or fondle her with its dribbling talons.

It was then that Xanticha let fall the lantern and the dagger, and ran with shrill, endless shriekings and laughters of immitigable madness from the vault.

THE DEATH OF MALYGRIS

At the hour of interlunar midnight, when lamps burned rarely and far apart in Susran, and slow-moving autumn clouds had muffled the stars, King Gadeiron sent forth into the sleeping city twelve of his trustiest mutes. Like shadows gliding through oblivion, they vanished upon their various ways; and each of them, returning presently to the darkened palace, led with him a shrouded figure no less discreet and silent than himself.

In this manner, groping along tortuous alleys, through blind cypress-caverns in the royal gardens, and down subterranean halls and steps, twelve of the most powerful sorcerers of Susran were brought together in a vault of oozing, death-gray granite, far beneath the foundations of the palace.

The entrance of the vault was guarded by earth-demons that obeyed the arch-sorcerer, Maranapion, who had long been the king's councillor. These demons would have torn limb from limb any who came unprepared to offer them a libation of fresh blood. The vault was lit dubiously by a single lamp, hollowed from a monstrous garnet, and fed with vipers' oil. Here Gadeiron, crownless, and wearing sackcloth dyed in sober purple, awaited the wizards on a seat of limestone wrought in the form of a sarcophagus. Maranapion stood at his right hand, immobile, and swathed to the mouth in the garments of the tomb. Before him was a tripod of orichalchum, rearing shoulder-high; and on the tripod, in a silver socket, there reposed the enormous blue eye of a slain Cyclops, wherein the archimage was said to behold weird visions. On this eye, gleaming balefully under the garnet lamp, the gaze of Maranapion was fixed with death-like rigidity.

From these circumstances, the twelve sorcerers knew that the king had convened them only because of a matter supremely grave and secret. The hour and fashion of their summoning, the place of meeting, the terrible elemental guards, the mufti worn by Gadeiron — all were proof of a need for preternatural stealth and privity.

For awhile there was silence in the vault, and the twelve, bowing deferentially, waited the will of Gadeiron. Then, in a voice that was little more than a harsh whisper, the king spoke:

"What know ye of Malygris?"

Hearing that awful name, the sorcerers paled and trembled visibly; but, one by one, as if speaking by rote, several of the foremost made answer to Gadeiron's question.

"Malygris dwells in his black tower above Susran," said the first. "The night of his power is still heavy upon Poseidonis; and we others, moving in that night, are as shadows of a withered moon. He is overlord of all kings and sorcerers. Yea, even the triremes that fare to Tartessos, and the far-flown eagles of the sea, pass not beyond the black falling of his shadow."

"The demons of the five elements are his familiars," said the second. "The gross eyes of common men have beheld them often, flying like birds about his tower, or crawling lizard-wise on the walls and pavements."

"Malygris sits in his high hall," avowed the third. "Unto him, tribute is borne at the full moon from all the cities of Poseidonis. He takes a tithe of the lading of every galley. He claims a share of the silver and incense, of the gold and ivory sacred to the temples. His wealth is beyond the opulence of the sunken kings of Atlantis... even those kings who were thy forefathers, O Gadeiron."

"Malygris is old as the moon," mumbled a fourth. "He will live for ever, armed against death with the dark magic of the moon. Death has become a slave in his citadel, toiling among other slaves, and striking only at the foes of Malygris."

"Much of this was true formerly," quoth the king, with a sinister hissing of his breath. "But now a certain doubt has arisen... for it may be that Malygris is dead."

A communicated shiver seemed to run about the assembly. "Nay," said the sorcerer who had affirmed the immortality of Malygris. "For how can this thing have come to pass? The doors of his tower stood open today at sunset; and the priests of the ocean-god, bearing a gift of pearls and purple dyes, went in before Malygris, and found him sitting in his tall chair of the ivory of mastodons. He received them haughtily, without speaking, as is his wont; and his servants, who are half ape and half man, came in unbidden to carry away the tribute."

"This very night," said another, "I saw the steadfast lamps of the sable tower, burning above the city like the eyes of Taaran, god of Evil. The familiars have departed not from the tower as such beings depart at the dying of a wizard: for in that case, men would have heard their howling and lamentation in the dark."

"Aye," declared Gadeiron, "men have been befooled ere this. And Malygris was ever the master of illuding shows, of feints, and beguilements. But there is one among us who discerns the truth. Maranapion, through the eye of the Cyclops, has looked on remote things and hidden places, Even now, he peers upon his ancient enemy, Malygris."

Maranapion, shuddering a little beneath his shroud-like garments, seemed to return from his clairvoyant absorption. He raised from the tripod his eyes of luminous amber, whose pupils were black and impenetrable as jet.

"I have seen Malygris," he said, turning to the conclave. "Many times I have watched him thus, thinking to learn some secret of his close-hidden magic, I have spied upon him at noon, at evenfall, and through the drear, lampless vigils of midnight. And I have beheld him in the ashen dawn and the dawn of quickening fire. But always he sits in the great ivory chair, in the high hall of his tower, frowning as if with meditation. And his hands clutch always the basilisk-carven arms of the chair, and his eyes turn evermore, unshutting, unblinking, toward the orient window and the heavens beyond where only high-risen stars and clouds go by.

"Thus have I beheld him for the space of a whole year and a month. And each day I have seen his monsters bring before him vessels filled with rare meat and drink: and later they have taken away the vessels untouched. And never have I discerned the least movement of his lips, nor any turning or tremor of his body.

"For these reasons, I deem that Malygris is dead; but by virtue of his supremacy in evil and in art magical, he sits defying the worm, still undecayed and incorrupt. And his monsters and his familiars attend him still, deceived by the lying appearance of life; and his power, though now an empty fraud, is still dark and awful upon Poseidonis."

Again, following the slow-measured words of Maranapion, there was silence in the vault. A dark, furtive triumph smoldered in the face of Gadeiron, on whom the yoke of Malygris had lain heavily, irking his pride. Among the twelve sorcerers, there was none who wished well to Malygris, nor any who did not fear him; and they received the annunciation of his demise with dreadful, half-incredulous joy. Some there were who doubted, holding that Maranapion was mistaken; and in the faces of all, as in somber mirrors, their awe of the master was still reflected.

Maranapion, who had hated Malygris above all others, as the one warlock whose art and power excelled his own, stood aloof and inscrutable like a poisoning vulture.

It was King Gadeiron who broke the gravid silence.

"Not idly have I called ye to this crypt, O sorcerers of Susran: for a work remains to be done. Verily, shall the corpse of a dead necromancer tyrannize over us all? There is mystery here, and a need to move cautiously, for the duration of his necromancy is yet unverified and untested. But I have called ye together in order that the hardiest among ye may take council with Maranapion, and aid him in devising such wizardry as will now expose the fraud of Malygris, and evince his mortality to all men, as well as to the fiends that follow him still, and the ministering monsters."

A babble of disputation rose, and they who were most doubtful of this matter, and feared to work against Malygris in any fashion, begged Gadeiron's leave to withdraw. In the end, there remained seven of the twelve...

Swiftly, by dim and covert channels, on the day that followed, the death of Malygris was bruited throughout the isle Poseidonis. Many disbelieved the story, for the might of the wizard was a thing seared as with hot iron on the souls of them that had witnessed his thaumaturgies. However, it was recalled that during the past year few had beheld him face to face; and always he had seemed to ignore them, speaking not, and staring fixedly through the tower window, as if intent on far things that were veiled to others. During that time, he had called no man to his presence, and had sent forth no message, no oracle or decree; and they who had gone before him were mainly bearers of tribute and had followed a long-established custom.

When these matters became generally known, there were some who maintained that he sat thus in a long swoon of ecstasy or catalepsy, and would awaken therefrom in time. Others, however, held that he had died, and was able to preserve the deceitful aspect of life through a spell that endured after him. No man dared to enter the tall, sable tower; and still the shadow of the tower fell athwart Susran like the shadow of an evil gnomon moving on some disastrous dial; and still the umbrage of the power of Malygris lay stagnant as the tomb's night on the minds of men.

Now, among the five sorcerers who had begged Gadeiron's leave to depart, fearing to join their fellows in the making of wizardry against Malygris, there were two that plucked heart a little afterward, when they heard from other sources a confirmation of the vision beheld by Maranapion through the Cyclop's eye.

These two were brothers, named Nygon and Fustules. Feeling a certain shame for their timidity, and desiring to rehabilitate themselves in the regard of the others, they conceived an audacious plan.

When night had again fallen upon the city, bringing no moon, but only obscure stars and the scud of sea-born clouds, Nygon and Fustules went forth through the darkened ways and came to the steep hill at the heart of Susran, whereon, in half-immemorial years, Malygris had established his grim citadel.

The hill was wooded with close-grown cypresses, whose foliage, even to the full sun, was black and sombre as if tarnished by wizard fumes. Crouching on either hand, they leaned like misshapen spirits of the night above the stairs of adamant that gave access to the tower. Nygon and Fustules, mounting the stairs, cowered and trembled when the boughs swung menacingly toward them in violent gusts of wind. They felt the dripping of heavy sea-dews, blown in their faces like a spittle of demons. The wood, it seemed, was full of execrably sighing voices, and weird whimpers and little moanings as of imp-children astray from Satanic dams.

The lights of the tower burned through the waving boughs, and seemed to recede unapproachably as they climbed. More than once the two regretted their temerity, but at length, without suffering palpable harm or hindrance, they neared the portals, which stood eternally open, pouring the effulgence of still, unflaring lamps on the windy darkness.

Though the plan they had conceived was nefarious, they deemed it best to enter boldly. The purpose of their visit if any should challenge or interrogate them was the asking of an oracle from Malygris, who was famed throughout the isle as the most infallible of soothsayers.

Freshening momentarily from the sea beyond Susran, the wind clamored about the tower like an army of devils in flight from deep to deep, and the long mantles of the sorcerers were blown in their faces. But, entering the wide portals, they heard no longer the crying of the gale, and felt no more its pursuing rudeness. At a single step they passed into mausolean silence. Around them the lamplight fell unshaken on caryatids of black marble, on mosaics of precious gems, on fabulous metals and many-storied tapestries; and a tideless perfume weighed upon the air like a balsam of death. They felt an involuntary awe, deeming the mortal stillness a thing that was hardly

natural. But, seeing that the tower vestibule was unguarded by any of the creatures of Malygris, they were emboldened to go on and climb the marmorean stairs to the apartments above.

Everywhere, by the light of opulent lamps, they beheld inestimable and miraculous treasures. There were tables of ebony wrought with sorcerous runes of pearl and white coral; webs of silver and samite, cunningly pictured; caskets of electrum overflowing with talismanic jewels; tiny gods of jade and agate; and tall chryselephantine demons. Here was the loot of ages, lying heaped and mingled in utter negligence, without lock or ward, as if free for any casual thief.

Eyeing the riches about them with covetous wonder, the two sorcerers mounted slowly from room to room, unchallenged and unmolested, and came ultimately to that upper hall in which Malygris was wont to receive his visitors.

Here, as elsewhere, the portals stood open before them, and lamps burned as if in a trance of light. The lust of plunder was hot in their hearts. Made bolder still by the seeming desolation, and thinking now that the tower was uninhabited by any but the dead magician, they went in with little hesitancy.

Like the rooms below, the chamber was full of precious artifacts; and iron-bound volumes and brazen books of occult, tremendous necromancy, together with golden and earthen censers, and vials of unshatterable crystal, were strewn in weird confusion about the mosaic floor. At the very center there sat the old archimage in his chair of primeval ivory, peering with stark, immovable eyes at the night-black window.

Nygon and Fustules felt their awe return upon them, remembering too clearly now the thrice-baleful mastery that this man had wielded, and the demon lore he had known, and the spells he had wrought that were irrefragable by other wizards. The specters of these things rose up before them as if by a final necromancy. With down-dropped eyes and humble mien, they went forward, bowing reverentially. Then, speaking aloud, in

accordance with their predetermined plan, Fustules requested an oracle of their fortunes from Malygris.

There was no answer, and lifting their eyes, the brothers were greatly reassured by the aspect of the seated ancient. Death alone could have set the grayish pallor on the brow, could have locked the lips in a rigor as of fast-frozen clay. The eyes were like cavern-shadowed ice, holding no other light than a vague reflection of the lamps. Under the beard that was half silver, half sable, the cheeks had already fallen in as with beginning decay, showing the harsh outlines of the skull. The gray and hideously shrunken hands, whereon the eyes of enchanted beryls and rubies burned, were clenched inflexibly on the chair-arms which had the form of arching basilisks.

"Verily," murmured Nygon, "there is naught here to frighten or dismay us. Behold, it is only the lich of an old man after all, and one that has cheated the worm of his due provender overlong."

"Aye," said Fustules. "But this man, in his time, was the greatest of all necromancers. Even the ring on his little finger is a sovereign talisman. The balas-ruby of the thumbing of his right hand will conjure demons from out of the deep. In the volumes that lie about the chamber, there are secrets of perished gods and the mysteries of planets immemorial. In the vials, there are sirups that give strange visions, and philtres that can revive the dead. Among these things, it is ours to choose freely."

Nygon, eyeing the gems greedily, selected a ring that encircled the right forefinger with the sixfold coils of a serpent of orichalchum, bearing in its mouth a beryl shaped like a griffin's egg. Vainly, however, he tried to loosen the finger from its rigid clutch on the chair-arm, to permit the removal of the ring. Muttering impatiently, he drew a knife from his girdle and prepared to hew away the finger. In the meanwhile, Fustules had drawn his own knife as a preliminary before approaching the other hand.

"Is thy heart firm within thee, brother?" he inquired in a sort of sibilant whisper. "If so, there is even more to be gained than these talismanic rings.

It is well known that a wizard who attains to such supremacy as Malygris, undergoes by virtue thereof a complete bodily transformation, turning his flesh into elements more subtle than those of common flesh. And whoso eats of his flesh even so much as a tiny morsel will share thereafter in the powers owned by the wizard."

Nygon nodded as he bent above the chosen finger. "This, too, was in my thought," he answered.

Before he or Fustules could begin their ghoulish attack, they were startled by a venomous hissing that appeared to emanate from the bosom of Malygris. They drew back in amazement and consternation, while a small coral viper slid from behind the necromancer's beard, and glided swiftly over his knees to the floor like a sinuous rill of scarlet. There, coiling as if to strike, it regarded the thieves with eyes that were cold and malignant as drops of frozen poison.

"By the black thorns of Taaran!" cried Fustules. "It is one of Malygris' familiars. I have heard of this viper--"

Turning, the two would have fled from the room. But, even as they turned, the walls and portals seemed to recede before them, fleeing giddily and interminably, as if unknown gulfs had been admitted to the chamber. A vertigo seized them; reeling, they saw the little segments of mosaic under their feet assume the proportions of mighty flags. Around them the strewn books and censers and vials loomed enormous, rearing above their heads and barring their way as they ran.

Nygon, looking over his shoulder, saw that the viper had turned to a vast python, whose crimson coils were undulating swiftly along the floor. In a colossal chair, beneath lamps that were large as suns, there sat the colossal form of the dead archimage, in whose presence Nygon and Fustules were no more than pigmies. The lips of Malygris were still immobile beneath his beard; and his eyes still glared implacably upon the blackness of the far window. But at that instant a voice filled the awful spaces of the room, reverberating like thunder in the heavens, hollow and tremendous:

"Fools! ye have dared to ask me for an oracle. And the oracle is — death!"

Nygon and Fustules, knowing their doom, fled on in a madness of terror and desperation. Beyond the towering thuribles, the tomes that were piled like pyramids, they saw the threshold in intermittent glimpses, like a remote horizon. It withdrew before them, dim and unattainable. They panted as runners pant in a dream. Behind them, the vermilion python crawled; and overtaking them as they tried to round the brazen back of a wizard volume, it struck them down like fleeing dormice...

In the end, there was only a small coral viper, that crept back to its hiding-place in the bosom of Malygris...

Toiling by day and night, in the vaults under the palace of Gadeiron, with impious charms and unholy conjurations, and fouler chemistries, Maranapion and his seven coadjutors had nearly completed the making of their sorcery.

They designed an involution against Malygris that would break the power of the dead necromancer by rendering evident to all the mere fact of his death. Employing an unlawful Atlantean science, Maranapion had created living plasm with all the attributes of human flesh, and had caused it to grow and flourish, fed with blood. Then he and his assistants, uniting their wills and convoking the forces that were blasphemy to summon, had compelled the shapeless, palpitating mass to put forth the limbs and members of a new-born child; and had formed it ultimately, after all the changes that man would undergo between birth and senescence, into an image of Malygris.

Now, carrying the process even further, they caused the simulacrum to die of extreme age, as Malygris had apparently died. It sat before them in a chair, facing toward the east, and duplicating the very posture of the magician on his seat of ivory.

Nothing remained to be done. Forspent and weary, but hopeful, the sorcerers waited for the first signs of mortal decay in the image. If the spells they had woven were successful, a simultaneous decay would occur in the

body of Malygris, incorruptible heretofore. Inch by inch, member by member, he would rot in the adamantine tower; His familiars would desert him, no longer deceived; and all who came to the tower would know his mortality; and the tyranny of Malygris would lift from Susran, and his necromancy be null and void as a broken pentacle in sea-girt Poseidonis.

For the first time since the beginning of their involution, the eight magicians were free to intermit their vigilance without peril of invalidating the charm. They slept soundly, feeling that their repose was well earned. On the morrow they returned, accompanied by King Gadeiron, to the vault in which they had left the plasmic image.

Opening the sealed door, they were met by a charnel odor, and were gratified to perceive in the figure the unmistakable signs of decomposition. A little later, by consulting the Cyclops' eye, Maranapion verified the paralleling of these marks in the features of Malygris.

A great jubilation, not unmingled with relief, was felt by the sorcerers and by King Gadeiron. Heretofore, not knowing the extent and duration of the powers wielded by the dead master, they had been doubtful of the efficacy of their own magic. But now, it seemed, there was no longer any reason for doubt.

On that very day it happened that certain seafaring merchants went before Malygris to pay him, according to custom, a share of the profits of their latest voyage. Even as they bowed in the presence of the master, they became aware, by sundry disagreeable tokens, that they had borne tribute to a corpse. Not daring even then to refuse the long-exacted toll, they flung it down and fled from the place in terror.

Soon, in all Susran, there was none who doubted any longer the death of Malygris. And yet, such was the awe he had wrought through many lustrums, that few were venturous enough to invade the tower; and thieves were wary, and would not try to despoil its fabled treasures.

Day by day, in the blue, monstrous eye of the Cyclops, Maranapion saw the rotting of his dreaded rival. And upon him presently there came a strong

desire to visit the tower and behold face to face that which he had witnessed only in vision. Thus alone would his triumph be complete.

So it was that he and the sorcerers who had aided him, together with King Gadeiron, went up to the sable tower by the steps of adamant, and climbed by the marble stairs, even as Nygon and Fustules before them, to the high room in which Malygris was seated... But the doom of Nygon and Fustules, being without other witnesses than the dead, was wholly unknown to them.

Boldly and with no hesitation they entered the chamber. Slanting through the western window, the sun of late afternoon fell goldenly on the dust that had gathered everywhere. Spiders had woven their webs on the bright-jeweled censers, on the graven lamps, and the metal-covered volumes of sorcery. The air was stagnant with a stifling foulness of death.

The intruders went forward, feeling that impulse which leads the victors to exult over a vanquished enemy. Malygris sat unbowed and upright, his black and tattered fingers clutching the ivory chair-arms as of yore, and his empty orbits glowering still at the eastern window. His face was little more than a bearded skull; and his blackening brow was like worm-pierced ebony.

"O Malygris, I give thee greeting," said Maranapion in a loud voice of mockery. "Grant, I beseech thee, a sign, if thy wizardry still prevails, and hath not become the appanage of oblivion."

"Greeting, O Maranapion," replied a grave and terrible voice that issued from the maggot-eaten lips. "Indeed, I will grant thee a sign. Even as I, in death, have rotted upon my seat from the foul sorcery which was wrought in the vaults of King Gadeiron, so thou and thy fellows and Gadeiron, living, shall decay and putrefy wholly in an hour, by virtue of the curse that I put upon ye now."

Then the shrunken corpse of Malygris, fulminating the runes of an old Atlantean formula, cursed the eight sorcerers and King Gadeiron. The formula, at frequent intervals, was cadenced with fatal names of lethal gods; and in it were told the secret appellations of the black god of time, and the

Nothingness that abides beyond time; and use was made of the titles of many tomb-lairing demons. Heavy and hollow-sounding were the runes, and in them one seemed to hear a noise of great blows on sepulchral doors, and a clangor of downfallen slabs. The air darkened as if with the hovering of seasonless night, and thereupon, like a breathing of the night, a chillness entered the chamber; and it seemed that the black wings of ages passed over the tower, beating prodigiously from void to void, ere the curse was done.

Hearing that maranatha, the sorcerers were dumb with the extremity of their dread; and even Maranapion could recall no counter-spell effectual in any degree against it. All would have fled from the room ere the curse ended, but a mortal weakness was upon them, and they felt a sickness as of quick-coming death. Shadows were woven athwart their eyes; but through the shadows, each beheld dimly the instant blackening of the faces of his fellows, and saw the cheeks fall ruinously, and the lips curl back on the teeth like those of long-dead cadavers.

Trying to run, each was aware of his own limbs that rotted beneath him, pace by pace, and felt the quick sloughing of his flesh in corruption from the bone. Crying out with tongues that shriveled ere the cry was done, they fell down on the floor of the chamber. Life lingered in them, together with the dire knowledge of their doom, and they preserved something of hearing and sight. In the dark agony of their live corruption, they tossed feebly to and fro, and crawled inchmeal on the chill mosaic. And they still moved in this fashion, slowly and more imperceptibly, till their brains were turned to gray mold, and the sinews were parted from their bones, and the marrow was dried up.

Thus, in an hour, the curse was accomplished. The enemies of the necromancer lay before him, supine and shrunken, in the tomb's final posture, as if doing obeisance to a seated Death. Except for the garments, none could have told King Gadeiron from Maranapion, nor Maranapion from the lesser wizards.

The day went by, declining seaward; and, burning like a royal pyre beyond Susran the sunset flung an aureate glare through the window, and then

dropped away in red brands and funereal ashes. And in the twilight a coral viper glided from the bosom of Malygris, and weaving among the remnant of them that lay on the floor, and slipping silently down the stairs of marble, it passed forever from the tower.

THE DEMON OF THE FLOWER

Not as the plants and flowers of Earth, growing peacefully beneath a simple sun, were the blossoms of the planet Lophai. Coiling and uncoiling in double dawns; tossing tumultuously under vast suns of jade green and balas-ruby orange; swaying and weltering in rich twilights, in aurora-curtained nights, they resembled fields of rooted serpents that dance eternally to an other-worldly music.

Many were small and furtive, and crept viper-wise on the ground. Others were tall as pythons, rearing superbly in hieratic postures to the jeweled light. Some grew with single or dual stems that burgeoned forth into hydra heads, and some were frilled and festooned with leaves that suggested the wings of flying lizards, the pennants of faery lances, the phylacteries of a strange sacerdotalism. Some appeared to bear the scarlet wattles of dragons; others were tongued as if with black flames or the colored vapors that issue with weird writhings from out barbaric censers; and others still were armed with fleshy nets or tendrils, or with huge blossoms like bucklers perforated in battle. And all were equipped with venomous darts and fangs, all were alive, restless, and sentient.

They were the lords of Lophai, and all other life existed by their sufferance. The people of the world had been their inferiors from unrecorded cycles; and even in the most primitive myths there was no suggestion that any other order of things had ever prevailed. And the plants themselves, together with the fauna and mankind of Lophai, gave immemorial obeisance to that supreme and terrible flower known as the Voorqual, in which a tutelary demon, more ancient than the twin suns, was believed to have made its immortal avatar.

The Voorqual was served by a human priesthood, chosen from amid the royalty and aristocracy of Lophai. In the heart of the chief city, Lospar, in an equatorial realm, it had grown from antiquity on the summit of a high pyramid of sable terraces that loomed over the town like the hanging

gardens of some greater Babylon, crowded with the lesser but deadly floral forms. At the center of the broad apex, the Voorqual stood alone in a basin level with the surrounding platform of black mineral. The basin was filled with a compost in which the dust of royal mummies formed an essential ingredient.

The demon flower sprang from a bulb so encrusted with the growth of ages that it resembled a stone urn. Above this there rose the gnarled and mighty stalk that had displayed in earlier times the bifurcation of a mandrake, but whose halves had now grown together into a scaly, furrowed thing like the tail of some mythic sea-monster. The stalk was variegated with hues of greening bronze, of antique copper, with the livid blues and purples of fleshly corruption. It ended in a crown of stiff, blackish leaves, banded and spotted with poisonous, metallic white, and edged with sharp serrations as of savage weapons. From below the crown issued a long, sinuous arm, scaled like the main stem, and serpentine downward and outward to terminate in the huge upright bowl of a bizarre blossom — as if the arm, in sardonic fashion, should hold out a hellish beggar's cup.

Abhorrent and monstrous was the bowl — which, like the leaves, was legended to renew itself at intervals of a thousand years. It smouldered with sullen ruby at the base; it lightened into zones of dragon's blood, into belts of the rose of infernal sunset, on the full, swelling sides; and it flamed at the rim to a hot yellowish nacarat red, like the ichor of salamanders. To one who dared peer within, the cup was lined with sepulchral violet, blackening toward the bottom, pitted with myriad pores, and streaked with turgescient veins of sulphurous green.

Swaying in a slow, lethal, hypnotic rhythm, with a deep and solemn sibilation, the Voorqual dominated the city of Lospar and the world Lophai. Below, on the tiers of the pyramid, the thronged ophidian plants kept time to this rhythm in their tossing and hissing. And far beyond Lospar, to the poles of the planet and in all its longitudes, the living blossoms obeyed the sovereign tempo of the Voorqual.

Boundless was the power exercised by this being over the people who, for want of a better name, I have called the humankind of Lophai. Myriad and frightful were the legends that had gathered through aeons about the Voorqual. And dire was the sacrifice demanded each year at the summer solstice by the demon: the filling of its proffered cup with the life-blood of a priest or priestess chosen from amid the assembled hierophants who passed before the Voorqual till the poised cup inverted and empty, descended like a devil's miter on the head of one of their number.

Lunithi, king of the realms about Lospar, and high-priest of the Voorqual, was the last if not the first of his race to rebel against this singular tyranny. There were dim myths of some primordial ruler who had dared to refuse the required sacrifice; and whose people, in consequence, had been decimated by a mortal war with the serpentine plants which, obeying the angry demon, had uprooted themselves everywhere from the soil and had marched on the cities of Lophai, slaying or vampirizing all who fell in their way. Lunithi, from childhood, had obeyed implicitly and without question the will of the floral overlord; had offered the stated worship, had performed the necessary rites. To withhold them would have been blasphemy. He had not dreamt of rebellion till, at the time of the annual choosing of the victim, and thirty suns before the date of his nuptials with Nala, priestess of the Voorqual, he saw the hesitant, inverted grail come down in deathly crimson on the fair head of his betrothed.

A sorrowful consternation, a dark, sullen dismay which he sought to smother in his heart, was experienced by Lunithi. Nala, dazed and resigned, in a mystic inertia of despair, accepted her doom without question; but a blasphemous doubt formed itself surreptitiously in the mind of the king.

Trembling at his own impiety, he asked himself if there was not some way in which he could save Nala, could cheat the demon of its ghastly tribute. To do this, and escape with impunity to himself and his subjects, he knew that he must strike at the very life of the monster, which was believed to be deathless and invulnerable. It seemed impious even to wonder concerning the truth of this belief which had long assumed the force of a religious tenet and was held unanimously. Amid such reflections, Lunithi remembered an

old myth about the existence of a neutral and independent being known as the Occlith: a demon coeval with the Voorqual, and allied neither to man nor the flower creatures. This being was said to dwell beyond the desert of Aphom, in the otherwise unpeopled mountains of white stone above the habitat of the ophidian blossoms. In latter days no man had seen the Occlith, for the journey through Ayhom was not lightly to be undertaken. But this entity was supposed to be immortal; and it kept apart and alone, meditating upon all things but interfering never with their processes. However, it was said to have given, in earlier times, valuable advice to a certain king who had gone forth from Lospar to its lair among the white crags.

In his grief and desperation, Lunithi resolved to seek the Occlith and question it anent the possibility of slaying the Voorqual. If, by any mortal means, the demon could be destroyed, he would remove from Lophai the long-established tyranny whose shadow fell upon all things from the sable pyramid.

It was necessary for him to proceed with utmost caution, to confide in no one, to veil his very thoughts at all times from the occult scrutiny of the Voorqual. In the interim of five days between the choosing of the victim and the consummation of the sacrifice, he must carry out his mad plan. Unattended, and disguised as a simple hunter of beasts, he left his palace during the short three-hour night of universal slumber, and stole forth toward the desert of Aphom. In the dawn of the balas-ruby sun, he had reached the pathless waste, and was toiling painfully over its knife-sharp ridges of dark stone, like the waves of a mounting ocean petrified in storm.

Soon the rays of the green sun were added to those of the other, and Aphom became a painted inferno through which Lunithi dragged his way, crawling from scarp to glassy scarp or resting at whiles in the colored shadows. There was no water anywhere; but swift mirages gleamed and faded; and the sifting sand appeared to run like rills in the bottom of deep valleys. At setting of the first sun, he came within sight of the pale mountains beyond Aphom, towering like cliffs of frozen foam above the desert's dark sea. They were tinged with transient lights of azure, of jade and orange in the

going of the yellow-red orb and the westward slanting of its binary. Then the lights melted into beryl and tourmaline, and the green sun was regnant over all, till it too went down, leaving a twilight whose colors were those of sea-water. In the gloom, Lunithi reached the foot of the pale crags; and there, exhausted, he slept till the second dawn.

Rising, he began his escalade of the white mountains. They rose bleak and terrible before him against the hidden suns, with cliffs that were like the sheer terraces of gods. Like the king who had preceded him in the ancient myth, he found a precarious way that led upward through narrow, broken chasms. At last he came to the vaster fissure, riving the heart of the white range, by which it was alone possible to reach the legendary lair of the Occlith.

The chasm's beetling walls rose higher and higher above him, shutting out the suns but creating with their whiteness a wan and deathly glimmer to illumine his way. The fissure was such as might have been cloven by the sword of a macrocosmic giant. It led downward, steepening ever, like a wound that pierced to the heart of Lophai.

Lunithi, like all of his race, was able to exist for prolonged periods without other nutriment than sunlight and water. He had brought with him a metal flask, filled with the aqueous element of Lophai, from which he drank sparingly as he descended the chasm; for the white mountains were waterless, and he feared to touch the pools and streams of unknown fluids upon which he came at intervals in the dusk. There were sanguine-colored springs that fumed, and bubbled before him, to vanish in fathomless rifts; and brooklets of mercurial metal, green, blue, or amber, that wound beside him like liquescent serpents and then slipped away into dark caverns. Acrid vapors rose from clefts in the chasm; and Lunithi felt himself among strange chemistries of nature. In this fantastic world of stone, which the plants of Lophai could never invade, he seemed to have gone beyond the Voorqual's grim, diabolic tyranny.

At last he came to a clear, watery pool, occupying almost the entire width of the chasm. In passing it he was forced to scramble along a narrow, insecure

ledge at one side. A fragment of the marble stone, breaking away beneath his footfall, dropped into the pool as he gained the opposite edge; and the hueless liquid foamed and hissed like a thousand vipers. Wondering as to its properties, and fearful of the venomous hissing, which did not subside for some time, Lunithi hurried on; and came after an interval to the fissure's end.

Here he emerged in the huge crater-like pit that was the home of the Occlith. Fluted and columned walls went up to a stupendous height on all sides; and the sun of orange ruby, now at zenith, was pouring down a vertical cataract of gorgeous fires and shadows.

Addorsed against the further wall of the pit in an upright posture, he beheld that being known as the Occlith, which had the likeness of a high cruciform pillar of blue mineral, shining with its own esoteric luster. Going forward he prostrated himself before the pillar; and then, in accents that quavered with a deep awe, he ventured to ask the desired oracle.

For awhile the Occlith maintained its aeon-old silence. Peering timidly, the king perceived the twin lights of mystic silver that brightened and faded with a slow, rhythmic pulsation in the arms of the blue cross. Then, from the lofty, shining thing, there issued a voice that was like the tinkling of mineral fragments tightly clashed together, but which somehow shaped itself into articulate words.

"It is possible," said the Occlith, "to slay the plant known as the Voorqual, in which an elder demon has its habitation. Though the flower has attained millennial age, it is not necessarily immortal: for all things have their proper term of existence and decay; and nothing has been created without its corresponding agency of death... I do not advise you to slay the plant... but I can furnish you with the information which you desire. In the mountain chasm through which you came to seek me, there flows a hueless spring of mineral poison, deadly to all the ophidian plant-life of this world..."

The Occlith went on, and told Lunithi the method by which the poison should be prepared and administered. The chill, toneless, tinkling voice

concluded:

"I have answered your question. If there is anything more that you wish to learn, it would be well to ask me now."

Prostrating himself again, Lunithi gave thanks to the Occlith; and, considering that he had learned all that was requisite, he did not avail himself of the opportunity to question further the strange entity of living stone. And the Occlith, cryptic and aloof in its termless, impenetrable meditation, apparently saw fit to vouchsafe nothing more except in answer to a direct query.

Withdrawing from the marble-walled abyss, Lunithi returned in haste along the chasm; till, reaching the pool of which the Occlith had spoken, he paused to empty his water-flask and fill it with the angry, hissing liquid. Then he resumed his homeward journey.

At the end of two days, after incredible fatigues and torments in the blazing hell of Aphom, he reached Lospar in the time of darkness and slumber; as when he had departed. Since his absence had been unannounced, it was supposed that he had retired to the underground adyta below the pyramid of the Voorqual for purposes of prolonged meditation, as was sometimes his wont.

In alternate hope and trepidation, dreading the miscarriage of his plan and shrinking still from its audacious impiety, Lunithi awaited the night preceding that double dawn of summer solstice when, in a secret room of the black pyramid, the monstrous offering was to be made ready. Nala would be slain by a fellow-priest or priestess, chosen by lot, and her life-blood would drip from the channeled altar into a great cup; and the cup would then be borne with solemn rites to the Voorqual and its contents poured into the evilly supplicative bowl of the sanguinated blossom.

He saw little of Nala during that interim. She was more withdrawn than ever, and seemed to have consecrated herself wholly to the coming doom. To no one — and least of all to his beloved — did Lunithi dare to hint a possible prevention of the sacrifice.

There came the dreaded eve, with a swiftly changing twilight of jeweled hues that turned to a darkness hung with auroral flame. Lunithi stole across the sleeping city and entered the pyramid whose blackness towered massively amid the frail architecture of buildings that were little more than canopies and lattices of stone. With infinite care and caution he made the preparations prescribed by the Occlith. Into the huge sacrificial cup of black metal, in a room lit with stored sunlight, he emptied the seething, sibilant poison he had brought with him from the white mountains. Then, opening adroitly a vein in one of his arms, he added a certain amount of his own life-fluid to the lethal potion, above whose foaming crystal it floated like a magic oil, without mingling; so that the entire cup, to all appearance, was filled with the liquid most acceptable to the Satanic blossom.

Bearing in his hands the black grail, Lunithi ascended a hewn stairway that led to the Voorqual's presence. His heart quailing, his senses swooning in chill gulfs of terror, he emerged on the lofty summit above the shadowy town.

In a luminous azure gloom, against the weird and iridescent streamers of light that foreran the double dawn, he saw the dreamy swaying of the monstrous plant, and heard its somnolent hissing that was answered drowsily by myriad blossoms on the tiers below. A nightmare oppression, black and tangible, seemed to flow from the pyramid and to lie in stagnant shadow on all the lands of Lophai.

Aghast at his own temerity, and deeming that his shrouded thoughts would surely be understood as he drew nearer, or that the Voorqual would be suspicious of an offering brought before the accustomed hour, Lunithi made obeisance to his floral suzerain. The Voorqual vouchsafed no sign that it had deigned to perceive his presence; but the great flower-cup, with its flaring crimsons dulled to garnet and purple in the twilight, was held forward as if in readiness to receive the hideous gift.

Breathless, and fainting with religious fear, in a moment of suspense that seemed eternal, Lunithi poured the blood-mantled poison into the cup. The

venom boiled and hissed like a wizard's brew as the thirsty flower drank it up; and Lunithi saw the scaled arm draw back, tilting its demon grail quickly, as if to repudiate the doubtful draught.

It was too late; for the poison had been absorbed by the blossom's porous lining. The tilting motion changed in mid-air to an agonized writhing of the reptilian arm; and then the Voorqual's huge, scaly stalk and pointed leaf-crown began to toss in a deathly dance, waving darkly against the auroral curtains of morn. Its deep hissing sharpened to an insupportable note, fraught with the pain of a dying devil; and looking down from the platform edge on which he crouched to avoid the swaying growth, Lunithi saw that the lesser plants on the terraces were now tossing in a mad unison with their master. Like noises in an ill dream, he heard the chorus of their tortured sibilations.

He dared not look again at the Voorqual, till he became aware of a strange silence, and saw that the blossoms below had ceased to writhe and were drooping limply on their stems. Then, incredulous, he knew that the Voorqual was dead.

Turning in triumph mingled with horror, he beheld the flaccid stalk that had fallen prone on its bed of unholy compost. He saw the sudden withering of the stiff, sworded leaves, of the gross and hellish cup. Even the stony bulb appeared to collapse and crumble before his eyes. The entire stem, its evil colors fading swiftly, shrank and fell in upon itself like a sere, empty serpent-skin.

At the same time, in some obscure manner, Lunithi was still aware of a presence that brooded above the pyramid. Even in the death of the Voorqual, it seemed to him that he was not alone. Then, as he stood and waited, fearing he knew not what, he felt the passing of a cold and unseen thing in the gloom — a thing that flowed across his body like the thick coils of some enormous python, without sound, in dark, clammy undulations. A moment more and it was gone; and Lunithi no longer felt the brooding presence.

He turned to go; but it seemed that the dying night was full of an unconceived terror that gathered before him as he went down the long, somber stairs. Slowly he descended; a weird despair was upon him; he had slain the Voorqual, had seen it wither in death. Yet he could not believe the thing he had done; the lifting of the ancient doom was still no more than an idle myth.

The twilight brightened as he passed through the slumbering city. According to custom, no one would be abroad for another hour. Then the priests of the Voorqual would gather for the annual blood-offering.

Midway between the pyramid and his own palace, Lunithi was more than startled to meet the maiden Nala. Pale and ghostly, she glided by him with a swift and swaying movement almost serpentine, which differed oddly from her habitual languor. Lunithi dared not accost her when he saw her shut, unheeding eyes, like those of a somnambulist; and he was awed and troubled by the strange ease, the unnatural surety of her motion, which reminded him of something which he feared to remember. In a turmoil of fantastic doubt and apprehension, he followed her.

Threading the exotic maze of Lospar with the fleet and sinuous glide of a homing serpent, Nala entered the sacred pyramid. Lunithi, less swift than she, had fallen behind; and he knew not where she had gone in the myriad vaults and chambers; but a dark and fearsome intuition drew his steps without delay to the platform of the summit.

He knew not what he should find; but his heart was drugged with an esoteric hopelessness; and he was aware of no surprise when he came forth in the varicolored dawn and beheld the thing which awaited him.

The maiden Nala — or that which he knew to be Nala — was standing in the basin of evil compost, above the withered remains of the Voorqual. She had undergone — was still undergoing — a monstrous and diabolic metamorphosis. Her frail, slight body had assumed a long and dragonlike shape, and the tender skin was marked off in incipient scales that darkened momentarily with a mottling of baleful hues. Her head was no longer

recognizable as such, and the human lineaments were flaring into a weird semi-circle of pointed leaf-buds. Her lower limbs had joined together, had rooted themselves in the ground. One of her arms was becoming a part of the reptilian bole; and the other was lengthening into a scaly stem that bore the dark-red bud of a sinister blossom.

More and more the monstrosity took on the similitude of the Voorqual; and Lunithi, crushed by the ancient awe and dark terrible faith of his ancestors, could feel no longer any doubt of its true identity. Soon there was no trace of Nala in the thing before him, which began to sway with a sinuous, python-like rhythm, and to utter a deep and measured sibilation, to which the plants on the lower tiers responded. He knew then that the Voorqual had returned to claim its sacrifice and preside forever above the city Lospar and the world Lophai.

THE DEVOTEE OF EVIL

The old Larcom house was a mansion of considerable size and dignity, set among oaks and cypresses on the hill behind Auburn's Chinatown, in what had once been the aristocratic section of the village. At the time of which I write, it had been unoccupied for several years and had begun to present the signs of desolation and dilapidation which untenanted houses so soon display. The place had a tragic history and was believed to be haunted. I had never been able to procure any first-hand or precise accounts of the spectral manifestations that were accredited to it. But certainly it possessed all the necessary antecedents of a haunted house. The first owner, Judge Peter Larcom, had been murdered beneath its roof back in the seventies by a maniacal Chinese cook; one of his daughters had gone insane; and two other members of the family had died accidental deaths. None of them had prospered: their legend was one of sorrow and disaster.

Some later occupants, who had purchased the place from the one surviving son of Peter Larcom, had left under circumstances of inexplicable haste after a few months, moving permanently to San Francisco. They did not return even for the briefest visit; and beyond paying their taxes, they gave no attention whatever to the place. Everyone had grown to think of it as a sort of historic ruin, when the announcement came that it had been sold to Jean Averaude, of New Orleans.

My first meeting with Averaude was strangely significant, for it revealed to me, as years of acquaintance would not necessarily have done, the peculiar bias of his mind. Of course, I had already heard some odd rumors about him; his personality was too signal, his advent too mysterious, to escape the usual fabrication and mongering of village tales. I had been told that he was extravagantly rich, that he was a recluse of the most eccentric type, that he had made certain very singular changes in the inner structure of the old house; and last, but not least, that he lived with a beautiful mulatress who never spoke to anyone and who was believed to be his mistress as well as

his housekeeper. The man himself had been described to me by some as an unusual but harmless lunatic, and by others as an all-round Mephistopheles.

I had seen him several times before our initial meeting. He was a sallow, saturnine Creole, with the marks of race in his hollow cheeks and feverish eyes. I was struck by his air of intellect, and by the fiery fixity of his gaze — the gaze of a man who is dominated by one idea to the exclusion of all else. Some medieval alchemist, who believed himself to be on the point of attaining his objective after years of unrelenting research, might have looked as he did.

I was in the Auburn library one day, when Averaud entered. I had taken a newspaper from one of the tables and was reading the details of an atrocious crime — the murder of a woman and her two infant children by the husband and father, who had locked his victims in a clothes-closet, after saturating their garments with oil. He had left the woman's apron-string caught in the shut door, with the end protruding, and had set fire to it like a fuse.

Averaud passed the table where I was reading. I looked up, and saw his glance at the headlines of the paper I held. A moment later he returned and sat down beside me, saying in a low voice:

"What interests me in a crime of that sort, is the implication of unhuman forces behind it. Could any man, on his own initiative, have conceived and executed anything so gratuitously fiendish?"

"I don't know," I replied, somewhat surprised by the question and by my interrogator. "There are terrifying depths in human nature — more abhorrent than those of the jungle."

"I agree. But how could such impulses, unknown to the most brutal progenitors of man, have been implanted in his nature, unless through some ulterior agency?"

"You believe, then, in the existence of an evil force or entity — a Satan or an Ahriman?"

"I believe in evil — how can I do otherwise when I see its manifestations everywhere? I regard it as an all-controlling power; but I do not think that the power is personal in the sense of what we know as personality. A Satan? No. What I conceive is a sort of dark vibration, the radiation of a black sun, of a center of malignant eons — a radiation that can penetrate like any other ray — and perhaps more deeply. But probably I don't make my meaning clear at all."

I protested that I understood him; but, after his burst of communicativeness, he seemed oddly disinclined to pursue the conversation. Evidently he had been prompted to address me; and no less evidently, he regretted having spoken with so much freedom. He arose; but before leaving, he said:

"I am Jean Averaude — perhaps you have heard of me. You are Philip Hastane, the novelist. I have read your books and I admire them. Come and see me sometime — we may have certain tastes in common."

Averaude's personality, the conception he had avowed, and the intense interest and value which he so obviously attached to these conceptions, made a singular impression on my mind, and I could not forget him. When, a few days later, I met him on the street and he repeated his invitation with a cordialness that was unfeignedly sincere, I could do no less than accept. I was interested, though not altogether attracted, by his bizarre, well-nigh morbid individuality, and was impelled by a desire to learn more concerning him. I sensed a mystery of no common order — a mystery with elements of the abnormal and the uncanny.

The grounds of the old Larcom place were precisely as I remembered them, though I had not found occasion to pass them for some time. They were a veritable tangle of Cherokee rose-vines, arbutus, lilac, ivy and crepe-myrtle, half overshadowed by the great cypresses and somber evergreen oaks. There was a wild, half-sinister charm about them — the charm of rampancy and ruin. Nothing had been done to put the place in order, and there were no outward repairs in the house itself, where the white paint of bygone years was being slowly replaced by mosses and lichens that flourished beneath the eternal umbrage of the trees. There were signs of decay in the roof and

pillars of the front porch; and I wondered why the new owner, who was reputed to be so rich, had not already made the necessary restorations.

I raised the gargoyle-shaped knocker and let it fall with a dull, lugubrious clang. The house remained silent; and I was about to knock again, when the door opened slowly and I saw for the first time the mulatress of whom so many village rumors had reached me.

The woman was more exotic than beautiful, with fine, mournful eyes and bronze-colored features of a semi-negroid irregularity. Her figure, though, was truly perfect, with the curving lines of a lyre and the supple grace of some feline animal. When I asked for Jean Averaude, she merely smiled and made signs for me to enter. I surmised at once that she was dumb.

Waiting in the gloomy library to which she conducted me, I could not refrain from glancing at the volumes with which the shelves were congested. They were an ungodly jumble of tomes that dealt with anthropology, ancient religions, demonology, modern science, history, psychoanalysis and ethics. Interspersed with these were a few romances and volumes of poetry. Beausobre's monograph on Manichaeism was flanked with Byron and Poe; and "Les Fleurs du Mal" jostled a late treatise on chemistry.

Averaude entered, after several minutes, apologizing profusely for his delay. He said that he had been in the midst of certain labors when I came; but he did not specify the nature of these labors. He looked even more hectic and fiery-eyed than when I had seen him last. He was patently glad to see me, and eager to talk.

"You have been looking at my books," he observed immediately. "Though you might not think so at first glance, on account of their seeming diversity, I have selected them all with a single object: the study of evil in all its aspects, ancient, medieval and modern. I have traced it in the religions and demonologies of all peoples; and, more than this, in human history itself. I have found it in the inspiration of poets and romancers who have dealt with the darker impulses, emotion and acts of man. Your novels have interested

me for this reason: you are aware of the baneful influences which surround us, which so often sway or actuate us. I have followed the working of these agencies even in chemical reactions, in the growth and decay of trees, flowers, minerals. I feel that the processes of physical decomposition, as well as the similar mental and moral processes, are due entirely to them.

"In brief, I have postulated a monistic evil, which is the source of all death, deterioration, imperfection, pain, sorrow, madness and disease. This evil, so feebly counteracted by the powers of good, allures and fascinates me above all things. For a long time past, my life-work has been to ascertain its true nature, and trace it to its fountain-head. I am sure that somewhere in space there is the center from which all evil emanates."

He spoke with a wild air of excitement, of morbid and semi-maniacal intensity. His obsession convinced me that he was more or less unbalanced; but there was an unholy logic in the development of his ideas; and I could not but recognize a certain disordered brilliancy and range of intellect.

Scarcely waiting for me to reply, he continued his monologue:

"I have learned that certain localities and buildings, certain arrangements of natural or artificial objects, are more favorable to the reception of evil influences than others. The laws that determine the degree of receptivity are still obscure to me; but at least I have verified the fact itself. As you know, there are houses or neighborhoods notorious for a succession of crimes or misfortunes; and there are also articles, such as certain jewels, whose possession is accompanied by disaster. Such places and things are receivers of evil... I have a theory, however, that there is always more or less interference with the direct flow of the malignant force; and that pure, absolute evil has never yet been manifested.

"By the use of some device which would create a proper field or form a receiving station, it should be possible to evoke this absolute evil. Under such conditions, I am sure that the dark vibration would become a visible and tangible thing, comparable to light or electricity." He eyed me with a gaze that was disconcertingly exigent. Then:

"I will confess that I have purchased this old mansion and its grounds mainly on account of their baleful history. The place is unusually liable to the influences of which I have spoken. I am now at work on an apparatus by means of which, when it is perfected, I hope to manifest in their essential purity the radiations of malign force."

At this moment, the mulatress entered and passed through the room on some household errand. I thought that she gave Averaude a look of maternal tenderness, watchfulness and anxiety. He, on his part seemed hardly to be aware of her presence, so engrossed was he in the strange ideas and the stranger project he had been expounding. However, when she had gone, he remarked:

"That is Fifine, the one human being who is really attached to me. She is mute, but highly intelligent and affectionate. All my people, an old Louisiana family, are long departed... and my wife is doubly dead to me." A spasm of obscure pain contracted his features, and vanished. He resumed his monologue; and at no future time did he again refer to the presumably tragic tale at which he had hinted: a tale in which, I sometimes suspect, were hidden the seeds of the strange moral and mental perversion which he was to manifest more and more.

I took my leave, after promising to return for another talk. Of course, I considered now that Averaude was a madman; but his madness was of a most uncommon and picturesque variety. It seemed significant that he should have chosen me for a confidant. All others who met him found him uncommunicative and taciturn to an extreme degree. I suppose he had felt the ordinary human need of unburdening himself to someone; and had selected me as the only person in the neighborhood who was potentially sympathetic.

I saw him several times during the month that followed. He was indeed a strange psychological study; and I encouraged him to talk without reserve — though such encouragement was hardly necessary. There was much that he told me — a strange medley of the scientific and the mystic. I assented tactfully to all that he said, but ventured to point out the possible dangers of

his evocative experiments, if they should prove successful. To this, with the fervor of an alchemist or a religious devotee, he replied that it did not matter — that he was prepared to accept any and all consequences.

More than once he gave me to understand that his invention was progressing favorably. And one day he said, with abruptness:

"I will show you my mechanism, if you care to see it." I protested my eagerness to view the invention, and he led me forthwith into a room to which I had not been admitted before. The chamber was large, triangular in form, and tapestried with curtains of some sullen black fabric. It had no windows. Clearly, the internal structure of the house had been changed in making it; and all the queer village tales, emanating from carpenters who had been hired to do the work, were now explained. Exactly in the center of the room, there stood on a low tripod of brass the apparatus of which Averaud had so often spoken.

The contrivance was quite fantastic, and presented the appearance of some new, highly complicated musical instrument. I remember that there were many wires of varying thickness, stretched on a series of concave sounding-boards of some dark, unlustrious metal; and above these, there depended from three horizontal bars a number of square, circular and triangular gongs. Each of these appeared to be made of a different material; some were bright as gold, or translucent as jade; others were black and opaque as jet. A small hammer-like instrument hung opposite each gong, at the end of a silver wire.

Averaud proceeded to expound the scientific basis of his mechanism. The vibrational properties of the gongs, he said, were designed to neutralize with their sound-pitch all other cosmic vibrations than those of evil. He dwelt at much length on this extravagant theorem, developing it in a fashion oddly lucid. He ended his peroration:

"I need one more gong to complete the instrument; and this I hope to invent very soon. The triangular room, draped in black, and without windows, forms the ideal setting for my experiment. Apart from this room, I have not

ventured to make any change in the house or its grounds, for fear of deranging some propitious element or collocation of elements."

More than ever, I thought that he was mad. And, though he had professed on many occasions to abhor the evil which he planned to evoke, I felt an inverted fanaticism in his attitude. In a less scientific age he would have been a devil-worshipper, a partaker in the abominations of the Black Mass; or would have given himself to the study and practice of sorcery. His was a religious soul that had failed to find good in the scheme of things; and lacking it, was impelled to make of evil itself an object of secret reverence.

"I fear that you think me insane," he observed in a sudden flash of clairvoyance. "Would you like to watch an experiment? Even though my invention is not completed, I may be able to convince you that my design is not altogether the fantasy of a disordered brain."

I consented. He turned on the lights in the dim room. Then he went to an angle of the wall and pressed a hidden spring or switch. The wires on which the tiny hammers were strung began to oscillate, till each of the hammers touched lightly its companion gong. The sound they made was dissonant and disquieting to the last degree — a diabolic percussion unlike anything I have ever heard, and exquisitely painful to the nerves. I felt as if a flood of finely broken glass was pouring into my ears.

The swinging of the hammers grew swifter and heavier; but, to my surprise, there was no corresponding increase of loudness in the sound. On the contrary, the clangor became slowly muted, till it was no more than an undertone which seemed to be coming from an immense depth or distance — an undertone still full of disquietude and torment, like the sobbing of far-off winds in hell, or the murmur of demonian fires on coasts of eternal ice.

Said Averaud at my elbow:

"To a certain extent, the combined notes of the gongs are beyond human hearing in their pitch. With the addition of the final gong, even less sound will be audible."

While I was trying to digest this difficult idea, I noticed a partial dimming of the light above the tripod and its weird apparatus. A vertical shaft of faint shadow, surrounded by a still fainter penumbra, was forming in the air. The tripod itself, and the wires, gongs and hammers, were now a trifle indistinct, as if seen through some obscuring veil. The central shaft and its penumbra seemed to widen; and looking down at the flood, where the outer adumbration, conforming to the room's outline, crept toward the walls, I saw that Averaud and myself were now within its ghostly triangle.

At the same time there surged upon me an intolerable depression, together with a multitude of sensations which I despair of conveying in language. My very sense of space was distorted and deformed as if some unknown dimension had somehow been mingled with those familiar to us. There was a feeling of dreadful and measureless descent, as if the floor were sinking beneath me into some nether pit; and I seemed to pass beyond the room in a torrent of swirling, hallucinative images, visible but invisible, felt but intangible, and more awful, more accursed than that hurricane of lost souls beheld by Dante.

Down, down, I appeared to go, in the bottomless and phantom hell that was impinging upon reality. Death, decay, malignity, madness, gathered in the air and pressed me down like Satanic incubi in that ecstatic horror of descent. I felt that there were a thousand forms, a thousand faces about me, summoned from the gulfs of perdition. And yet I saw nothing but the white face of Averaud, stamped with a frozen and abominable rapture as he fell beside me.

Like a dreamer who forces himself to awaken, he began to move away from me. I seemed to lose sight of him for a moment in the cloud of nameless, immaterial horrors that threatened to take on the further horror of substance. Then I realized that Averaud had turned off the switch, and that the oscillating hammers had ceased to beat on those infernal gongs. The double shaft of shadow faded in mid-air, the burden of terror and despair lifted from my nerves and I no longer felt the damnable hallucination of nether space and descent.

"My God!" I cried. "What was it?" Averaud's look was full of a ghastly, gloating exultation as he turned to me.

"You saw and felt it, then?" he queried — "that vague, imperfect manifestation of the perfect evil which exists somewhere in the cosmos? I shall yet call it forth in its entirety, and know the black, infinite, reverse raptures which attend its epiphany."

I recoiled from him with an involuntary shudder. All the hideous things that had swarmed upon me beneath the cacophonous beating of those accursed gongs, drew near again for an instant; and I looked with fearful vertigo into hells of perversity and corruption. I saw an inverted soul, despairing of good, which longed for the baleful ecstasies of perdition. No longer did I think him merely mad: for I knew the thing which he sought and could attain; and I remembered, with a new significance, that line of Baudelaire's poem — "The hell wherein my heart delights."

Averaud was unaware of my revulsion, in his dark rhapsody. When I turned to leave, unable to bear any longer the blasphemous atmosphere of that room, and the sense of strange depravity which emanated from its owner, he pressed me to return as soon as possible.

"I think," he exulted, "that all will be in readiness before long. I want you to be present in the hour of my triumph."

I do not know what I said, nor what excuses I made to get away from him. I longed to assure myself that a world of unblasted sunlight and undefiled air could still exist. I went out; but a shadow followed me; and execrable faces leered or mowed from the foliage as I left the cypress-shaded grounds.

For days afterward I was in a condition verging upon neurotic disorder. No one could come as close as I had been to the primal effluence of evil, and go thence unaffected. Shadowy noisome cobwebs draped themselves on all my thoughts, and presences of unlineamented fear, of shapeless horror, crouched in the half-lit corners of my mind but would never fully declare themselves. An invisible gulf, bottomless as Malebolge, seemed to yawn before me wherever I went.

Presently, though, my reason reasserted itself, and I wondered if my sensations in the black triangular room had not been wholly a matter of suggestion or auto-hypnosis. I asked myself if it were credible that a cosmic force of the sort postulated by Averaud could really exist; or, granting it existed, could be evoked by any man through the absurd intermediation of a musical device. The nervous terrors of my experience faded a little in memory; and, though a disturbing doubt still lingered, I assured myself that all I had felt was of purely subjective origin. Even then, it was with supreme reluctance, with an inward shrinking only to be overcome by violent resolve, that I returned to visit Averaud once more.

For an even longer period than usual, no one answered my knock. Then there were hurrying footsteps, and the door was opened abruptly by Fifine. I knew immediately that something was amiss, for her face wore a look of unnatural dread and anxiety, and her eyes were wide, with the whites showing blankly, as if she gazed upon horrific things. She tried to speak, and made that ghastly inarticulate sound which the mute is able to make on occasion as she plucked my sleeve and drew me after her along the somber hall to the triangular room.

The door was open; and as I approached it, I heard a low, dissonant, snarling murmur, which I recognized as the sound of the gongs. It was like the voice of all the souls in a frozen hell, uttered by lips congealing slowly toward the ultimate torture of silence. It sank and sank till it seemed to be issuing from pits below the nadir.

Fifine shrank back on the threshold, imploring me with a pitiful glance to precede her. The lights were all turned on and Averaud, clad in a strange medieval costume, in a black gown and cap such as Faustus might have worn, stood near the percussive mechanism. The hammers were all beating with a frenzied rapidity; and the sound became still lower and tenser as I approached. Averaud did not seem to see me: his eyes, abnormally dilated, and flaming with infernal luster like those of one possessed, were fixed upon something in mid-air.

Again the soul-congealing hideousness, the sense of eternal falling, of myriad harpy-like incumbent horrors, rushed upon me as I looked and saw. Vaster and stronger than before, a double column of triangular shadow had materialized and was becoming more and more distinct. It swelled, it darkened, it enveloped the gong-apparatus and towered to the ceiling. The double column grew solid and opaque as ebony; and the face of Averaud, who was standing well within the broad penumbral shadow, became dim as if seen through a film of Stygian water.

I must have gone utterly mad for a while. I remember only a teeming delirium of things too frightful to be endured by a sane mind, that peopled the infinite gulf of hell-born illusion into which I sank with the hopeless precipitancy of the damned. There was a sickness inexpressible, a vertigo of redeemless descent, a pandemonium of ghoulish phantoms that reeled and swayed about the column of malign omnipotent force which presided over all. Averaud was only one more phantom in this delirium, when with arms outstretched in his perverse adoration, he stepped toward the inner column and passed into it till he was lost to view. And Fifine was another phantom when she ran by me to the wall and turned off the switch that operated those demoniacal hammers.

As one who re-emerges from a swoon, I saw the fading of the dual pillar, till the light was no longer sullied by any tinge of that satanic radiation. And where it had been, Averaud still stood beside the baleful instrument he had designed. Erect and rigid he stood, in a strange immobility; and I felt an incredulous horror, a chill awe, as I went forward and touched him with a faltering hand. For that which I saw and touched was no longer a human being but an ebon statue, whose face and brow and fingers were black as the Faust-like raiment or the sullen curtains. Charred as by sable fire, or frozen by black cold, the features bore the eternal ecstasy and pain of Lucifer in his ultimate hell of ice. For an instant, the supreme evil which Averaud had worshipped so madly, which he had summoned from the vaults of incalculable space, had made him one with itself; and passing, it had left him petrified into an image of its own essence. The form that I touched was harder than marble; and I knew that it would endure to all time

as a testimony of the infinite Medusean power that is death and corruption and darkness.

Fifine had now thrown herself at the feet of the image and was clasping its insensible knees. With her frightful muted moaning in my ears, I went forth for the last time from that chamber and from that mansion. Vainly, through delirious months and madness-ridden years, I have tried to shake off the infrangible obsession of my memories. But there is a fatal numbness in my brain as if it too had been charred and blackened a little in that moment of overpowering nearness to the dark ray of the black statue that was Jean Averaude, the impress of awful and forbidden things has been set like an everlasting seal.

THE DIMENSION OF CHANCE

"Better get that pea-shooter ready," warned Markley through the audiphone, from his seat at the controls of the rocket plane. "At this rate we'll come within range in a few minutes. Those Japs are good gunners, and they'll have a red-hot welcome for us.

Clement Morris, Secret Service operative, and college chum of Andrew Markley, his pilot, in a swift and dangerous chase, inspected the cartridge-belt of the new and incredibly rapid-firing gun, behind which he sat in lieu of the official gunner. Then he resumed his watching of the bright metallic speck that they followed in the thin, dark, stirless air of the stratosphere, twelve miles above the eastward-flowing blur that was Nevada.

They were beginning to overhaul the Japanese plane that had picked up the fleeing spy, Isho Sakamoto, near Ogden. Morris had been tracking down this preternaturally clever spy for months, under Government orders. Sakamoto was believed to have procured plans of many American fortifications, as well as information regarding projected army movements in the war against the Sino-Japanese Federation that had begun a year ago, in 1975.

The enemy rocket plane, descending unexpectedly, had rescued Sakamoto at the very moment when Morris was about to corner him; and Morris had immediately commandeered the services of his old friend Markley of the Air Corps, then stationed at Ogden.

Markley's rocket plane was said to be one of the swiftest in the entire Corps. In its air-tight hull, with oxygen-tanks, helmets and parachutes already donned in case of accident, the two men were speeding onward at an acceleration so terrific that it held them in their seats as if with leaden strait-jackets. Morris, however, was little less accustomed to such flights than Markley himself; and it was not the first time that they had hunted down some national foe or traitor in company.

They drove on between the dark-blue heavens and the dim Earth with its mottlings of mountains and desert. The roar of the rockets was strangely thin in that rarefied air. Before them the light of the stark sun, falling westward, glittered on the wings and hull of the Japanese as if on some great silver beetle. They were many miles from the usual lanes of stratosphere traffic; and no other vessels rode the windless gulf through which pursued and pursuer plunged toward the Sierras and the far Pacific.

Less than a mile now intervened betwixt the two vessels. There was ~no sign of overt hostility from the Japanese, which carried a heavy machine-gun equal in range to that of the American ship, and was manned by a professional gunner as well as by Sakamoto and the pilot. Morris began to calculate the range carefully. It would be a fair fight; and he thrilled at the prospect. The spy, at all costs, must not be permitted to reach San Francisco, where the enemy had established a hard-won base. If the fight should go against them, he or Markicy, as a last resort, would summon other planes by radio from one of the American bases in California, to intercept Sakamoto.

Far off, through the inconceivably clear air, on the enormously extended horizon, he could see the faint notching of the California mountains. Then, as the planes hurtled on, it seemed to him that a vague, misty blur, such as might appear in sun-dazzled eyes, had suddenly developed in mid-air beyond the Japanese. The blur baffled him, like an atmospheric blind spot, having neither form nor hue nor delimitable outlines. But it seemed to enlarge rapidly and to blot out the map-like scene beyond in an inexplicable manner.

Markley had also perceived the blur.

"That's funny," he roared through the audiphone. "Anything in the shape of mist or cloud would be altogether impossible at this height. Must be some queer kind of atmosphere phenomenon—the mirage of a remote cloud, perhaps, transferred to the isothermal layer. But I can't make it out."

Morris did not answer. Amazement checked the somewhat inconsequential remark that rose to his lips; for at that moment the Japanese rocket plane appeared to enter the mysterious blur, vanishing immediately from vision as if in actual cloud or fog. There was a quick, tremulous gleaming of its hull and wings, as if it had started to fall or had abruptly changed its course—and then it was gone, beyond the hueless and shapeless veil.

"That's funnier still," commented Markley, in a puzzled voice. "But they can't shake us by flying into any damned mirage or what-you-call-it. We'll soon pick them up on the other side."

Diving horizontally ahead at six hundred miles per hour, the vessel neared the strange blur, which had now blotted out a huge section of the sky and world. It was like a sort of blindness spreading on the upper air; but it did not convey the idea of darkness or of anything material or tangible.

Both Morris and Markley, as they neared it, felt that they were peering with strained, eluded eyes at something that was virtually beyond the scope of human vision. They seemed to grope for some ungraspable image—an unearthly shadow that fled from sight—a thing that was neither dark nor light nor colored with any known hue.

An instant more, and the blur devoured the heavens with terrible momentum. Then, as the plane rushed into it, a blindness fell on the two men, and they could no longer discern the vessel's interior or its ports. Ineffable greyness, like an atmosphere of cotton-wool, enveloped them and seemed to intercept all visual images.

The roar of the rockets had ceased at the same time, and they could hear nothing. Markley tried to speak, but the oath of astonishment died unuttered in his throat as if before a harrier of infrangible silence. It was as if they had entered some unfamiliar medium, neither air nor ether, that was wholly void and negative, and which refused to carry the vibrations of light, color, and sound.

They had lost the sense of movement, too, and could not know if they were flying or falling or were suspended immovably in the weird vacuum.

Nothing seemed able to touch or reach them; the very sense of time was gone; and their thoughts crawled sluggishly, with a dull confusion, a dreamy surprise, in the all-including void. It was like the preliminary effect of an anaesthetic: a timeless, bodiless, weightless hovering in the gulf that borders upon oblivion.

Very suddenly, like the lifting of a curtain, the blindness cleared away. In a strange, flickering, brownish-red light the men saw the interior of the hull, and beheld each other's goggled helmets and leatheroid air-suits. They became aware that the vessel was falling gently and obliquely, with slanted floor. The rocket explosions had wholly ceased, though Markley had not touched the controlling lever. He could not start them again, and the entire mechanism refused any longer to obey his control. Through the ports, he and Morris saw a multi-colored chaos of outlandish and incomprehensible forms, into which the plane was descending slowly, with incredible lightness, like a downward-floating leaf or feather.

"I don't know what has happened, or where we are," said Markley. "But I guess we might as well sit tight. There's no need to jump—we couldn't go down any more safely with parachutes. But what the hell have we gotten into, anyway?"

"Can't say," rejoined his companion, equally dumbfounded and at a loss. "Whatever or wherever the place is, it's not the state of Nevada."

Their descent toward the unknown, mysterious terrain seemed to occupy many minutes, and once or twice the vessel hung motionless for a moment, and then resumed its gliding with a jerk. Staring from the ports in ever-growing bewilderment, they began to distinguish separate forms and masses in the queer chaos of scenery. Irregular hills, mottled with grey, green, ocher and violet-black, lifted about them in the rufous light, and they perceived that they were settling into a kind of valley-bottom. The ground beneath them was partly bare, partly covered with objects that resembled vegetable growths rather than anything else. These plants, or plant-like things, as the plane settled closer above them, displayed a remarkable diversity of shape, size and hue, ranging from leafless, limbless stems to great tree-forms, with

a crowded foliation that suggested some impossible crossing of araucaria and banana. The whole impression of this flora, even at that first glimpse, was one of lawless variety and illimitable grotesquery.

The vessel slanted slowly down on an open, level tract, narrowly missing the tops of some of the taller growths. It landed with a light jar, little more pronounced than if it had been checked by the usual process of careful deceleration. Markley and Morris peered out on a scene that amazed them more and more as they began to perceive its innumerable oddities of detail. For the nonce, they forgot the Japanese rocket plane they had been following, and did not even speculate regarding its fate or whereabouts.

"Jumping Christopher !" cried Markley. "Mother Nature certainly was inventive when she designed this place. Look at those plants—no two of them alike. And the soil would give a geologist a nightmare." He was now peering at the ground about the vessel, which offered a remarkable mosaic of numberless elements—a conglomeration of parti-colored soils, ores, and mineral forms, wholly unstratified and chaotic.

It was mostly bare, and broken into uneven mounds and hummocks; but here and there, in patches of poisonous-looking day or marl, peculiar grasses grew, with blades that varied in the same manner as the larger growths, so that one might well have imagined that each blade belonged to a separate genus.

Not far away was a clump of trees, exhibiting monstrous variations in their leafage, even when there was a vague likeness of bole or branch. It seemed as if the laws of type had been disowned, as if each individual plant were a species in itself.

A stream of some water-like fluid, varying strangely from peacock blue to cloudy amber in its course, ran past the fallen plane and meandered through the valley toward a barren slope at one end, from which another stream appeared to descend and join it, flowing in a series of rapids and low cascades from a hill-top that melted indistinctly into the reddish-brown heavens.

"Well," observed Markley, after contemplating this milieu with a quizzical and slightly troubled frown, "the problem of how we got here is equalled in its abstruseness only by the problem of how we are going to get away. Somehow or other, we have fallen into a foreign world and are now subject to unfamiliar physical laws. Our nitrone fuel simply won't explode—there's something—hell knows what—that prevents combustion."

"Sure the tubes are all right?" queried Morris. "Maybe we've run short of fuel."

"Huh!" the tone was superbly contemptuous. "I know this boat. There's nothing the matter with the rocket mechanism. And I loaded up to the limit with nitrone before we started. We could have chased Sakamoto to the Great Wall of China and back again, if necessary, without re-fueling. I tell you, we're up against something that was omitted from the text-books. Just look at this ungodly hole, anyway. It's like the scrambled hallucinations of a hundred cases of delirium tremens."

"I've monkeyed with hashish and peyote beans in my time," said Morris, "but I'll admit that I never saw anything like this. However, we're probably missing a lot by staying in the ship. What do you say to a little promenade? Sakamoto and his friends may be somewhere in the neighborhood, too; and if they are, I'd like to get a line on them."

Very cautiously, the two men unstrapped themselves from their seats and arose. In spite of their heavy garments, they felt a queer physical lightness that argued a lesser gravitation than that of Earth, and which no doubt accounted for the leisurely fall of the plane. They almost seemed to float around the hull; and found great difficulty in controlling and calculating their movement.

They had brought along a few sandwiches and a thermos bottle of coffee. These, their sole provisions, they decided to leave in the plane. Both carried automatic pistols of a new type, firing fifteen shots with terrifically high-powered ammunition, and having almost the range of rifles. Making sure that these pistols were ready in their holsters, which formed part of the

leatheroid garments, and re-testing their oxygen-tanks and helmets, the men opened the sealed door of the hull by means of a spring apparatus, and emerged.

The air of the valley, as far as they could tell, was still and windless. It seemed to be quite warm, and they were forced to shut off the heating mechanism in their suits, which they had turned on against the zero of the stratosphere. Almost vertically overhead, a heavy and lop-sided sun glared down, pouring on its light like a visible flood of reddish-brown liquid. A few clouds, with unearthly forms, floated idly about the sun; and far off in the lower heavens, above dim slopes and crags, other clouds went racing as if driven by a mad tempest.

Trying to determine the course of their descent into the valley, Morris and Markley perceived an aerial blur at one point in the heavens—a blur similar to, and perhaps identical with the one into which they had flown above Nevada. This blur, it occurred to Markley, was perhaps formed by the meeting or overlapping of two different kinds of space, and was the entrance between their own world and the alien dimension into which they had been precipitated. It was visible in the reddish air like the "ropiness" or cloudy nucleus that sometimes appears in a clear wine.

"Which way shall we go?" queried Markley, as he and Morris surveyed the valley on all sides, perceiving much that they had not seen from the plane. At the end that had been previously hidden, the vari-colored stream emerged from a narrowing defile of madly-tilted cliffs and pinnacles, hued as with petrified rainbows. On both sides of the valley were long, irregular slopes and barren bluffs, looming vaguely hove areas of fantastic forestation. One of these areas, lying on the right hand, approached in a sort of arc to within a hundred yards of the rocket plane.

"I move that we head for the nearest timber," said Morris, indicating this mass of grotesquely varied growths. "I have a feeling, somehow, that I'd like to get under cover as quickly as possible. There's no telling, of course, but I have an intuition that Sakamoto and his compatriots are somewhere in the vicinity."

"Their visibility is pretty poor, if they are," commented Markley. "We may have lost them altogether—maybe they got safely through that atmospheric blind spot, or fell into another and remote section of this ungodly world."

"Well, I'm not taking any more chances than I have to. I don't care for the idea of a soft-nosed Japanese bullet in the back."

"If rocket fuel won't explode in this world, there's no certainty that cartridges will either," Markley pointed out. "But anyway, we might as well take a look at the woods."

They started off toward the forest, trying to control the absurd lightness that sent them bounding for twenty feet or more. After a few paces, however, they found that their weight was increasing rapidly, as if they had entered a zone of stronger gravitation. They took one or two steps that were almost normal—and then floated off in ludicrous leaps of a dozen yards that were checked suddenly as if by another belt of increased gravity.

The trees, which had seemed so near, retreated in a strange and disconcerting fashion. At length, after many minutes of variable progression, the men saw the wood looming immediately before them, and could study its details. High in the heavens, above all the other growths, there towered two incredibly elongated boles such as might be seen in the delirium of hashish; and about them a medley of lesser forms, no two of which displayed the same habit, leaned and crawled and squatted or massed themselves in monstrous tangles. There were single plants that combined enormous moon-shaped leaves with others that were fern-like or lanceolate. Gourd-like fruits grew on the same tree with others in the form of tiny plums and huge melons. Everywhere there were flowers that made the most ornate terrestrial orchids appear simple and rudimentary as daisies in comparison.

All was irregular and freakish, testifying to a haphazard law of development. It seemed that this whole chaotic cosmos in which the men found themselves had been shaped from atoms and electrons that had formed no fixed patterns of behavior, and whose one controlling law was

chance. Nothing, apparently, was duplicated; the very stones and minerals were anomalous. What further irregularities they would encounter, Morris and Markley could not guess. In a world subject to chance, everything would be incalculable; and the action of the simplest natural laws would be wholly erratic and undependable. A horror of this lawless world gradually arose in them.

So far, they had met nothing in the form of animal life. Now, as they neared the forest, a creature that was like a paddy and spider-legged serpent came down as if from the heavens on one of the preposterously tall boles, running swiftly. The men stepped toward the tree, trying to decide which end of this curious creature was the head and which the tail.

Astoundingly, like a mirage, the forest faded away with their change of position; and they saw its fantastic tops at a seeming distance of many hundred yards, in an oblique direction. Turning, they found that the whole valley, during their brief journey, had shifted about and had re-composed itself beyond all recognition. They were unable to locate the rocket plane for some moments; but finally, in an opposite quarter, and seemingly much further away than they had supposed, they discerned the gleaming of its wings and hull.

Before them, in lieu of the forest, was an open space in which the varicolored stream had mysteriously reappeared. Beyond the stream arose plots of scattered vegetation, backed by opalescent cliffs.

"The late Professor Einstein would have been interested in this," remarked Morris. "Even the light must be moving at random, and sight images are traveling in zigzags and circles. Nothing is where it ought to be. We've gotten into a labyrinth of mirages."

"We'll be lucky if we ever find our way back to the old boat," snorted Markley. "Want to look any further for our Japanese friends?"

Morris did not answer at once. His eye had caught a silvery glint dose to one of the far-off plots of vegetation beyond the stream. He pointed it out to his companion silently. Three dark, moving specks, doubtless the figures of

men, appeared beside the glint as they watched. "There they are," said Morris. "Looks as if they were starting for a pasear themselves, or were just returning from one. Shall we try to interview them?"

"You're the captain, old scout. I'm game if you are. Lead on, MacDuff."

Temporarily forgetting the highly illusive refraction of the weird scenery, they started toward the stream, which appeared to be only a few paces away, and which they could easily cross at a step if the light gravity prevailed in its neighborhood. By another astonishing shift, the stream moved away from them, reappearing in a different quarter, at a considerable distance; and the gleam of the Japanese rocket plane and its attendant human specks had vanished from view.

"I guess we'll play tag with some more mirages," opined Markley in a disgusted tone. "Even if guns will shoot in this crazy world, there's small likelihood that we could hit anyone, or that anyone could hit us."

More deeply bewildered and bemused than ever, they pressed forward, trying to re-locate the enemy vessel. The changing zones of gravity made their progress erratic and uncertain; and the landscape melted and shifted around them like the imagery of a kaleidoscope.

A dump of crowded vegetation, rearing its anomalous boles and monstrous leafage as if from nowhere, leaped into place before them. Rounding the dump, which seemed relatively stable, they came suddenly in sight of the Japanese, who, in air-suits and helmets, were now standing on the opposite brink of the apparently nearby water.

Whether or not Sakamoto and his fellows had seen the Americans was uncertain. They were staring in the direction of Morris and Markley, who did not wait for decisive proof that the enemy had perceived them, but drew their automatics and aimed quickly, each choosing one of the two nearest figures,

Somewhat to their surprise, in view of the various baffling and topsy-turvey phenomena they had encountered, the pressure of the triggers was followed

by a sharp double report. The Japanese, however, did not seem to realize that they were being fired at; and their apparent nearness and relative position were no doubt illusory.

Markley and Morris, recognizing the probability of this, did not shoot again, but sprang forward in an effort to approach the deceptive figures. The Japanese vanished; the whole valley seemed to swirl in a semi-circle and rearrange itself; and the two Americans found themselves at the foot of that barren slope from which, in their first remote view of the place, a second stream had appeared to descend and join the meandering creek.

From their new and close vantage, however, there was only one stream, which, flowing down the valley-bottom against the barring slope, ran turbulently uphill in a series of skyward-leaping rapids and cascades!

Too astonished even for profanity, they stared without comment at this unique reversal of what they were accustomed to regard as natural law. For a considerable distance on either side of the stream, the acclivity was hollowed and worn smooth as if by landslides or a process of slow attrition. Occasionally, as the men stood watching it, a pebble, a lump of conglomerate soil, or a few particles of grit were loosened from the ground, to roll heavenward rapidly and disappear beyond the ragged crest of the slide together with the cascading waters.

Drawn by thoughtless curiosity and wonder, Morris stepped toward the beginning of the slope, which was perhaps ten feet away. It was like stepping over a precipice. The ground seemed to tilt beneath him, and the slope fell like an overturning world, till it pitched downward at a steep angle with the sky at its bottom. Unable to arrest his strange fall, he slid sidelong into the rushing water, and was carried roughly and dizzily down the rapids and over the cascades. Half-dazed and breathless, he felt that he was shooting across the world's rim toward a nether gulf in which hung the fallen sun.

Markley, seeing his companion's weird fate, also started toward the acclivity, with some dim instinctive idea of rescuing Morris from the

inverted stream. A single step, and he too was seized by the skyward gravitation. Slipping, rolling and bumping as if in a steep chute, and unable to regain his foothold, he slid along the topsy-turvy slope, followed by a shower of detritus, but without falling into the water.

He and Morris, passing the rim of the slide as if hurled toward the reddish-brown sky that was now beneath them, each experienced another bewildering bouleversement. Morris found himself floundering in a sort of hilltop pool, where the final cascade foamed itself into quiescence; and Markley, stunned and sprawling but with unbroken bones, was lying on a pile of rubble such as would ordinarily gather at the bottom of an escarpment.

Morris scrambled from the pool, which was only waist-deep, and helped Markley to his feet. The local gravity was almost normal from a terrene viewpoint; and plainly all objects that were drawn skyward along the deficiently attractive area were promptly arrested when they reached the top. Headlong and turbulent, the cascade curved over the rim into the level pool.

The earth-men, finding themselves quite unhurt, proceeded to examine their air-suits and helmets for possible damage. Since the local atmosphere was untested, and might well possess deleterious properties, a rift in the leatheroid fabric would perhaps be a serious matter. The suits, however, were intact, and the tubes that supplied oxygen from flat tanks behind the shoulders were in perfect condition.

The height that they had climbed in a fashion so singular was really part of an uneven plateau that appeared to surround the whole valley. The plateau was divided by long hummocks of mottled soil and stone, which rose gradually into bleak uplands and low mountains at a seeming distance of several miles.

From their present vantage, the valley below was an immense sink. They saw the entire course of the tortuous stream, the areas of outré vegetation, and the gleaming of some metallic object which they assumed to be their

own rocket plant. The Japanese plane was not visible, and was perhaps hidden by one of the plots of forestation. Of course, remembering the optical distortion and displacement which they had encountered so often in their wanderings, they could not be sure of the actual distance, perspective and relationship of the various elements in this bizarre scenery.

Turning again from the valley, they considered the plateau itself. Here the stream, running in a normal and tranquil fashion, entered a ravine and disappeared. The whole landscape was intolerably drear and repellent, with the same chaotic mineral formation as the valley, but without even the anomalous plant-life to relieve its deadly desolation.

The lopsided sun, declining very swiftly, or else subject to the nearly universal optic transposition, had already fallen half-way from its zenith toward the horizon of amorphous mountains in what the men estimated to be less than an hour. The clouds had all melted away, but far off, above the valley, they could still discern the mysterious aerial blurred spot.

"I guess we'd better mosey back toward the boat," said Markley, after viewing the barren scene with obvious horror. "But we won't try to go the way we came. If we follow the rim of the valley, we ought to find a place where the gravitation won't drag us the wrong way.

Made doubly cautious by their disconcerting experiences, they started along the verge of the sink. For some distance, the ground was littered with detritus, and even with loose boulders that had rolled upward to be arrested at the top. When they came to the end of this rubble, they surmised that they were beyond the belt of reverse gravitation.

Following the rim toward a point where the slope became easier and more gradual, they came suddenly into a zone of heavier gravity than any they had yet entered. At one step their weight appeared to treble; a crushing burden descended upon them; and they could lift their feet only with immense effort.

Struggling against the uncanny pull of the strange earth, and on the verge of panic they heard an indescribable clattering and rustling behind them, and

turned their heads laboriously, in much startlement, to ascertain the cause.

Emerging as if from empty air, a concourse of unimaginably monstrous beings had gathered at their very heels on the bleak verge of the plateau. There were scores or hundreds of these entities, who, whether mere beasts or the analogues of humanity, were no less various and freakish in their conformation than the weird flora of the valley-bottom.

Obviously, there was no common norm or type of development as in the terrestrial species. Some of the entities were no less than twelve or thirteen feet tall; others were squat pygmies. Limbs, bodies, and senseorgans were equally diversified. One creature was like a prodigious moonfish mounted on stilts. Another was a legless, rolling globe fringed about the equator with prehensile ropes that served to haul it along by attaching themselves to projections. Still another resembled a wingless bird with a great falcon beak and a tapering serpentine body with lizard legs, that glided half-erect. Some of the creatures possessed double or triple bodies; some were hydra-headed, or equipped with an excessive number of limbs, eyes, mouths, ears and other anatomical features.

Truly these beings were the spawn of chance, the random creations of a lawless biologic force. A horde of fabulous, fantastic, nightmare improbabilities, they surged forward upon Morris and Markley, uttering a babel of wordless sounds, of cacklings, hisses, clucks, ululations, roarings and bellowings. Whether they were hostile or merely curious, the men could not decide. Both were petrified with a horror beyond the horror of evil dreams.

The leaden gravitational drag, rendering the least movement slow and toilsome, re-enforced their sensation of nightmare. Laboriously they drew their pistols, and half-lifting them at the oncoming rout, pulled die triggers. The reports were dull and muffled; the bullets flew with visible slowness, and rebounded harmlessly like tossed pebbles from the monsters that they struck.

Like a stampeding herd, the throng of biologic horrors was upon Morris and Markley. Battling against the gravity as well as against the loathsome bodies and members that engulfed them, they were borne irresistibly along by the seething mass. Their pistols were torn from their hands, they saw hideous faces and faceless things that milled about them like a torrent of the damned in some nether circle. Occasionally, in broken glimpses, they saw a disordered landscape of amorphous rocks, with pools and streams of fine sand, and sudden, fortuitous vegetation like mad mirages, through which they were being carried.

The origin of the monsters, their purpose, their destination, their intention in regard to the earth-men, were enigmatic as the riddles of delirium. Resistance was futile; and Morris and Markley gave themselves up to the rushing motion of the throng, in the hope that some opportunity of escape would ultimately offer itself.

They seemed to go on for hours. The gravitation still varied, but was often constant over large areas. The sun, instead of sinking further, rose again to the zenith. Sometimes there were brief intervals of darkness, as if the light had been shut off by some queer fluctuation of atmospheric properties. Puffs of wild wind arose and died. Rocks and whole hummocks seemed to crumble abruptly on the waste. But through all this chaos of conditions, the monstrous horde poured onward with its captives.

Apparently the earth-men had fallen in with a whole tribe of these anomalous creatures, who were perhaps migrating from one zone of their random world to another. At least, such was the explanation that suggested itself in lieu of positive knowledge.

Markley and Morris became aware that the ground was slanting downward. Over the heads of the monsters, they saw that they had entered a flat, sloping valley. Rough mountains, perhaps the same that they had beheld from the rim of the sink, appeared to loom at no great distance above them.

The low valley debouched in a sort of shallow, crater-like hollow. Here the horde suddenly arrested its onward rush and began to spread out in a

curious manner. Markley and Morris, now able to work their way forward, saw that the creatures had arranged themselves in a ring about the slopes of the circular hollow, leaving a dear space at its bottom.

In the center of the vacant space, a singular phenomenon was manifesting itself. A fountain of fine, hueless powder rose from the storne and soil, attaining a height of three feet. Slowly it widened and rose higher, preserving the form of a round column. Its top mushroomed into a vague cloud, spreading above the heads of the assembled throng and floating skyward. It was as if some process of molecular dissolution were taking place, to form this fountain.

Markley and Morris were fascinated by the spectacle. Before them, the silent, circular crumbling of the ground went on, the column swelled to Titanic proportions, towering above the crater. Seemingly, too, the monsters were fascinated, for none of them stirred to break the ring-like formation.

Then, gradually, as the column of atoms increased, the horde began to surge forward. The ring narrowed till its inmost ranks were driven, close-packed, into the fountain by the pressure from behind. Visibly, as die creatures entered it, their limbs and bodies melted like bursting puff-balls, to swell the columnar cloud of dissolution that mounted skyward.

"Are they all going to commit suicide and take us with them ?" Markley's voice was a horror-tautened whisper. He and Morris, caught in the forward ranks, were being forced slowly toward the fountain. Only two rows of the monsters now intervened; and even as Markley spoke, the bodies of the inmost row began to dissolve in the column.

The earth-men struggled desperately against the massed bodies that crowded from behind. But the living wall, close and implacable, as if bent on nothing but self-immolation, drove them downward inch by inch.

Overhead, the sun was blinded by the mushrooming column. The sky took on a madder-brown twilight. Then, with a suddenness as of some atmospheric legerdemain, the twilight blacked into Cimmerian darkness. A mad, elemental howling tore the air, a blind hurricane filled the crater,

blowing as if from above; and bolts of lightning leapt upward from the ground, enshrouding with blue and violet fire the horrible horde of biologic anomalies.

The pressure behind the earth-men relaxed. A panic seemed to have seized the monsters, who were now dispersing in the bolt-riven darkness. The earth-men, fighting their way upward, stumbled over the half-charred bodies of those who had been slain by the lightning. By intermittent flashes, they saw, looking back, that the column of atomic dissolution still poured from the crater's bottom, to merge with the seething storm that had risen as if at random from nowhere.

Miraculously untouched by the lightning, Morris and Markley found themselves in the flat valley through which they had entered the crater. Most of the monsters had now disappeared, melting away like the shadow of a nightmare; and the last flashes revealed little but vacant soil and rock.

The lightning ceased, leaving the men in darkness. An irresistible wind, like a torrent of rushing water, bore them along through the Stygian night, and they lost all trace of each other henceforth. Often hurled headlong, or lifted bodily from the ground at the mercy of lawless, anarchic elements, they were blown apart like lost leaves.

Abruptly as it had begun, the tumult fell in a great stillness. The darkness dissolved from the heavens. Morris, lying dazed and breathless, found himself alone amid barren reaches of rock and sand. He could trace nothing familiar in the landscape. The mountains were lost to view, and he saw no sign of the fountain of molecules. It was as if he had been transported to another tract of this fantastic realm of chance.

Halloing loudly, but answered only by sardonic echoes, he started off at random in an effort to find Markley. Once or twice, amid the shifting, illusive imageries through which he wandered, he thought that he saw the mountains that had loomed beyond the crater of dissolution.

The sun, changing its apparent position by leaps and bounds, was now close to the horizon, and its rays were indescribably dark and eerie. Morris,

plodding doggedly on amid the delusive advances and recessions of the dreary landscape, came without warning to a flat valley that was somehow familiar. Before him the lost mountains re-appeared as if by magic; and going on, he emerged in the crater-like hollow.

Many of the charred monsters, slain by the electric storm, were strewn about the slopes. But the fountain itself was no longer active. A round, funnel-like pit, twenty feet in diameter, yawned dark and silent at the bottom of the hollow.

Morris felt the descent of an overmastering despair. Lost as he was in this awful trans-dimensional limbo, and separated from his comrade, whose fate he could not imagine, the prospect was indeed drear and hopeless. His whole body ached with accumulated fatigue; his mouth and throat were afire with corrosive thirst. Though the oxygen still poured freely from his tank, he could not tell how much of the supply remained. A few hours, at most, and then his ordeals might end in asphyxiation. Momentarily crushed by the horror of it all, he sat down on the crater slope in the rusty-brown gloom.

Curiously, the twilight did not darken. As if in a reversed ediptic, the sun returned slowly into the heavens. But Morris, in his despair, hardly heeded this outré phenomenon.

Staring dully at the re-illuminated ground, he saw the appearance of several grotesque, anomalous shadows that fell past him on the slope. Startled from his lethargy, he sprang up. A dozen or more of the monstrous people had returned. Some of them were gnawing the cindery bodies of their late companions; but three, as if disdainful of such fare, were closing in upon Morris.

Even as he turned, they assailed him. One of them, a headless thing withropy arms and a puckered, mouth-like orifice in the center of its gourd-shaped body, tried to drag him down with its frightfully elongated members. Another, which might have been some heraldic griffin minus wings and feathers, began to peck at his air-suit with its tremendous horny beak. The

third, which was more like a horribly overgrown toad than anything else, hopped about him on the ground and mumbled his ankles with its toothless mouth.

Sick with nausea, Morris struggled against them. Time and again he kicked away the toad-like creature, which returned with noisome pertinacity. He could not loosen the ropy members of the headless horror, which had wrapped themselves about him in plastic folds. But his worst fear was that the griffin would tear open his leatheroid garments with its slicing beak. He hammered the huge bird-shaped body with his fists, driving it away repeatedly; but as if mad with rage or hunger, it re-as sailed him. His legs and body were sore in a dozen places from the blows of the cruel beak.

Beyond his attackers, he caught involuntary glimpses of the horrid feast that was being enjoyed by their fellows. It was like the feeding of harpies in some infernal circle; and Morris could surmise his own imminent fate all too dearly. He saw that several of the feeders, quitting their half-eaten provender, were turning in his direction as if to join the three assailants.

Instinctively, as he fought on, he heard the sound of a measured drumming from above. The sound drew nearer and ceased. In a turn of the eddying combat, he saw that two gigantic beings had arrived among the monsters, and were standing a little apart, as if watching the gruesome orgy with detached interest.

Even amid the frightful preoccupation of his struggles, he noticed a strange thing. The new arrivals, alone of all the life-forms that he and Markley had met in this erratic world, seemed to approximate a common type of physical development. Both of them stood erect, and their conformation was vaguely human in its outlines, except for the enormous wings, ribbed and leathery as those of ancient pterodactyls, which hung half-folded at their backs. Their coloration was a dark, bituminous brown, verging upon ebon blackness in the wings, and lightened somewhat in their heads and faces. They were massively built, with a stature of eleven or twelve feet, and aquiline, sloping hairless heads that denoted a large brain-capacity. No trace of ears could be detected; but two round, luminous, golden-yellow eyes were set far apart in

their faces above sphinx-like mouths and nostrils. Somehow they made Morris think of Satanic angels; but their aspect was not malign, and was wholly poised, aloof and dispassionate.

Such were the impressions he received, without conscious assortment or definition at the time. Without interlude, the atrocious battle with the three monsters continued. Presently, however, one of the gigantic winged beings came with prodigious strides toward the earth-man and his attackers, as if to watch the uneven combat. Morris felt the regard of the great yellow eyes, which, inscrutable themselves, appeared to search him through and read the inmost secrets of his mind.

The being stepped closer, lifted an enormous hand in a leisurely but imperious gesture. As if fearful or cognizant of a superior power, the loathsome assailants abandoned their efforts to drag Morris down, and slunk away to assuage their hunger on an un-preempted carrion that lay beside the pit in the crater's bottom.

A dreadful faintness surged upon the earth-man---a reaction from all the intolerable horrors and fatigues of the day. Amid the whirling darkness into which he slid, he saw the gleaming of two mesmeric golden eyes, and felt the firm grasp of giant hands that seemed to support and lift him.

An electric shock ran through him at their touch. Miraculously, his faintness cleared away, leaving him wonderfully alert. Strength seemed to flow into him from the mighty hands: magnetic strength, buoyant and preterhuman. The horror faded from his shaken nerves, he was no longer lost and bewildered, but was filled with a mystic confidence.

The experience that he now underwent was perhaps the strangest of all that befell him in the dimension of chance. Also, it was the hardest to remember or describe.

Beneath the thrilling touch of the winged being, whose hands held him firmly by the shoulders, he seemed almost to pass beyond his own consciousness. Thoughts that were not his own rose up and limned themselves with the clearness of actual visions or objective impressions. In

some ineffable way, he shared for a moment the thoughts and memories of the being who had rescued him from the monsters. Whether or not an intentional telepathy was being exerted, he never quite knew; but alien vistas, beheld through unfamiliar senses, appeared to open before him.

The two winged beings, he knew, were members of a race that was far from numerous. They were the rulers of this outlandish world, the self-made masters of its incalculable forces and disorganized elements. Their evolution had been supremely difficult and painful. Through their Own volition, they had risen from a state that was little higher than that of the unhappy monsters. They had developed faculties that enabled them to circumvent the lawlessness of their environment, to forecast its very randomness, and impose law and order on the ever-changing chaos. They had even learned to control their own environment.

The nightmare hollow in which Morris stood had temporarily vanished. There came to him the sense of tremendous flight above strange horizons. He seemed to pass on lofty wings over wastes of chaotically piled and tumbled rocks with the being whom he knew as one of the Masters of Chance. Amid the shifting mirages of desolation, through distorting zones of air, above realms that pitched obliquely for immeasurable leagues, like the flattened side of some malformed planet, he flew unerringly to his destination.

Beyond the chaos, on tiered mountains that rose stupendously, he beheld the high and many-terraced citadels of the Masters. As if he had trodden their battlements, he knew the white walls of a majestically ordered architecture that defied the erratic formlessness of the world beneath, and imposed their harmonic sternness on the tumbled waste. He knew the terraces, lined with geometric rows of trees and flowers, in which, by some miracle of horticultural mastery, the random flora had been subdued and had taken on the characters of type and species.

Dimly, to the limit of his human thought-capacity, he understood something of the Masters. Their powers were those of dynamic will, of magnetism and sense-development; and they did not depend entirely on mere physical

science or machinery. In former ages, they had been more numerous, had ruled a larger area of that unstable, incalculably treacherous world. It seemed that the apex of their evolution had passed; though still powerful, they were menaced more and more by the beleaguering forces of cosmic anarchy.

Such were the things that Morris learned in that moment of communion with his rescuer. Returning to his own proper consciousness, he felt also that the telepathic interchange had been mutual: the being had read his own history, his predicament of hopeless alienation in a strange world; and in some inscrutably benign way, was minded to help him.

He left no surprise, whatever, at the more than outré happenings that ensued. Somehow, as if he shared the ability of his protector to read the future, all that occurred was familiar as a twice-told tale. In this bizarre but fore-known drama, the winged being lifted him gently but firmly, making a cradle of its vast arms, and spreading its ebon wings, mounted swiftly toward the misshapen sun. Its companion followed; and Morris knew, as they flew steadily above the changing zones of gravitation, above the dreary jumble of wandering mirages, that they were seeking for Markley.

In a dim, partial way, he seemed to share the clairvoyance of the Masters, which enabled them to distinguish the real from the illusory amid the disordered refraction of their atmosphere. He, too, was gifted with a televisual faculty by which he could scan the remote or hidden portions of the waste.

Sure and undeviating, the mighty leathern wings beat onward toward their goal. Amid the kaleidoscopes of desolation, there appeared the rough rim of the valley in which Morris and Markley had left their rocket plane.

Swifter grew the beating of the wings, louder was their drumming, as if haste were needed. A strange anxiety mounted in Morris, lest they should be too late.

Now they hovered above the valley, slanting groundward. The place had changed, in some fashion that Morris could not define to himself for a

moment. Then he realized that certain of the ringing bluffs and slopes had crumbled away, were still crumbling, to form a moving sea of hueless sand. In places, columns of atomic powder mounted like geysers; some of the areas of forestation had fallen into shapeless heaps of dust, like disintegrated fungi. These sudden, erratic, localized decompositions of matter were common phenomena of the world of chance; and it came to Morris, as part of his mystic knowledge, that the order which the Masters had wrested from chaos was not wholly secure against their inroads.

Anxiously, with a breathless fear, he scanned the area into which the mighty being who carried him was descending on sloped wings. Markley was somewhere in that area, to which he had wandered back in a blind, bewildered search for his lost companion; and danger—a double danger—threatened him now.

As if with the keen, straight-seeing eyes of the Master, Morris discerned a rocket plane on the valley floor, and knew it to be the one that the Japanese had used. Seemingly it was deserted, and the moving tide of sand from the crumbling cliffs engulfed it even as he watched.

In the middle of the valley, he descried the glittering of another plane — the one that belonged to Markley. Four tiny figures were milling to and fro beside it, as if in wild combat. Upon them, unheeded, the deluge of dissolution was advancing swiftly. The sands rolled in crested billows. The trees swelled and soared to monstrous arboreal phantoms, and dissolved in pulverous clouds. Pillars of freed molecules built themselves up from the valley-bottom, and were shaped into ominous, floating domes that obscured the sun.

It was a scene of elemental terror and silent tumult. Across it, sloping and dipping, the wings of the Masters drummed, till they hovered above the knot of struggling figures.

Three men in helmets and air-suits were attacking a fourth, who was similarly attired. The weakness of the local gravity, however, made the

combat less unequal than it might have seemed. Also, it served to lighten the blows which the contestants succeeded in delivering.

Markley, in great, twenty-foot leaps, was eluding the Japanese much of the time; but plainly he was tiring; and the three would corner him soon. Several automatic pistols, discarded as if empty or useless, were lying on the ground; but one of the Japanese had drawn an ugly, curved knife, and was watching his chance for a thrust at the darting figure of Markley.

In their desperate struggle, none of the four had perceived the arrival of the Masters. It was Markley who saw them first. As if stupefied, he paused in one of his rushes, and stared at Morris and the winged beings.

Two of the Japanese turned and also beheld the hovering figures. They stood as if petrified with astonishment or terror. But the third, intent on delivering a thrust with his wicked knife, had not seen them; and he flew in a long, aerial leap at Markley.

The second Master, hanging in air beside Morris' projector, raised his right hand and pointed at the flying Japanese. For an instant, his fingers seemed to clutch and hurl a great javelin of living fire. The javelin leapt and faded—and the Japanese, a shapeless pile of fuming cinders, lay at Markley's feet.

The other two, shielding their goggled eyes with their hands, as if the terrible lance of light had blinded them, rushed toward the oncoming storm of atomic disintegration. Before them, on the valley floor, a sudden pillar of dust ascended, swelling awfully as it ate the conglomerate soil. It seemed to topple upon them—and they were gone.

Morris, watching in a wordless awe, felt that the lifting arms had been withdrawn—that his feet had been set on the ground. Close above him, the two Masters towered, with spread wings. As if an urgent voice had spoken aloud, he knew the things that must be done without delay. 'Come—we can start the plane!' he cried to Markley. 'We've got to move in a hurry.'

Markley, who had been staring at the Masters, appeared to emerge from a sort of trance.

"All right, if you say so—and if the fuel will explode," he agreed. "But before we go, I'd like to thank your winged friend for browning Sakamoto. I don't know how it was done; but he sure has a wicked jolt. That Jap would have laid me open like a gutted fish, in another split-second."

A sudden, howling wind blew down the valley, spreading the dust-billows like a blown spray, and lifting the atomic columns into a roof of doom. Swiftly the storm of dissolution gathered, rushing toward the plane.

Markley, following by Morris, sprang for the open manhole. While Morris swung the heavy lid into place, his companion leapt to the control-board. As if by some miracle of chance, or some change in the unknown, interfering force, his pressure of the starting-lever was answered by the loud roar of discharging rockets. The plane lifted, acquiring momentum, till it soared above the seething valley.

Looking back through one of the ports, Morris perceived the two flying colossi, who hung aloof in the heavens, as if watching the departure of the plane. Serene, impassive, on poised wings, they floated beyond the atomic storm, which had already begun to subside.

He turned away with a strange awe, a reverential gratitude. Beneath Markley's skilful guidance, the plane was heading straight for the formless atmospheric blur that still blotted the reddish-brown sky.

Again Morris looked back. High, far, and tiny, between the malformed sun and the chaotically strewn and riven world, the mysterious beings whom he knew as the Masters of Chance flew steadily on level wings toward their remote city. It was his last sight of them; and already the mystic knowledge that had been imparted to him was fading a little in his brain.

The telepathic vision of the citadels that imposed their severe architectural ordination on a mad terrain; the supernal, hard-won power of the Masters, battling perpetually against lawless elements and the treacherous,

intractable forces of a cosmic Pandemonium—all had become slightly unreal, like a dreamland from which the dreamer is departing.

Now the blind aerial blur had enveloped the vessel. Greyness, clinging and all-pervasive, filled it like an atmosphere of cotton-wool. Sight sound—even feeling and thought—were lost as if in some hinterland of oblivion.

Out of the blur, as if from a formless, hueless dream of death between two lives, the plane and its occupants floated into the dark azure of the terrene stratosphere. Sight, consciousness, feeling, memory, returned in a sudden flood to Morris and Markley. Below them again, they saw in mottled relief the familiar reaches of Nevada, edged with white and saw-like mountains.

THE DISINTERMENT OF VENUS

Prior to certain highly deplorable and scandalous events in the year 1550, the vegetable garden of Perigon was situated on the southeast side of the abbey. After these events, it was removed to the northwest side, where it has remained ever since; and the former garden-site was given to weeds and briars which, by strict order of the successive abbots, no one has ever tried to eradicate or curb.

The happenings which compelled this removal of the Benedictine's turnip and carrot patches became a popular tale in Averoigne. It is hard to say how much or how little of the legend is apocryphal.

One April morning, three monks were spading lustily in the garden. Their names were Paul, Pierre and Hughes. The first was a man of ripe years, hale and robust; the second was in his early prime; the third was little more than a boy, and had but recently taken his final vows.

Being moved with an especial ardour, in which the vernal stirring of youthful sap may have played its part, Hughes proceeded to dig the loamy soil even more diligently than his comrades. The ground was almost free of stones, owing to the careful tillage of many generations of monks; but anon, through the muscular zeal with which it was wielded, the spade of Hughes encountered a hard and well-buried object of indeterminate size.

Hughes felt that this obstruction, which in all likelihood was a small boulder, should be removed for the honour of the monastery and the glory of God. Bending busily, he shovelled away the moist, blackish loam in an effort to uncover it. The task was more arduous than he had expected; and the supposed boulder began to reveal an amazing length and a quite singular formation as he bared it by degrees. Leaving their own toil, Pierre and Paul came to his assistance. Soon, through the zealous endeavours of the three, the nature of the buried object became all too manifest.

In the large pit they had now dug, the monks beheld the grimy head and torso of what was plainly a marble woman or goddess from antique years. The pale stone of shoulders and arms, tinged faintly as if with a living rose, had been scraped clean in places by their shovels; but the face and breasts were still black with heavily caked loam.

The figure stood erect, as if on a hidden pedestal. One arm was raised, caressing with a shapely hand the ripe contour of shoulder and bosom; the other, hanging idly, was still plunged in the earth. Digging deeper, the monks uncovered the full hips and rounded thighs; and finally, taking turns in the pit, whose rim was now higher than their heads, they came to the sunken pedestal, which stood on a pavement of granite.

During the course of their excavations, the Brothers had felt a strange, powerful excitement whose cause they could hardly have explained, but which seemed to arise, like some obscure contagion, from the long-buried arms and bosom of the image. Mingled with a pious horror due to the infamous pagantry and nudity of the statue, there was an unacknowledged pleasure which the three would have rebuked in themselves as vile and shameful if they had recognized it.

Fearful of chipping or scratching the marble, they wielded their spades with much chariness; and when the digging was completed and the comely feet were uncovered on their pedestal, Paul, the oldest, standing beside the image in the pit, began to wipe away with a handful of weeds and grass the maculations of dark loam that still clung to its lovely body. This task he performed with great thoroughness; and he ended by polishing the marble with the hem and sleeves of his black robe.

He and his fellows, who were not without classic learning, now saw that the figure was evidently a statue of Venus, dating no doubt from the Roman occupation of Averroigne, when certain altars to this divinity had been established by the invaders.

The vicissitudes of half-legendary time, the long dark years of inhumation, had harmed the Venus little if at all. The slight mutilation of an ear-tip half

hidden by rippling curls, and the partial fracture of a shapely middle toe, merely served to add, if possible, a keener seduction to her languorous beauty.

She was exquisite as the succubi of youthful dreams, but her perfection was touched with inenarrable evil. The lines of the mature figure were fraught with a maddening luxuriousness; the lips of the full, Circean face were half pouting, half smiling with ambiguous allure. It was the masterpiece of an unknown, decadent sculptor; not the noble, maternal Venus of heroic times, but the sly and cruelly voluptuous Cytherean of dark orgies, ready for her descent into the Hollow Hill.

A forbidden enchantment, an unhallowed thralldom, seemed to flow from the flesh-pale marble and to weave itself like invisible hair about the hearts of the Brothers. With a sudden, mutual feeling of shame, they recalled their monkhood, and began to debate what should be done with the Venus, which, in a monastery garden, was somewhat misplaced. After brief discussion, Hughes went to report their find to the abbot and await his decision regarding its disposal. In the meanwhile, Paul and Pierre resumed their garden labours, stealing perhaps, occasional covert glances at the pagan goddess.

Augustin the abbot came presently into the garden, accompanied by those monks who were not, at that hour, engaged in some special task. With a severe mien, in silence, he proceeded to inspect the statue; and those with him waited reverently, not venturing to speak before their abbot had spoken.

Even the saintly Augustin, however, in spite of his age and rigorous temper, was somewhat discomfited by the peculiar witchery which seemed to emanate from the marble. Of this he gave no sign, and the natural austerity of his demeanour deepened. Curtly he ordered the bringing of ropes, and directed the raising of the Venus from her loamy bed to a standing position on the garden ground beside the hole. In this task, Paul, Pierre and Hughes were assisted by two others.

Many of the monks now pressed forward to examine the figure closely; and several were even prompted to touch it, till rebuked for this unseemly action by their superior. Certain of the elder and more austere Benedictines urged its immediate destruction, arguing that the image was a heathen abomination that defiled the abbey garden by its presence. Others, the most practical, pointed out that the Venus, being a rare and beautiful example of Roman sculpture, might well be sold at a goodly price to some rich and impious art-lover.

Augustin, though he felt that the Venus should be destroyed as an impure pagan idol, was filled with a queer and peculiar hesitation which led him to defer the necessary orders for her demolition. It was as if the subtly wanton loveliness of the marble were pleading for clemency like a living form, with a voice half human, half divine. Averting his eyes from the white bosom, he spoke harshly, bidding the Brothers to return to their labours and devotions, and saying that the Venus could remain in the garden till arrangements were made for her ultimate disposition and removal. Pending this, he instructed one of the Brothers to bring sackcloth and drape therewith the unseemly nudity of the goddess.

The disinterment of this antique image became a source of much discussion and some perturbation and dissension amid the quiet Brotherhood at Perigon. Because of the curiosity shown by many monks, the abbot issued an injunction that no one should approach the statue, other than those whose labours might compel an involuntary proximity. He himself, at that time, was criticized by some of the deans for his laxness in not destroying the Venus immediately. During the few years that remained to him, he was to regret bitterly the remissness he had shown in this matter.

No one, however, dreamt of the grave scandals that were to ensue shortly. But, on the day following the discovery of the statue, it became manifest that some evil and disturbing influence was abroad. Heretofore, breaches of discipline had been rare among the Brothers; and cardinal offences were quite unknown; but now it seemed that a spirit of unruliness, impiety, ribaldry and wrongdoing had entered Perigon.

Paul, Pierre and Hughes were the first to undergo penance for their peccancies. A shocked dean had overheard them discussing with impure levity, certain matters that were more suitable for the conversation of worldly gallants than of monks. By way of extenuation, the three Brothers pleaded that they had been obsessed with carnal thoughts, and images ever since their exhumation of the Venus; and for this they blamed the statue, saying that a pagan witchcraft had come upon them from its flesh-white marble.

On that same day, others of the monks were charged with similar offences; and still others made confession of lubric desires and visions such as had tormented Anthony during his desert vigil. Those, too, were prone to blame the Venus. Before evensong, many infractions of monastic rule were reported; and some of them were of such nature as to call for the severest rebuke and penance. Brothers whose conduct had heretofore been exemplary in all ways were found guilty of transgressions such as could be accounted for only by the direct influence of Satan or some powerful demon.

Worst of all, on that very night, it was found that Hughes and Paul were absent from their beds in the dormitory; and no one could say whither they had gone. They did not return on the day following, Inquiries were made by the abbot's order in the neighboring village of Sainte Zenobie, and it was learned that Paul and Hughes had spent the night at a tavern of unsavoury repute, drinking and wenching; and they had taken the road to Vyones, chief city of the province, at early dawn. Later, they were apprehended and brought back to the monastery, protesting that their downfall was wholly due to some evil contagion which they had incurred by touching the statue.

In view of the unexampled demoralization which prevailed at Perigon, no one doubted that a diabolic pagan charm was at work The source of the charm was all too obvious, Moreover, queer tales were told by monks who had laboured in the garden or had passed within sight of the image. They swore that the Venus was no mere sculptured idol but a living woman or she-devil who had changed her position repeatedly and had re-arranged the folds of the sackcloth in such manner as to lay bare one shapely shoulder

and a part of her bosom. Others avowed that the Venus walked in the garden by night; and some even affirmed that she had entered the monastery and appeared before them like a succubus.

Much fright and horror was created by these tales, and no one dared to approach the image closely. Though the situation was supremely scandalous, the abbot still forbore to issue orders for the statue's demolition, fearing that any monk who touched it, even with a motive so pious, would court the baleful sorcery that had brought Hughes and Paul to disaster and disgrace, and had led others into impurity of speech or actual impiety.

It was suggested, however, that some layman should be hired to shatter the idol and remove and bury its fragments. This, no doubt would have been accomplished in good time, if it had not been for the hasty and fanatic zeal of Brother Louis.

This Brother, a youth of good family, was conspicuous among the Benedictines both for his comely face and his austere piety. Handsome as Adonis, he was given to ascetic vigils and prolonged devotions, outdoing in this regard the abbot and the deans.

At the hour of the statue's disinterment, he was busily engaged in copying a Latin testament; and neither then nor at any later time had he cared to inspect a find which he considered more than dubious. He had expressed disapprobation on hearing from his fellows the details of the discovery; and feeling that the abbey garden was polluted by the presence of an obscene image, he had purposely avoided all windows through which the marble might have been visible to his chaste eyes.

When the influence of heathen evil and corruption became manifest amid the Brothers, he had shown great indignation deeming it a most insufferable thing that virtuous, God-fearing monks should be brought to shame through the operation of some hellish pagan spell. He had reprobated openly the hesitation of Augustin and his delay in destroying the maleficent idol. More mischief, he said, would ensue if it were left intact.

In view of all this, extreme surprise and alarm were felt at Perigon when, on the fourth day after the exhumation of the statue, Brother Louis was discovered missing. His bed had not been occupied on the previous night; but it seemed impossible that he could have fled the monastery, yielding to such desires and impulsions, as had caused the ruin of Paul and Hughes.

The monks were strictly interrogated by their abbot, and it was revealed that Brother Louis, when last seen, had been loitering about the abbey workshop. Since, formerly, he had shown small interest in tools or manual labour, this was deemed a peculiar thing. Forthwith a visit was made to the workshop; and the monk in charge of the smithy soon found that one of his heaviest hammers had been removed.

The conclusion was obvious to all: Louis, impelled by virtuous ardour and holy wrath, had gone forth during the night to demolish the baleful image of Venus.

Augustin and the Brothers who were with him repaired immediately to the garden. There they were met by the gardeners who, noticing from afar that the image no longer occupied its position beside the pit, were hurrying to report this matter to the abbot. They had not dared to investigate the mystery of its disappearance, believing firmly that the statue had come to life and was lurking somewhere about the garden.

Made bold by their number and by the leadership of Augustin, the assembled monks approached the pit. Beside its rim they beheld the missing hammer, lying on the clodded loam as if Louis had cast it aside. Near by was the sacking that had clothed the image; but there were no fragments of broken marble such as they had thought to see. The footprints of Louis were clearly imprinted upon the pit's margin, and were discernible in strangely close proximity to the mark left by the pedestal of the statue.

All this was very peculiar, and the monks felt that the mystery had begun to assume a more than sinister tinge. Then, peering into the hole itself, they beheld a thing that was explicable only through the machinations of Satan — or one of Satan's most pernicious and seductive she-demons.

Somehow, the Venus had been overturned and had fallen back into the broad deep pit. The body of Brother Louis, with a shattered skull and lips bruised to a sanguine pulp, was lying crushed beneath her marble breasts. His arms were clasped about her in a desperate, loverlike embrace, to which death had now added its own rigidity. Even more horrible and inexplicable, however, was the fact that the stone arms of the Venus had changed their posture and were now folded closely about the dead monk as if she had been sculptured in the attitude of an amorous enlacement!

The horror and consternation felt by the Benedictines were inexpressible. Some would have fled from the spot in panic, after viewing this frightful and most abominable prodigy; but Augustin restrained them, his features stern with the religious ire of one who beholds the fresh handiwork of the Adversary. He commanded the bringing of a cross, an aspergillus and holy water, together with a ladder for use in descending into the pit; saying that the body of Louis must be redeemed from the baleful and dolorous plight into which it had fallen. The iron hammer, lying beside the hole, was proof of the righteous intention with which Louis had gone forth; but it was all too plain that he had succumbed to the hellish charms of the statue. Nevertheless, the Church could not abandon its erring servant to the powers of evil.

When the ladder was brought, Augustin himself led the descent, followed by three of the stoutest and most courageous Brothers, who were willing to risk their own spiritual safety for the redemption of Louis. Regarding that which ensued, the legends vary slightly. Some say that the aspersions of holy water, made by Augustin on the statue and its victim, were without palpable effect; while others relate that the drops turned to infernal steam when they struck the recumbent Venus, and blackened the flesh of Louis like that of a month-old cadaver, thus proving him wholly claimed by perdition. But the tales agree in this, that the strength of the three stout Brothers, labouring in unison at their abbot's direction, was impotent to loosen the marble clasp of the goddess from about her prey.

So, by the order of Augustin, the pit was filled hastily to its rim with earth and stones; and the very spot where it had been, being left without mound

or other mark, was quickly overgrown by grass and weeds along with the rest of the abandoned garden.

THE DOOR TO SATURN

When morghi, the high priest of the goddess Yhoundeh, together with twelve of his most ferocious and efficient underlings, came at morning twilight to seek the infamous heretic, Eibon, in his house of black gneiss on a headland above the northern main, they were surprised as well as disappointed to find him absent.

Their surprise was due to the fact that they had every intention of taking him unawares; for all their plots against Eibon had been carried on with meticulous privacy in underground vaults with sound-proof bolted doors; and they themselves had made the long journey to his house in a single night, immediately following the hour of his condemnation. They were disappointed because the formidable writ of arrest, with symbolic flame-etched runes on a scroll of human skin, was now useless and because there seemed to be no early prospect of trying out the ingenious agonies, the intricately harrowing ordeals which they had devised for Eibon with such care.

Morghi was especially disappointed; and the malisons which he muttered when the emptiness of the topmost room had revealed itself, were of truly cabalistic length and fearfulness. Eibon was his chief rival in wizardry, and was acquiring altogether too much fame and prestige among the peoples of Mhu Thulan, that ultimate peninsula of the Hyperborean continent. So Morghi had been glad to believe certain malignant rumors concerning Eibon and to utilize them in the charges he had preferred.

These rumors were, that Eibon was a devotee of the long discredited heathen god, Zhothaquah, whose worship was incalculably older than man; and that Eibon's magic was drawn from his unlawful affiliation with this dark deity, who had come down by way of other worlds from a foreign universe, in primeval times when the earth was still no more than a steaming morass. The power of Zhothaquah was still feared; and it was said that those who were willing to forego their humanity by serving him

would become the heritors of antemundane secrets, and the masters of a knowledge so awful that it could only have been brought from outlying planets coeval with night and chaos.

The house of Eibon was built in the form of a pentagonal tower and possessed five stories, including the two that were underground. All, of course, had been searched with painstaking thoroughness; and the three servants of Eibon had been tortured with a slow drip of boiling-hot asphaltum to make them reveal their master's whereabouts. Their continued denial of all knowledge, after a half hour of this, was taken as proof that they were genuinely ignorant.

No sign of a subterranean passage was unearthed by delving in the walls and floor of the lower rooms; though Morghi had even gone so far as to remove the flagstones beneath an obscene image of Zhothaquah which occupied the nethermost. This he had done with extreme reluctance, for the squat, fur-covered god with his bat-like features and sloth-like body, was fearsomely abhorrent to the high priest of the elk-goddess, Yhoundedh.

Returning in renewed search to the highest room of Eibon's tower, the inquisitors were compelled to own themselves baffled. There was nothing to be found but a few articles of furniture, some antique volumes on conjuration such as might be owned by any sorcerer, some disagreeable and gruesome paintings on rolls of pterodactyl parchment, and certain primitive urns and sculptures and totem-poles of the sort that Eibon had been so fond of collecting. Zhothaquah, in one form or another, was represented in most of these: his face even leered with a bestial somnolence from the urn-handles; and he was to be found in half the totems (which were those of sub-human tribes) along with the seal, the mammoth, the giant tiger, and the aurochs. Morghi felt that the charges against Eibon were now substantiated beyond all remaining doubt, for surely no one who was not a worshipper of Zhothaquah would care to own even a single representation of this loathsome entity.

However, such additional evidence of guilt, no matter how significant or damnatory, was of small help in finding Eibon. Staring from the windows

of the topmost chamber, where the walls fell sheer to the cliff and the cliff dropped clear on two sides to a raging sea four hundred feet below, Morghi was driven to credit his rival with superior resources of magic. Otherwise, the man's disappearance was altogether too much of a mystery. And Morghi had no love for mysteries, unless they were part of his own stock-in-trade.

He turned from the window and re-examined the room with minutely careful attention. Eibon had manifestly used it as a sort of study: there was a writing-table of ivory, with reed-pens, and various colored inks in little earthen pots; and there were sheets of paper made from a kind of calamite, all scribbled over with odd astronomical and astrological calculations that caused Morghi to frown because he could not understand them.

On each of the five walls there hung one of the parchment paintings, all of which seemed to be the work of some aboriginal race. Their themes were blasphemous and repellent; and Zhothaquah figured in all of them, amid forms and landscapes whose abnormality and sheer uncouthness may have been due to the half-developed technique of the primitive artists. Morghi now tore them from the walls one by one, as if he suspected that Eibon might in some manner be concealed behind them.

The walls were now entirely bare; and Morghi considered them for a long time, amid the respectful silence of his underlings. A queer panel, high up in the southeastern side above the writing-table, had been revealed by the removal of one of the paintings. Morghi's heavy brows met in a long black bar as he eyed this panel. It was conspicuously different from the rest of the wall, being an oval-shaped inlay of some reddish metal that was neither gold nor copper — a metal that displayed an obscure and fleeting fluorescence of rare colors when one peered at it through half-shut eyelids. But somehow it was impossible, with open eyes, even to remember the colors of this fluorescence. Morghi — who, perhaps, was cleverer and more perspicacious than Eibon had given him credit for being — conceived a suspicion that was apparently baseless and absurd, since the wall containing the panel was the outer wall of the building, and could give only on the sky and sea.

He climbed upon the writing-table and struck the panel with his fist. The sensations which he felt, and the result of the blow, were alike astounding. A sense of icy cold so extreme that it was hardly distinguishable from extreme heat, ran along his hand and arm through his whole body as he smote the unknown reddish metal. And the panel itself swung easily outward, as if on unseen hinges, with a high sonorous clang that seemed to fall from an incomputable distance. Beyond it, Morghi saw that there was neither sky nor sea nor, in fact, anything he had ever seen or heard of, or even dreamed of in his most outrageous nightmares...

He turned to his companions. The look on his face was half amazement, half triumph.

"Wait here till I return," he commanded, and leaped headlong through the open panel.

The charges that had been brought against Eibon were indeed true. The sagacious wizard, in his lifelong study of laws and agencies, both natural and supernatural, had taken account of the myths that were prevalent in Mhu Thulan regarding Zhothaquah, and had thought it conceivably worth while to make a personal investigation of this obscure pre-human entity.

He had cultivated the acquaintance of Zhothaquah, who, in the desuetude of his worship, was now driven to lead an existence wholly subterranean; he had offered the prescribed prayers, had made the sacrifices that were most acceptable; and the strange, sleepy little god, in return for Eibon's interest and his devotion, had confided to him certain information that was more than useful in the practise of the black arts. Also he had presented Eibon with some autobiographical data that confirmed the popular legends in more explicit detail. For reasons which he did not specify, he had come to Earth in former aeons from the planet Cykranosh (the name by which Saturn was called in Mhu Thulan); and Cykranosh itself had been merely a waystation in his travels from remoter worlds and systems.

As a special reward, after years of service and burnt offerings, he presented to Eibon a large thin oval plate of some ultra-telluric metal, instructing him

to have it fitted as a hinged panel in an upper room of his house. The panel, if swung outward from the wall on open air, would have the peculiar property of giving admittance to the world Cykranosh, many million miles away in space.

According to the vague and somewhat unsatisfactory explanation vouchsafed by the god, this panel, being partly wrought from a kind of matter which belonged to another universe than man's, possessed uncommon radiative properties that served to ally it with some higher dimension of space, through which the distance to astronomically remote spheres was a mere step.

Zhothaquah, however, warned Eibon not to make use of the panel unless in time of extreme need, as a means of escape from otherwise inevitable danger; for it would be difficult if not impossible to return to Earth from Cykranosh — a world where Eibon might find it anything but easy to acclimate himself, since the conditions of life were very different from those in Mhu Thulan, even though they did not involve so total an inversion of all terrene standards and norms as that which prevailed in the more outlying planets.

Some of Zhothaquah's relatives were still resident in Cykranosh and were worshipped by its peoples; and Zhothaquah told Eibon the almost unpronounceable name of the most powerful of these deities, saying that it would be useful to him as a sort of password if he should ever need to visit Cykranosh.

The idea of a panel that would open on some remote world impressed Eibon as being rather fantastic, not to say far-fetched; but he had found Zhothaquah to be in all ways and at all times a most veracious deity. However, he made no trial of the panel's unique virtues, till Zhothaquah (who maintained a close surveillance of all underground doings) had warned him of the machinations of Morgghi and the processes of ecclesiastic law that were being instituted in the vaults below the temple of Yhoundeh.

Knowing as he did the power of these jealous bigots, Eibon decided that it would be injudicious to the point of folly if he were to let himself fall into their hands. Bidding a short and grateful farewell to Zhothaquah, and collecting a small parcel of bread and meat and wine, he retired to his study and climbed upon the writing-table. Then, putting aside the crude picture of a scene in Cykranosh with which Zhothaquah had inspired some primeval half-human artist, he pushed open the panel it had served to conceal.

Eibon saw that Zhothaquah was indeed a god of his word: for the scene beyond the panel was nothing that could ever find a legitimate place in the topography of Mhu Thulan or of any terrestrial region. It did not altogether appeal to him; but there was no alternative, save the inquisitorial cells of the goddess Yhoundeh. Envisaging in thought the various refinements and complications of torture which Morghi would have now prepared, he sprang through the opening into Cykranosh with an agility that was quite juvenile for a wizard of mature years.

It was only a step; but turning he saw that all trace of the panel or of his dwelling had now disappeared. He was standing on a long declivity of ashen soil, down which a sluggish stream that was not water, but some liquescent metal resembling mercury, ran from tremendous unscalable shoulders and horns of the mountain heights above, to debouch in a hill-surrounded lake of the same liquid.

The slope beneath him was lined with rows of peculiar objects; and he could not make up his mind whether they were trees, mineral forms, or animal organisms, since they appeared to combine certain characteristics of all these. This preternatural landscape was appallingly distinct in every detail, under a greenish-black sky that was overarched from end to end with a triple cyclopean ring of dazzling luminosity. The air was cold, and Eibon did not care for its sulphurescent odor or the odd puckery sensation it left in his nostrils and lungs. And when he took a few steps on the unattractive-looking soil, he found that it had the disconcerting friability of ashes that have dried once more after being wetted with rain.

He started down the slope, half-fearing that some of the equivocal objects around him would reach out their mineral boughs or arms to arrest his progress. They seemed to be a kind of bluish-purple obsidian cacti, with limbs that ended in formidable talon-like spines, and heads that were altogether too elaborate for either fruits or blossoms. They did not move as he passed among them; but he heard a faint and singular tinkling with many modulations of tone, that preceded and followed him along the slope. Eibon conceived the uncomfortable notion that they were holding converse with each other; and were perhaps debating what should be done with him or about him.

However, he reached without mishap or hindrance the end of the declivity, where terraces and ledges of decomposing trap, like a mighty stairway of elder aeons, had rimmed the sunken lake of liquescent metal. Wondering as to the way he should now take, Eibon stood irresolute on one of the ledges.

His train of conjecture was broken by a shadow that fell suddenly athwart him and lay like a monstrous blot on the crumbling stone at his feet. He was not prepossessed by the shadow: it was outrageously defiant of all known esthetic standards; and its malformation and distortion were no less than extravagant.

He turned to see what manner of creature had flung the shadow. This being, he perceived, was not easy to classify, with its ludicrously short legs, its exceedingly elongated arms, and its round, sleepy-looking head that was pendulous from a spherical body, as if it were turning a somnambulistic somersault. But after he had studied it a while and had noted its furriness and somnolent expression, he began to see a vague though inverted likeness to the god Zhothaquah. And remembering how Zhothaquah had said the form assumed by himself on Earth was not altogether that which he had worn in Cykranosh, Eibon now wondered if this entity was one of Zhothaquah's relatives.

He was trying to recall the almost inarticulate name that had been confided to him by the god as a sort of password, when the owner of that unusual shadow, without seeming to note Eibon's presence, began a descent of the

terraces and ledges toward the lake. Its locomotion was mainly on its hands, for the absurd legs were not half long enough for the steps it had to take.

Arriving at the lake-edge, the creature drank of the liquid metal in a hearty and copious manner that served to convince Eibom of its godship; for surely no being of an inferior biologic order would quench its thirst with a beverage so extraordinary. Then, re-ascending to the ledge where Eibon stood, it paused and appeared to notice him for the first time.

Eibon had finally remembered the outlandish name for which he was groping.

"Hziulquoigmnzah," he sought to articulate. Doubtless the result was not wholly conformable to Cykranoshian rules; but Eibon did the best he could with the vocal organs at his command. His auditor seemed to recognize the word, for it peered at Eibon a little less sleepily than before, with its inversely situated eyes; and even deigned to utter something which sounded like an attempt to correct his pronunciation. Eibon wondered how he was ever to learn such a language; or, having learned it, how he was ever to pronounce it. However, it heartened him a little to find that he was understood at all.

"Zhothaqquah," he said, repeating the name three times in his most orotund incantatory manner.

The topsy-turvy being opened its eyes a trifle more, and again admonished him, uttering the word Zhothaqquah with an indescribable abbreviation of vowels and thickening of consonants. Then it stood regarding him for a while as if in doubt or cogitation. Finally it raised one of its ell-long arms from the ground and pointed along the shore, where the mouth of a low valley was discernible among the hills. It said distinctly the enigmatic words: "Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh," and then, while the sorcerer was pondering the significance of this unusual locution, it turned away from him and started to re-ascend the higher steps, toward a rather spacious cavern with columned opening, that he had not heretofore perceived. It had hardly

passed from sight into the cavern, when Eibon was greeted by the high priest, Morghi, who had readily followed him by his tracks in the ashen soil.

"Detestable sorcerer! Abominable heretic! I arrest you!" said Morghi with pontifical severity.

Eibon was surprised, not to say startled; but it reassured him to see that Morghi was alone. He drew the sword of highly tempered bronze which he carried, and smiled.

"I should advise you to moderate your language, Morghi," he admonished. "Also, your idea of arresting me is slightly out of place now, since we are alone together in Cykranosh, and Mhu Thulan and the temple-cells of Yhoundeh are many million miles away."

Morghi did not appear to relish this information. He scowled and muttered: "I suppose this is some more of your damnable wizardry."

Eibon chose to ignore the insinuation.

"I have been conversing with one of the gods of Cykranosh," he said magniloquently. "The god, whose name is Hziulquoigmnzah, has given me a mission to perform, a message to deliver, and has indicated the direction in which I should go. I suggest that you lay aside our little mundane disagreement, and accompany me. Of course we could slit each other's throats or eviscerate each other, since we are both armed. But under the circumstances I think you will see the puerility, not to mention the sheer inutility, of such a proceeding. If we both live we may be of mutual use and assistance, in a strange world whose problems and difficulties, if I mistake not, are worthy of our united powers."

Morghi frowned and pondered.

"Very well," he said grudgingly, "I consent. But I warn you that matters will have to take their course when we return to Mhu Thulan."

"That," rejoined Eibon, "is a contingency which need not trouble either of us. Shall we start?"

The two Hyperboreans had been following a defile that wound away from the lake of fluid metal among hills whose vegetation thickened and grew more various as their height decreased. It was the valley that had been indicated to the sorcerer by the topsy-turvy biped. Morghi, a natural inquisitor in all senses, was plying Eibon with questions.

"Who, or what, was the singular entity that disappeared in a cavern just before I accosted you?"

"That was the god Hziulquoigmzhah."

"And who, pray, is this god? I confess that I have never heard of him."

"He is the paternal uncle of Zhothaquah."

Morghi was silent, except for a queer sound that might have been either an interrupted sneeze or an exclamation of disgust. But after a while he asked:

"And what is this mission of yours?"

"That will be revealed in due time," answered Eibon with sententious dignity. "I am not allowed to discuss it at present. I have a message from the god which I must deliver only to the proper persons."

Morghi was unwillingly impressed.

"Well, I suppose you know what you are doing and where you are going. Can you give me any hint as to our destination?"

"That, too, will be revealed in due time."

The hills were lapsing gently to a well-wooded plain whose flora would have been the despair of Earthly botanists. Beyond the last hill, Eibon and Morghi came to a narrow road that began abruptly and stretched away in the distance. Eibon took the road without hesitation. Indeed there was little

else to do, for the thickets of mineral plants and trees were rapidly becoming impenetrable. They lined the way with serrate branches that were like sheaves of darts and daggers, of sword-blades and needles.

Eibon and Morghi soon noticed that the road was full of large footprints, all of them circular in form and rimmed about with the marks of protruding claws. However, they did not communicate their misgivings to each other.

After an hour or two of progress along the yielding ashy thoroughfare, amid the vegetation that was more horrent than ever with knives and caltrops, the travelers began to remember that they were hungry. Morghi, in his haste to arrest Eibon, had not breakfasted; and Eibon, in his natural hurry to evade Morghi, had committed a like omission. They halted by the wayside, and the sorcerer shared his parcel of food and wine with the priest. They ate and drank with frugality, however, since the supply was limited, and the landscape about them was not likely to yield any viands that were suitable for human sustenance.

With strength and courage revived by this little refection, they continued their journey, They had not gone far when they overtook a remarkable monster that was plainly the originator of the numerous footprints. It was squatting down with its armored haunches toward the travelers, filling the whole road for an indeterminable distance ahead. They could see that it was possessed of a myriad of short legs; but they could form no idea of what its head and forequarters were like.

Eibon and Morghi were much dismayed.

"Is this another of your 'gods'?" asked Morghi ironically.

The sorcerer did not reply. But he realized that he had a reputation to sustain. He went boldly forward and cried out: "Hziulquoigmnzah" in the most resonant bellow that he could summon. At the same time he drew his sword and thrust it between two plates of the horny mail that covered the monster's hindquarters.

Greatly to his relief, the animal began to move and resumed its march along the road. The Hyperboreans followed it; and whenever the creature slackened its pace Eibon would repeat the formula which he had found so effective. Morghi was compelled to regard him with a certain awe.

They traveled on in this manner for several hours. The great luminous triple ring still over-arched the zenith, but a strangely small and chilly sun had now intersected the ring and was declining toward the west of Cykranosh. The forest along the way was still a high wall of sharp metallic foliage; but other roads and paths and byways were now branching off from the one that the monster followed.

All was very silent, except for the many-footed shuffling of this uncouth animal; and neither Eibon nor Morghi had spoken for miles. The high priest was regretting more and more his rashness in pursuing Eibon through the panel; and Eibon was wishing that Zhothaquah had given him the entrée to a different sort of world. They were startled out of their meditations by a sudden clamor of deep and booming voices that rose from somewhere in advance of the monster. It was a veritable pandemonium of unhuman guttural bellowings and croakings, with notes that were somehow suggestive of reproof and objurgation, like shrewish drums, as if the monster were being scolded by a group of unimaginable entities.

"Well?" queried Morghi.

"All that we are destined to behold will reveal itself at the proper time," said Eibon.

The forest was thinning rapidly, and the clamor of termagant bellows was drawing closer. Still following the hindquarters of their multipedal guide, which was crawling on with reluctant slowness, the travelers emerged in an open space and beheld a most singular tableau. The monster, which was plainly of a tame and harmless and stupid sort, was cowering before a knot of beings no larger than men, who were armed only with long-handled goads.

These beings, though they were bipeds, and were not quite so unheard-of in their anatomic structure as the entity which Eibon had met by the lake, were nevertheless sufficiently unusual; for their head and bodies were apparently combined in one, and their ears, eyes, nostrils, mouths, and certain other organs of doubtful use were all arranged in a somewhat unconventional grouping on their chests and abdomens. They were wholly naked, and were rather dark in color, with no trace of hair on any part of their bodies. Behind them at a little distance were many edifices of a kind which hardly conformed to human ideas of architectural symmetry.

Eibon strode valorously forward, with Morghi following discreetly. The torso-headed beings ceased their scolding of the fawning monster and peered at the Earth-men with expressions that were difficult to read on account of the odd and baffling relationship of their features.

"Hziulquoigmnzah! Zhothaquah!" said Eibon with oracular solemnity and sonority. Then, after a pause of hieratic length: "Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh!"

The result was indeed gratifying, and was all that could be expected even from a formula so remarkable; for the Cykranoshian beings dropped their goads and bowed before the sorcerer till their featured bosoms almost touched the ground.

"I have performed the mission, I have delivered the message given me by Hziulquoigmnzah," said Eibon to Morghi.

For several Cykranoshian months the two Hyperboreans were the honored guests of the quaint and worthy and virtuous people, who called themselves the Bhlemphroims. Eibon had a real gift for languages and made progress in the local tongue far more readily than Morghi. His knowledge of the customs, manners, ideas, and beliefs of the Bhlemphroims soon became extensive; but he found it a source of disillusionment as well as of illumination.

The armored monster that he and Morghi had driven before them so valiantly was, he learned, a domestic beast of burden that had strayed away

from its owners amid the mineral vegetation of the desert lands adjoining Vhlorrh, the chief town of the Bhlemphroims. The genuflections with which Eibon and Morghi had been greeted were only an expression of gratitude for the safe return of this beast; and were not, as Eibon had thought, an acknowledgment of the divine names he had quoted and the fearsome phrase, "Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh."

The being that Eibon had met by the lake was indeed the god Hziulquoigmnzah; and there were dim traditions of Zhothaquah in certain early myths of the Bhlemphroims. But this people, it seemed, were most regrettably materialistic and had long ceased to offer sacrifice and prayer to the gods; though they spoke of them with a sort of distant respect and with no actual blasphemy.

Eibon learned that the words "Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh" doubtless belonged to a private language of the gods, which the Bhlemphroims no longer understood; but which, however, was still studied by a neighboring people, the Ydheems, who maintained the ancient formal worship of Hziulquoigmnzah and various related deities.

The Bhlemphroims were indeed a practical race, and had few if any interests beyond the cultivation of a great variety of edible fungi, the breeding of large centipedal animals, and the propagation of their own species. The latter process, as revealed to Eibon and Morghi, was somewhat unusual: though the Bhlemphroims were bisexual, only one female in a generation was chosen for reproductive duties; and this female, after growing to mammoth size on food prepared from a special fungus, became the mother of an entire new generation.

When they had been well initiated into the life and customs of Vhlorrh, the Hyperboreans were privileged to see the future national mother, called the Djhenquomh, who had now attained the requisite proportions after years of scientific nourishment. She lived in an edifice that was necessarily larger than any of the other buildings in Vhlorrh; and her sole activity was the consumption of immense quantities of food. The sorcerer and the inquisitor were impressed, even if not captivated, by the mountainous amplitude of

her charms and by their highly novel arrangement. They were told that the male parent (or parents) of the forthcoming generation had not yet been selected.

The possession of separate heads by the Hyperboreans seemed to lend them a remarkable biologic interest in the eyes of their hosts. The Bhlemphroims, it was learned, had not always been headless but had reached their present physical conformation through a slow process of evolution, in which the head of the archetypal Bhlemphroim had been merged by imperceptible degrees with the torso.

But, unlike most peoples, they did not regard their current stage of development with unqualified complacency. Indeed, their headlessness was a source of national regret; they deplored the retrenchment of nature in this regard; and the arrival of Eibon and Morghi, who were looked upon as ideal exemplars of cephalic evolution, had served to quicken their eugenic sorrow.

The sorcerer and the inquisitor, on their part, found life rather dull among the Bhlemphroims after the first feeling of exoticism had worn off. The diet was tiresome for one thing — an endless succession of raw and boiled and roasted mushrooms, varied at rare intervals by the coarse and flabby meat of tame monsters. And this people, though they were always polite and respectful, did not seem to be greatly awed by the exhibitions of Hyperborean magic with which Eibon and Morghi favored them; and their lamentable want of religious ardor made all evangelistic endeavor a thankless task. And, being fundamentally unimaginative, they were not even duly impressed by the fact that their visitors had come from a remote ultra-Cykranosian world.

"I feel," said Eibon to Morghi one day, "that the god was sadly mistaken in deigning to send this people a message of any sort."

It was very soon after this that a large committee of the Blemphroims waited upon Eibon and Morghi and informed them that after long consideration they had been selected as the fathers of the next generation

and were to be married forthwith to the tribal mother in the hope that a well-headed race of Bhlemphroims would result from the union.

Eibon and Morghi were quite overcome by the proposed eugenic honor. Thinking of the mountainous female they had seen, Morghi was prone to remember his sacerdotal vows of celibacy and Eibon was eager to take similar vows upon himself without delay. The inquisitor, indeed, was so overwhelmed as to be rendered almost speechless; but, with rare presence of mind, the sorcerer temporized by making a few queries anent the legal and social status which would be enjoyed by Morghi and himself as the husbands of the Djhenquomh. And the naive Blemphroims told him that this would be a matter of brief concern; that after completing their marital duties the husbands were always served to the national mother in the form of ragouts and other culinary preparations.

The Hyperboreans tried to conceal from their hosts the reluctance with which they both regarded the coming honor in all its stages. Being as usual a master of diplomatics, Eibon went so far as to make a formal acceptance on behalf of himself and his companion. But when the delegation of Bhlemphroims had departed he said to Morghi:

"I am more than ever convinced that the god was mistaken. We must leave the city of Vhlorrh with all feasible dispatch, and continue our journey till we find a people who are worthier to receive his communication."

Apparently it had never occurred to the simple and patriotic Bhlemphroims that the fathering of the next national litter was a privilege that anyone would dream of rejecting. Eibon and Morghi were subjected to no manner of duress or constraint, and their movements were not even watched. It was an easy matter to leave the house in which they had been domiciled, when the rumbling snores of their hosts were ascending to the great ring of Cykranoshian moons, and to follow the highway that led from Vhlorrh toward the country of Ydheems.

The road before them was well marked; and the ringlight was almost as clear and brilliant as full day. They traveled a long distance through the

diversified and always unique scenery which it served to illumine, before the rising of the sun and the consequent discovery of their departure by the Bhlemphroims. These single-minded bipeds, it is likely, were too sorely perplexed and dumbfounded by the loss of the guests whom they had chosen as future progenitors to even think of following them.

The land of the Ydheems (as indicated on an earlier occasion by the Bhlemphroims) was many leagues away; and tracts of ashen deserts, of mineral cacti, of fungoid forests, and high mountains intervened. The boundary of the Bhlemphroims — marked by a crude sculpturesque representation of the tribal mother beside the way — was passed by the travelers before dawn.

And during the following day they journeyed among more than one of those unusual races who diversify so widely the population of Saturn. They saw the Djhibbis, that apterous and Stylitean bird-people who roost on their individual dolomites for years at a time and meditate upon the cosmos, uttering to each other at long intervals the mystic syllables yop, yeep, and yoop, which are said to express an unfathomed range of esoteric thought.

And they met those flibbertigibbet pygmies, the Ephiqhs, who hollow out their homes in the trunks of certain large fungi, and are always having to hunt new habitations because the old ones crumble into powder in a few days. And they heard the underground croaking of that mysterious people, the Ghlonghs, who dread not only the sunlight but also the ring-light, and who have never yet been seen by any of the surface-dwellers.

By sunset, however, Eibon and Morghi had crossed the domains of all the aforementioned races, and had even climbed the lower scarps of those mountains which still divided them from the land of Ydheems. Here, on a sheltered ledge, their weariness impelled them to halt; and since they had now ceased to dread pursuit from the Blemphroims, they wrapped themselves more tightly in their mantles against the cold, after a meager supper of raw mushrooms, and fell asleep.

Their slumber was disturbed by a series of cacodemoniacal dreams in which they both thought they had been recaptured by the Bhlemphroims and were forced to espouse the Djhenquomh. They awoke shortly before dawn from visions whose details were excruciatingly vivid, and were more than ready to resume their ascent of the mountains.

The slopes and cliffs above them were desolate enough to have deterred any travelers of inferior hardihood or less cogent fears. The tall woods of fungi dwindled ere long to tiny growths, and soon they lessened to forms that were no bigger than lichens; and after these, there was nothing but black and naked stone. The wiry and slender Eibon suffered no great inconvenience from the climb; but Morghi, with his sacerdotal girth and bulk, was soon winded. Whenever he paused to recover his breath, Eibon would say to him: "Think of the national mother," and Morghi would climb the next acclivity like an agile but somewhat asthmatic mountain-sheep.

They came at noon to a pinnacle-guarded pass from which they could look down on the country of the Ydheems. They saw that it was a broad and fertile realm, with woods of mammoth mushrooms and other thallophytes that excelled in size and number those of any other region they had yet traversed. Even the mountain-slopes were more fruitful on this side, for Eibon and Morghi had not descended far when they entered a grove of enormous puff-balls and toadstools.

They were admiring the magnitude and variety of these growths, when they heard a thunderous noise on the mountains above them. The noise drew nearer, gathering to itself the roar of new thunders. Eibon would have prayed to Zhothaquah, and Morghi would have supplicated the goddess Yhoundeh, but unfortunately there was no time. They were caught in a mighty mass of rolling puff-balls and toppling toadstools overthrown by the huge avalanche that had started on the heights above; and, borne with increasing momentum, with vertiginous speed and tumult amid an ever-growing heap of shattered fungi, they finished their descent of the mountain in less than a minute.

Endeavoring to extricate themselves from the pile of thallophytic debris in which they were buried, Eibon and Morghi noticed that there still seemed to be a good deal of noise, even though the avalanche had stopped. Also, there were other movements and heavings than their own in the pile. When they had managed to get their necks and shoulders clear, they discovered that the commotion was being made by certain people who differed from their late hosts, the Bhlemphroims, in that they possessed rudimentary heads.

These people were some of the Ydheems, on one of whose towns the avalanche had descended. Roofs and towers were beginning to emerge from the mass of boulders and puff-balls; and just in front of the Hyperboreans there was a large temple-like edifice from whose blocked-up door a multitude of the Ydheems had now tunneled their way. At sight of Eibon and Morghi they suspended their labors; and the sorcerer, who had freed himself and had made sure that all his bones and members were intact, now took the opportunity to address them.

"Harken!" he said with great importance. "I have come to bring you a message from the god Hziulquoigmzhah. I have borne it faithfully on ways beset with many hazards and perils. In the god's own divine language, it runs thus: 'Iqhui dlosh odhqfonqh.'"

Since he spoke in the dialect of the Bhlemphroims, which differed somewhat from their own, it is doubtful if the Ydheems altogether understood the first part of his utterance. But Hziulquoigmzhah was their tutelary deity, and they knew the language of the gods. At the words: "Iqhui dlosh odhqfonqh," there was a most remarkable resumption and increase of activity, a ceaseless running to and fro on the part of the Ydheems, a shouting of guttural orders, and a recrudescence of new heads and limbs from the avalanche.

Those who had issued from the temple re-entered it, and came out once more carrying a huge image of Hziulquoigmzhah, some smaller icons of lesser though allied deities, and a very ancient-looking idol which both Eibon and Morghi recognized as having a resemblance to Zhothaquah. Others of the Ydheems brought their household goods and furniture forth

from the dwellings, and, signing the Hyperboreans to accompany them, the whole populace began to evacuate the town.

Eibon and Morghi were much mystified. And it was not until a new town had been built on the fungus-wooded plain at the distance of a full day's march, and they themselves had been installed among the priests of the new temple, that they learned the reason of it all and the meaning of: "Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh." These words meant merely: "Be on your way," and the god had addressed them to Eibon as a dismissal. But the coincidental coming of the avalanche and of Eibon and Morghi with this purported message from the god, had been taken by the Ydheems as a divine injunction to remove themselves and their goods from their present location. Thus the wholesale exodus of people with their idols and domestic belongings.

The new town was called Ghlomph, after the one that the avalanche had buried. Here, for the remainder of their days, Eibon and Morghi were held in much honor; and their coming with the message, "Iqhui dlosh odhqlonqh," was deemed a fortunate thing, since there were no more avalanches to threaten the security of Ghlomph in its new situation remote from the mountains.

The Hyperboreans shared the increment of civic affluence and well-being resultant from this security. There was no national mother among the Ydheems, who propagated themselves in a far more general manner than the Bhlemphroims, so existence was quite safe and tranquil. Eibon, at least, was really in his element; for the news which he brought of Zhothaquah, who was still worshipped in this region of Cykranosh, had enabled him to set up as a sort of minor prophet, even apart from the renown which he enjoyed as the bearer of the divine message and as the founder of the new town of Ghlomph.

Morghi, however, was not entirely happy. Though the Ydheems were religious, they did not carry their devotional fervor to the point of bigotry or intolerance; so it was quite impossible to start an inquisition among them. But still there were compensations: the fungus-wine of the Ydheems was

potent though evil-tasting; and there were females of a sort, if one were not too squeamish. Consequently, Morghi and Eibon both settled down to an ecclesiastic regimen which, after all, was not so radically different from that of Mhu Thulan or any other place on the planet of their birth.

Such were the various adventures, and such was the final lot of this redoubtable pair in Cykranosh. But in Eibon's tower of black gneiss on that headland of the northern sea in Mhu Thulan, the underlings of Morghi waited for days, neither wishing to follow the high priest through the magic panel nor daring to leave in disobedience of his orders.

At length they were recalled by a special dispensation from the hierophant who had been chosen as Morghi's temporary successor. But the result of the whole affair was highly regrettable from the standpoint of the hierarchy of Yhoundeh. It was universally believed that Eibon had not only escaped by virtue of the powerful magic he had learned from Zhothaquah but had made away with Morghi into the bargain. As a consequence of this belief, the faith of Yhoundeh declined, and there was a widespread revival of the dark worship of Zhothaquah throughout Mhu Thulan in the last century before the onset of the great Ice Age.

THE DOUBLE SHADOW

MY NAME is Pharpetron, among those who have known me in Poseidonis; but even I, the last and most forward pupil of the wise Avyctes, know not the name of that which I am fated to become ere to-morrow. Therefore, by the ebbing silver lamps, in my master's marble house above the loud, ever-ravensing sea, I write this tale with a hasty hand, scrawling an ink of wizard virtue on the grey, priceless, antique parchment of dragons. And having written, I shall enclose the pages in a sealed cylinder of orichalchum, and shall cast the cylinder from a high window into the sea, lest that which I am doomed to become should haply destroy the writing. And it may be that mariners from Lephara, passing to Umb and Pneur in their tall triremes, will find the cylinder; or fishers will draw it from the wave in their seines of byssus; and having read my story, men will learn the truth and take warning; and no man's feet, henceforward, will approach the pale and demon-haunted house of Avyctes.

For six years, I have dwelt apart with the aged master, forgetting youth and its wonted desires in the study of arcanic things. Together, we have delved more deeply than all others before us in an interdicted lore; we have solved the keyless hieroglyphs that guard ante-human formulae; we have talked with the prehistoric dead; we have called up the dwellers in sealed crypts, in fearful abysses beyond space. Few are the sons of mankind who have cared to seek us out among the desolate, wind-worn crags; and many, but nameless, are the visitants who have come to us from further bourns of place and time.

Stern and white as a tomb, older than the memory of the dead, and built by men or devils beyond the recording of myth, is the mansion in which we dwell. Far below, on black, naked reefs, the northern sea climbs and roars indomitably, or ebbs with a ceaseless murmur as of armies of baffled demons; and the house is filled evermore, like a hollow-sounding sepulcher, with the drear echo of its tumultuous voices; and the winds wail in dismal wrath around the high towers, but shake them not. On the seaward side, the

mansion rises sheerly from the straight-falling cliff; but on the other sides there are narrow terraces, grown with dwarfish, crooked cedars that bow always beneath the gale. Giant marble monsters guard the landward portals; and huge marble women ward the strait porticoes above the sea; and mighty statues and mummies stand everywhere in the chambers and along the halls. But, saving these, and the spirits we have summoned, there is none to companion us; and liches and shadows have been the servitors of our daily needs.

All men have heard the fame of Avyctes, the sole surviving pupil of that Malygris who tyrannized in his necromancy over Susran from a tower of sable stone; Malygris, who lay dead for years while men believed him living; who, lying thus, still uttered potent spells and dire oracles with decaying lips. But Avyctes lusted not for temporal power in the manner of Malygris; and having learned all that the elder sorcerer could teach him, withdrew from the cities of Poseidonis to seek another and vaster dominion; and I, the youth Pharpetron, in the latter years of Avyctes, was permitted to join him in this solitude; and since then, I have shared his austerities and vigils and evocations . . . and now, likewise, I must share the weird doom that has come in answer to his summoning.

Not without terror (since man is but mortal) did I, the neophyte, behold at first the abhorrent and tremendous faces of them that obeyed Avyctes: the genii of the sea and earth, of the stars and the heavens, who passed to and fro in his marmorean halls. I shuddered at the black writhing of submundane things from the many-volumed smoke of the braziers; I cried in horror at the grey foulnesses, colossal, without form, that crowded malignly about the drawn circle of seven colors, threatening unspeakable trespass on us that stood at the center. Not without revulsion did I drink wine that was poured by cadavers, and eat bread that was purveyed by phantoms. But use and custom dulled the strangeness, destroyed the fear; and in time I believed implicitly that Avyctes was the lord of all incantations and exorcisms, with infallible power to dismiss the beings he evoked.

Well had it had been for Avyctes-- and for me-- if the master had contented himself with the lore preserved from Atlantis and Thule, or brought over from Mu and Mayapan. Surely this should have been enough: for in the ivory-sheeted books of Thule there were blood-writ runes that would call the demons of the fifth and seventh planets, if spoken aloud at the hour of their ascent; and the sorcerers of Mu had left record of a process whereby the doors of far-future time could be unlocked; and our fathers, the Atlanteans, had known the road between the atoms and the path into far stars, and had held speech with the spirits of the sun. But Avyctes thirsted for a darker knowledge, a deeper empery; and into his hands, in the third year of my novitiate, there came the mirror-bright tablet of the lost serpent-people.

Strange, and apparently fortuitous, was our finding of the tablet. At certain hours, when the tide had fallen from the steep rocks, we were wont to descend by cavern-hidden stairs to a cliff-walled crescent beach behind the promontory on which stood the house of Avyctes. There, on the dun, wet sands, beyond the foamy tongues of the surf, would lie the worn and curious driftage of alien shores, and trove that hurricanes had cast up from unsounded deeps. And there we had found the purple and sanguine volutes of great shells, and rude lumps of ambergris, and white flowers of perpetually blooming coral; and once, the barbaric idol of green brass that had been the figurehead of a galley from far hyperboreal isles.

There had been a great storm, such as must have riven the sea to its nethermost profound; but the tempest had gone by with morning, and the heavens were cloudless on that fatal day when we found the tablet, and the demon winds were hushed among the high crags and chasms; and the sea lisped with a low whisper, like the rustle of gowns of samite trailed by fleeing maidens on the sand. And just beyond the ebbing wave, in a tangle of russet sea-weed, we beheld a thing that glittered with blinding sun-like brilliance. And running forward, I plucked it from the wrack before the wave's return, and bore it to Avyctes.

The tablet was wrought of some nameless metal, like never-rusting iron, but heavier. It had the form of a triangle and was broader at the widest than a

man's heart. On one side it was wholly blank; and Avyctes and I, in turn, beheld our features mirrored strangely, like the drawn, pallid features of the dead, in its burnished surface. On the other side many rows of small crooked ciphers were incised deeply in the metal, as if by the action of some mordant acid; and these ciphers were not the pictorial symbols or alphabetic characters of any language known to the master or to me.

Of the tablet's age and origin, likewise, we could form no conjecture; and our erudition was altogether baffled. For many days thereafter we studied the writing and held argument that came to no issue. And night by night, in a high chamber closed against the perennial winds, we pondered over the dazzling triangle by the tall straight flames of silver lamps. For Avyctes deemed that knowledge of rare value (or haply some secret of an alien or elder magic) was holden by the clueless crooked ciphers. Then, since all our scholarship was in vain, the master sought another divination, and had recourse to wizardry and necromancy. But at first, among the devils and phantoms that answered our interrogation, none could tell us aught concerning the tablet. And any other than Avyctes would have despaired in the end . . . and well would it have been if he had despaired, and had sought no longer to decipher the writing

The months and years went by with a slow thundering of seas on the dark rocks, and a headlong clamor of winds around the white towers. Still we continued our delvings and evocations; and further, always further we went into lampless realms of space and spirit; learning, perchance, to unlock the hithermost of the manifold infinities. And at whiles, Avyctes would resume his pondering of the sea-found tablet; or would question some visitant from other spheres of time and place regarding its interpretation.

At last, by the use of a chance formula, in idle experiment, he summoned up the dim, tenuous ghost of a sorcerer from prehistoric years; and the ghost, in a thin whisper of uncouth, forgotten speech, informed us that the letters on the tablet were those of a language of the serpent-men, whose primordial continent had sunk aeons before the lifting of Hyperborea from the ooze. But the ghost could tell us naught of their significance; for, even in his time,

the serpent-people had become a dubious legend; and their deep, ante-human lore and sorcery were things irretrievable by man.

Now, in all the books of conjuration owned by Avyctes, there was no spell whereby we could call the lost serpent-men from their fabulous epoch. But there was an old Lemurian formula, recondite and uncertain, by which the shadow of a dead man could be sent into years posterior to those of his own life-time, and could be recalled after an interim by the wizard. And the shade, being wholly insubstantial, would suffer no harm from the temporal transition, and would remember, for the information of the wizard, that which he had been instructed to learn during the journey.

So, having called again the ghost of the prehistoric sorcerer, whose name was Ybith, Avyctes made a singular use of several very ardent gums and combustible fragments of fossil wood; and he and I, reciting the responses to the formula, sent the thin spirit of Ybith into the far ages of the serpent-men. And after a time which the master deemed sufficient, we performed the curious rites of incantation that would recall Ybith from his alienage. And the rites were successful; and Ybith stood before us again, like a blown vapor that is nigh to vanishing. And in words that were faint as the last echo of perishing memories, the specter told us the key to the meaning of the letters, which he had learned in the primeval past; and after this, we questioned Ybith no more, but suffered him to return unto slumber and oblivion.

Then, knowing the import of the tiny, twisted ciphers, we read the writing on the tablet and made thereof a transliteration, though not without labor and difficulty, since the very phonetics of the serpent tongue, and the symbols and ideas expressed in the writing, were somewhat alien to those of mankind. And when we had mastered the inscription, we found that it contained the formula for a certain evocation which, no doubt, had been used by the serpent sorcerers. But the object of the evocation was not named; nor was there any clue to the nature or identity of that which would come in answer to the rites. And moreover there was no corresponding rite of exorcism nor spell of dismissal.

Great was the jubilation of Avyctes, deeming that we had learned a lore beyond the memory or prevision of man. And though I sought to dissuade him, he resolved to employ the evocation, arguing that our discovery was no chance thing but was fatefully predestined from the beginning. And he seemed to think lightly of the menace that might be brought upon us by the conjuration of things whose nativity and attributes were wholly obscure. "For," said Avyctes, "I have called up, in all the years of my sorcery, no god or devil, no demon or lich or shadow, which I could not control and dismiss at will. And I am loath to believe that any power or spirit beyond the subversion of my spells could have been summoned by a race of serpents, whatever their skill in demonism and necromancy."

So, seeing that he was obstinate, and acknowledging him for my master in all ways, I consented to aid Avyctes in the experiment, though not without dire misgivings. And then we gathered together, in the chamber of conjuration, at the specified hour and configuration of the stars, the equivalents of sundry rare materials that the tablet had instructed us to use in the ritual.

Of much that we did, and of certain agents that we employed, it were better not to tell; nor shall I record the shrill, sibilant words, difficult for beings not born of serpents to articulate, whose intonation formed a signal part of the ceremony. Toward the last, we drew a triangle on the marble floor with the fresh blood of birds; and Avyctes stood at one angle, and I at another; and the gaunt umber mummy of an Atlantean warrior, whose name had been Oigos, was stationed at the third angle. And standing thus, Avyctes and I held tapers of corpse-tallow in our hands, till the tapers had burned down between our fingers as into a socket. And in the outstretched palms of the mummy of Oigos, as if in shallow thuribles, talc and asbestos burned, ignited by a strange fire whereof we knew the secret. At one side we had traced on the floor an infrangible ellipse, made by an endless linked repetition of the twelve unspeakable Signs of Oumor, to which we could retire if the visitant should prove inimical or rebellious. We waited while the pole-circling stars went over, as had been prescribed. Then, when the tapers had gone out between our seared fingers, and the talc and asbestos were wholly consumed in the mummy's eaten palms, Avyctes uttered a

single word whose sense was obscure to us; and Oigos, being animated by sorcery and subject to our will, repeated the word after a given interval, in tones that were hollow as a tomb-born echo; and I in my turn also repeated it.

Now, in the chamber of evocation, before beginning the ritual, we had opened a small window giving upon the sea, and had likewise left open a high door on the hall to landward, lest that which came in answer to us should require a spatial mode of entrance. And during the ceremony, the sea became still and there was no wind, and it seemed that all things were hushed in awful expectation of the nameless visitor. But after all was done, and the last word had been repeated by Oigos and me, we stood and waited vainly for a visible sign or other manifestation. The lamps burned stilly in the midnight room; and no shadows fell, other than were cast by ourselves and Oigos and by the great marble women along the walls. And in the magic mirrors we had placed cunningly, to reflect those that were otherwise unseen, we beheld no breath or trace of any image.

At this, after a reasonable interim, Avyctes was sorely disappointed, deeming that the evocation had failed of its purpose; and I, having the same thought, was secretly relieved. And we questioned the mummy of Oigos, to learn if he had perceived in the room, with such senses as are peculiar to the dead, the sure token or doubtful proof of a presence undescried by us the living. And the mummy gave a necromantic answer, saying that there was nothing.

"Verily," said Avyctes, "it were useless to wait longer. For surely in some way we have misunderstood the purport of the writing, or have failed to duplicate the matters used in the evocation, or the correct intonement of the words. Or it may be that in the lapse of so many aeons, the thing that was formerly wont to respond has long ceased to exist, or has altered in its attributes so that the spell is now void and valueless." To this I assented readily, hoping that the matter was at an end. So, after erasing the blood-marked triangle and the sacred ellipse of the linked Signs of Oumor, and after dismissing Oigos to his wonted place among other mummies, we retired to sleep. And in the days that followed, we resumed our habitual

studies, but made no mention to each other of the strange triangular tablet or the vain formula.

Even as before, our days went on; and the sea climbed and roared in white fury on the cliffs, and the winds wailed by in their unseen, sullen wrath, bowing the dark cedars as witches are bowed by the breath of Taaran, god of evil. Almost, in the marvel of new tests and cantraipts, I forgot the ineffectual conjuration, and I deemed that Avyctes had also forgotten it.

All things were as of yore, to our sorcerous perception; and there was naught to trouble us in our wisdom and power and serenity, which we deemed secure above the sovereignty of kings. Reading the horoscopic stars, we found no future ill in their aspect; nor was any shadow of bale foreshown to us through geomancy, or other modes of divination such as we employed. And our familiars, though grisly and dreadful to mortal gaze, were wholly obedient to us the masters.

Then, on a clear summer afternoon, we walked, as was often our custom, on the marble terrace behind the house. In robes of ocean-purple, we paced among the windy trees with their blown, crooked shadows; and there, following us as we went to and fro, I saw the blue shadow of Avyctes and my own shadow on the marble; and between them, an adumbration that was not wrought by any of the cedars. And I was greatly startled, but spoke not of the matter to Avyctes, and observed the unknown shadow with covert care.

I saw that it followed closely the shadow of Avyctes, keeping ever the same distance. And it fluttered not in the wind, but moved with a flowing as of some heavy, thick, putrescent liquid; and its color was not blue nor purple nor black, nor any other hue to which man's eyes are habituated, but a hue as of some unearthly purulence; and its form was altogether monstrous, having a squat head and a long, undulant body, without similitude to beast or devil.

Avyctes heeded not the shadow; and still I feared to speak, though I thought it an ill thing for the master to be companioned thus. And I moved closer to

him, in order to detect by touch or other perception the invisible presence that had cast the adumbration. But the air was void to sunward of the shadow; and I found nothing opposite the sun nor in any oblique direction, though I searched closely, knowing that certain beings cast their shadows thus.

After a while, at the customary hour, we returned by the coiling stairs and monster-flanked portals into the high house. And I saw that the strange adumbration moved ever behind the shadow of Avyctes, falling horrible and unbroken on the steps and passing clearly separate and distinct amid the long umbrages of the towering monsters. And in the dim halls beyond the sun, where shadows should not have been, I beheld with terror the distorted loathly blot, having a pestilent, unnamable hue, that followed Avyctes as if in lieu of his own extinguished shadow. And all that day, everywhere that we went, at the table served by specters, or in the mummy-warded room of volumes and books, the thing pursued Avyctes, clinging to him even as leprosy to the leper. And still the master had perceived it not; and still I forbore to warn him, hoping that the visitant would withdraw in its own time, going obscurely as it had come.

But at midnight, when we sat together by the silver lamps, pondering the bloody-writ runes of Hyperborea, I saw that the shadow had drawn closer to the shadow of Avyctes, towering behind his chair on the wall between the huge sculptured women and the mummies. And the thing was a streaming ooze of charnel pollution, a foulness beyond the black leprosy of hell; and I could bear it no more; and I cried out in my fear and loathing, and informed the master of its presence.

Beholding now the shadow, Avyctes considered it closely and in silence; and there was neither fear nor awe nor abhorrence in the deep, graven wrinkles of his visage. And he said to me at last:

"This thing is a mystery beyond my lore; but never, in all the practice of my art, has any shadow come to me unbidden. And since all others of our evocations have found answer ere this, I must deem that the shadow is a veritable entity, or the sign of an entity, that has come in belated response to

the formula of the serpent-sorcerers, which we thought powerless and void. And I think it well that we should now repair to the chamber of conjuration, and interrogate the shadow in such manner as we may, to inquire its nativity and purpose."

We went forthwith into the chamber of conjuration, and made such preparations as were both necessary and possible. And when we were prepared to question it, the unknown shadow had drawn closer still to the shadow of Avyctes, so that the clear space between the two was no wider than the thickness of a necromancer's rod.

Now, in all ways that were feasible, we interrogated the shadow, speaking through our own lips and the lips of mummies and statues. But there was no determinable answer; and calling certain of the devils and phantoms that were our familiars, we made question through the mouths of these, but without result. And all the while, our magic mirrors were void of any reflection of a presence that might have cast the shadow; and they that had been our spokesmen could detect nothing in the room. And there was no spell, it seemed, that had power upon the visitant. So Avyctes became troubled; and drawing on the floor with blood and ashes the ellipse of Oumor, wherein no demon nor spirit may intrude, he retired to its center. But still within the ellipse, like a flowing taint of liquid corruption, the shadow followed his shadow; and the space between the two was no wider than the thickness of a wizard's pen.

Now, on the face of Avyctes, horror had graven new wrinkles; and his brow was beaded with a deathly sweat. For he knew, even as I, that this was a thing beyond all laws, and foreboding naught but disaster and evil. And he cried to me in a shaken voice, and said:

"I have no knowledge of this thing nor its intention toward me, and no power to stay its progress. Go forth and leave me now; for I would not that any man should witness the defeat of my sorcery and the doom that may follow thereupon. Also, it were well to depart while there is time, lest you too should become the quarry of the shadow and be compelled to share its menace."

Though terror had fastened upon my inmost soul, I was loath to leave Avyctes. But I had sworn to obey his will at all times and in every respect; and moreover I knew myself doubly powerless against the adumbration, since Avyctes himself was impotent.

So, bidding him farewell, I went forth with trembling limbs from the haunted chamber; and peering back from the threshold, I saw that the alien umbrage, creeping like a noisome blotch on the floor, had touched the shadow of Avyctes. And at that moment the master shrieked aloud like one in nightmare; and his face was no longer the face of Avyctes but was contorted and convulsed like that of some helpless madman who wrestles with an unseen incubus. And I looked no more, but fled along the dim outer hall and through the high portals giving upon the terrace.

A red moon, ominous and gibbous, had declined above the terrace and the crags; and the shadows of the cedars were elongated in the moon; and they wavered in the gale like the blown cloaks of enchanters. And stooping against the gale, I fled across the terrace toward the outer stairs that led to a steep path in the riven waste of rocks and chasms behind Avyctes' house. I neared the terrace edge, running with the speed of fear; but I could not reach the topmost outer stair; for at every step the marble flowed beneath me, fleeing like a pale horizon before the seeker. And though I raced and panted without pause, I could draw no nearer to the terrace edge.

At length I desisted, seeing that an unknown spell had altered the very space about the house of Avyctes, so that none could escape therefrom to landward. So, resigning myself in despair to whatever might befall, I returned toward the house. And climbing the white stairs in the low, level beams of the crag-caught moon, I saw a figure that awaited me in the portals. And I knew by the trailing robe of sea-purple, but by no other token, that the figure was Avyctes. For the face was no longer in its entirety the face of man, but was become a loathly fluid amalgam of human features with a thing not to be identified on earth. The transfiguration was ghastlier than death or the changes of decay; and the face was already hued with the nameless, corrupt and purulent color of the strange shadow, and had taken on, in respect to its outlines, a partial likeness to the squat profile of the

shadow. The hands of the figure were not those of any terrene being; and the shape beneath the robe had lengthened with a nauseous undulant pliancy; and the face and fingers seemed to drip in the moon- light with a deliquescent corruption. And the pursuing umbrage, like a thickly flowing blight, had corroded and distorted the very shadow of Avyctes, which was now double in a manner not to be narrated here.

Fain would I have cried or spoken aloud; but horror had dried up the fount of speech. And the thing that had been Avyctes beckoned me in silence, uttering no word from its living and putrescent lips. And with eyes that were no longer eyes, but had become an oozing abomination, it peered steadily upon me. And it clutched my shoulder closely with the soft leprosy of its fingers, and led me half-swooning with revulsion along the hall, and into that room where the mummy of Oigos, who had assisted us in the threefold incantation of the serpent-men, was stationed with several of his fellows.

By the lamps which illumed the chamber, burning with pale, still, perpetual flames, I saw that the mummies stood erect along the wall in their exanimate repose, each in his wonted place with his tall shadow beside him. But the great, gaunt shadow of Oigos on the marble wall was companioned by an adumbration similar in all respects to the evil thing that had followed the master and was now incorporate with him. I remembered that Oigos had performed his share of the ritual, and had repeated an unknown stated word in turn after Avyctes; and so I knew that the horror had come to Oigos in turn, and would wreak itself upon the dead even as on the living. For the foul, anonymous thing that we had called in our presumption could manifest itself to mortal ken in no other way than this. We had drawn it from unfathomable depths of time and space, using ignorantly a dire formula; and the thing had come at its own chosen hour, to stamp itself in abomination uttermost on the evocators.

Since then, the night has ebbed away, and a second day has gone by like a sluggish ooze of horror. . . . I have seen the complete identification of the shadow with the flesh and the shadow of Avyctes . . . and also I have seen the slow encroachment of that other umbrage, mingling itself with the lank

shadow and the sere, bituminous body of Oigos, and turning them to a similitude of the thing which Avyctes has become. And I have heard the mummy cry out like a living man in great pain and fear, as with the throes of a second dissolution, at the impingement of the shadow. And long since it has grown silent, like the other horror, and I know not its thoughts or its intent. . . . And verily I know not if the thing that has come to us be one or several; nor if its avatar will rest complete with the three that summoned it forth into time, or be extended to others.

But these things, and much else, I shall soon know; for now, in turn, there is a shadow that follows mine, drawing ever closer. The air congeals and curdles with an unseen fear; and they that were our familiars have fled from the mansion; and the great marble women seem to tremble where they stand along the walls. But the horror that was Avyctes, and the second horror that was Oigos, have left me not, and neither do they tremble. And with eyes that are not eyes, they seem to brood and watch, waiting till I too shall become as they. And their stillness is more terrible than if they had rended me limb from limb. And there are strange voices in the wind, and alien roarings upon the sea; and the walls quiver like a thin veil in the black breath of remote abysses.

So, knowing that the time is brief, I have shut myself in the room of volumes and books and have written this account. And I have taken the bright triangular tablet, whose solution was our undoing, and have cast it from the window into the sea, hoping that none will find it after us. And now I must make an end, and enclose this writing in the sealed cylinder of orichalchum, and fling it forth to drift upon the wave. For the space between my shadow and the shadow of the horror is straitened momentarily. . . . and the space is no wider than the thickness of a wizard's pen.

THE EMIR'S CAPTIVE

The sun was setting in the Syrian Desert. Already the fiery ball was concealed behind mass of glowing, red clouds, which mantled the distant horizon with crimson. The sand of the desert shone bright yellow in the fleeting light.

For a moment the clouds parted, and a long, fiery beam of light pierced through the gap and was reflected upon the untarnished shield of a desert horseman. His mount, a steed of the Kochlani blood, the horses which are said to be descended from the steeds of King Solomon, stood silent and impassive, sharply [limned] against the horizon. His master seemed for the moment a part of him, and the two a statue carved from solid stone. The Arab was watching the sunset, but his eyes roved constantly on the distant horizon as tho he were expecting something.

He was a tall impressive man, long-bearded, and clothed in a flowing caftan. A curved sabre of Damascus steel was at his side. In his right hand was a long spear, and on his left arm a small buckler of rhinoceros hide, with a sharp spike in the centre. His face was grave, yet handsome. He was a man in the prime of life, and his cheeks were dark with the fierce heat of the Eastern sun.

Some distance to his right rose a group of date palms, from amongst which bubbled a crystal spring which stream ran some distance, and was lost in the sand. Amongst these palms stood a number of black tents, and near them were camels and horses. White-robed figures hastened about, and a low hum of voices was audible. At a distance from the encampment, several silent figures, bearing long spears, sat on horse-back. They were the outposts.

The Emir, Yusuf ben Omar, to whom we have just been introduced, gave a sudden start. His sharp eye had detected something—a black speck moving slowly, far out on the sea of molten sand. The setting sun drew gradually nearer, and soon it revealed itself as a horseman. On, on he came, the camp of the Arabs seeming to be his destination.

The sun was poised a moment above the red horizon and was gone. The darkness fell like a blanket over the desert, and the stars shone out. The moon was peeping from the East.

As its first rays shone over the desert, making all things white and silvery, the horseman galloped up to the Emir, and flung himself from the back of his panting steed.

He reeled a moment, as a drunken man, then stood up and faced the Emir. He was young, tall and handsome, and dressed in much the same manner as Yusuf ben Omar.

"Father, I have escaped," he gasped. "For seven days they held me prisoner in the Camp of the Infidels—I, who went to them as an envoy. It was treachery, for I came to them with a flag of truce, and their Chief guaranteed my safety.

"Today they would have sent me to the Camp of King Richard, but I escaped, and on my own horse. For [forty?] miles they pursued me, but their steeds were not as fleet as mine. And now I am with thee—safe!" As he spoke the last word he staggered and fell, almost at his father's feet.

"I am wounded—in the breast," he gasped. "Their bows are strong, and their arrows reach far. The curse of Allah be upon them—the infidels!" Here the speaker relapsed into unconsciousness.

The Emir, with a dark look upon his face, stepped forward and lifted the limp body in his arms. The caftan at the breast was stiff with blood, and there was a gaping wound in the lad's right side, where the arrow had been wrenched forth. It was not necessarily fatal, but would require skill and time to heal.

Yusuf bore his son to the camp, and called a dark faced, wizened little man before him.

"See that he be well ere long," said the Emir, addressing this person, "else thy head, Jew, shall pay the price." He withdrew, leaving Molochi, the

Jewish physician, in sole possession of the apartment.

"Now for revenge," muttered Yusuf as he passed out of the great tent. Many of his warriors, who had seen him bring in the body of his son, had gathered in a group. They knew at once that Ali, the Emir's son, who had been sent as an envoy to the camp of Robert, one of King Richard's knights, had met with treachery.

Here a few words of explanation may be necessary. Robert de Montrevel, with a band of men-at-arms, had detached himself from the English King's army, and had set out to find Yusuf ben Omar, who was an old enemy of his against whom he had fought in the Second Crusade. He had been badly beaten, and now was longing for revenge. So, with Richard's permission, he had set off to find his old foe.

Yusuf, hearing of his coming, had sent to his camp his son Ali, as an envoy, it being the Emir's purpose to arrange a place of combat, in which he and his enemy could settle their quarrel once and forever. It was to be a single combat, the side whose Chief was beaten to leave the field in possession of the victor. And they were to fight to the death.

Robert, in spite of his given word that no harm should befall Ali, had immediately imprisoned him. Ali, as he was taken out to be sent to the camp of King Richard, had espied his horse. He called to it, and the obedient steed came galloping up. Before the soldiers could recover from their momentary confusion, the young Arab, who was unbound, leaped onto his horse and was off like a flash.

A portion of the band, returning from a foray, attempted to intercept him. One sent an arrow into his breast ere he was out of bowshot. They pursued him for many a mile, but at last he outdistanced them, and arrived as before related, at his father's camp.

The Emir called his chiefs before him, and gave them a brief account of what had happened. "Now for revenge," he said. "Tonight, by moon light, we will swoop down upon the infidels, and take their chief captive. We will kill his men without mercy, so they may not escape with tales to Richard.

Here in the desert will I deal with my prisoner. If my son dies, his head shall pay the penalty. If not, we will hold him for a ransom. Now to your horses, for though the night is yet young, the way is long. We will attack in the hours before dawn, when men sleep the heaviest, and sentinels are drowsy from their long night."

In half an hour all was ready. A few men, perhaps a score in all, were left to guard the camp. Three hundred horsemen with long spears and flowing caftans, with the Emir at their head, at a given word swept away into the desert, and like white spectres soon faded from sight. The stillness of the night fell upon the encampment, as the beating hoofs grew fainter and fainter, and naught was heard save the weird and melancholy cry of the jackal in the distance.

II

In the tent of the Emir lay Ali, still unconscious and breathing heavily. He was laid on a silken couch. Several dim lamps, suspended from the roof of the tent, burned dimly, and threw a golden radiance on the rich rugs with which the ground was covered. The Jewish physician, Molochi, stood over him, feeling his pulse. It beat rapidly, for Ali was consumed with fever. A couple of negro slaves darted about the apartment at the doctor's orders, and every now and then a swarthy face peered through the curtains, and a low voice asked for the health of Ali, the son of Yusuf bin Omar.

The young man stirred uneasily in his sleep. He muttered for a moment, and seemed to speak. The Jew bent down to catch his words. But they were inaudible, and Molochi again rose to his feet.

Again Ali stirred, his eyes opened, and he awoke. He stared about for several moments before realizing where he was. His lips moved again, and the physician heard the muttered words, "Water, water, for the love of Allah!"

Cooling drinks were brought and administered to Ali. Into one of the cups, unobserved, Molochi dropped a lozenge of bhang.

Ali lay back on the cushions. His eyes closed slowly as the influence of the narcotic made itself felt. In a little while he had fallen into a deep and peaceful sleep. The worst of the fever was over.

III

It was night in the camp of Robert de Montrevel. The knight, a burly man of about forty, and renowned for his love of wine, as well as his prowess, lay in a drunken stupor. Without, in the long watches of the night, the sentinels stood guard. In the tents his men lay, snoring heavily. The sentinels were drowsy, for they had not been relieved at Midnight, as was the custom, for their comrades, having indulged freely in liquor, had forgotten all about them.

One by one they nodded at their posts and fell asleep upon the sand. The night wore on till morning was but a few hours distant. Suddenly the desert resounded to the Moslem battle-cry, and the clatter of galloping horses. The drowsy sentinels, as they arose to their feet, rubbing the sleep from their eyes, were cut down, and the Arabs swept on towards the tents.

"Allahu-akbar!" went up the cry from three hundred throats. Spearheads waved in the moonlight, and where a few moments before all had been silence, all was now tumult. Tents were overturned upon their inmates. The drunken soldiers, entangled in the folds, were unable to rise. Before they had time to become fully aware of the situation, they were pinned to the ground by long spears.

A few gathered in a group and contested the advance of the Emir's followers. The Moslems, being at close quarters, drew their swords, and the little band was quickly cut to pieces. The ground was slippery with blood,

and the camp resounded with the clash of steel, the yells of the living, and the groans of the wounded and dying.

In the short space of ten minutes, some two hundred men lay dead or wounded upon the sand. Those who were maimed, were shown no quarter, but speedily dispatched by the swords of their assailants.

The Emir had lost very few men. Half a score of his warriors lay dead, and a few had been wounded. But in opposition to this most or all of Robert de Montrevel's soldiers had been slain, and he himself, still asleep, was a prisoner.

Ere noon of the following day the Emir and his men were back in camp. The spoil taken from the Crusaders was divided amongst them.

IV

When Robert de Montrevel awoke he found himself amongst strange and unfamiliar surroundings. He was in a large and spacious apartment, part, in fact, of the Emir's tent.

He was lying on a couch of silk, at which he marvelled greatly. Rugs from the looms of Smyrna and Ispahan covered the floor. The rough black cloth of the walls was concealed by silken draperions, and golden lamps hung from the ceiling.

A tabouret with a tray of fruit and cups of sherbet stood at his side. In the door stood the figure of a follower of the Prophet, leaning upon his long spear and surveying the captive with some measure of curiosity. Without there was a hum of voices, and the stamping of horses and cries of camels.

De Montrevel stared about stupidly, taking in the surroundings with great wonder.

"Where am I?" he muttered. "Surely I am dreaming." His eye fell upon the sentinel in the doorway. "Who art thou?" he asked in the Lingua Franca, the common medium of intercourse between Europeans and Saracens.

"A warrior of the Emir Yusuf ben Omar," was the reply of the turbanned Moslem.

Robert started violently. "I am, then, his prisoner?" he asked.

"So it seems," answered the guard, with a grin.

De Montrevel's hand went to his sword. It was gone. He stared gloomily at the wall, and then, feeling hungry, stretched out his hand to the tabouret. He ate ravenously of the fruit, and drank the sherbet. He had scarcely finished when the Emir himself entered. He told his prisoner what had occurred, and then explained his situation to him.

"If my son dies, you die," he said. "His condition is very critical. The physician is doing his best, even though he is a Jew, but the wound is worse than we expected. The arrowhead must have been rusty, for gangrene has set in, and a terrible fever has seized him. Curse you!" he cried, stepping closer, and shaking his fist in Robert's face. "If he dies, your fate is certain." Robert paled, but said nothing. Yusuf ben Omar withdrew soon afterwards, leaving him to his own gloomy thoughts.

Ali's condition, as the Emir had said, was indeed critical. Molochi, who had come to love the lad, wrung his hands. Blood poisoning had set in, and blood had collected around the lungs. The bleeding, indeed, had been mostly internal. Hemorrhages were frequent, and the young man was on fire with a terrible fever. His pulse beat like a hammer, and his face was drawn with pain.

As night approached, matters grew worse. Ali breathed fitfully, and was entirely unconscious. Molochi, in despair, announced that nothing more could be done. Yusuf, with a stern set face, strode about the room, muttering. There was a constant hum of voices and patter of feet.

About midnight the end came. Molochi had done everything he could, and the Emir realized that it would not be the doctor's fault if his son died. He spoke to the Jew. "You can do nothing more," he said, "so you had best retire." But Molochi would not go.

Soon the word went through the camp that Ali was dying. The chiefs clustered in the tent, behind the Emir, who stood close beside his son.

It was midnight. Suddenly Ali's eyes opened, and he gazed about the room. Then he looked up, stretched out his arms, with a wild cry to Allah, and fell back dead.

The chiefs filed out of the tent. Molochi wept and wrung his hands, and the Emir, with a stern and set face strode up and down. The lamps burned low as the night advanced, and ere they knew it, morning was upon them, and sorrow reigned.

V

Three days later Yusuf ben Omar stood before his captive. "I have altered your fate," he said. "I shall fight you with my own hand, and slay you, if such be the will of Allah."

So he and Robert de Montrevel went out into the sunshine. The Arabs clustered about them, and formed a ring. Three swords were laid before him, and he was given his choice. He selected the largest. The Emir picked up another, and they attacked fiercely.

But the Knight of King Richard, strong though he was, was not as lithe and skilfull as his adversary. He fought clumsily, and at every stroke he was driven back. His enemy's blade seemed everywhere. The flash blinded his eyes, and he could scarce defend himself.

The Emir had scarcely begun to fight. He was merely playing with his clumsy foe. Soon the knight was out of breath, and his strokes went wild. The Arab, darting at him from nearly every side at once, was too much. He could not turn in time to ward off the blows.

Still Yusuf continued to play with him. There was a fiendish smile on his face. A dozen times he could have driven his blade home through armor and all, but he refrained.

De Montrevel's head drooped forward, and he staggered for a moment. The Emir stopped and watched him. When he had regained his balance he was at him again.

The knight's breath came in pants. The hot sun and his adversary's agility began to tell upon him. The Emir was cool and crafty, and breathing as easily as if he were at ease in his harem. Round and round they went, stabbing, striking, and guarding, the one cool, the other furious. De Montrevel grew weaker and weaker. At last the Emir was ready. As his foe dropped his guard for a moment, his keen blade drove home, and Robert de Montrevel fell dead on the sand.

THE EMPIRE OF THE NECROMANCERS

The legend of Mmatmuor and Sodosma shall arise only in the latter cycles of Earth, when the glad legends of the prime have been forgotten. Before the time of its telling, many epochs shall have passed away, and the seas shall have fallen in their beds, and new continents shall have come to birth. Perhaps, in that day, it will serve to beguile for a little the black weariness of a dying race, grown hopeless of all but oblivion. I tell the tale as men shall tell it in Zothique, the last continent, beneath a dim sun and sad heavens where the stars come out in terrible brightness before eventide.

I

Mmatmuor and Sodosma were necromancers who came from the dark isle of Naat, to practise their baleful arts in Tinarath, beyond the shrunken seas. But they did not prosper in Tinarath: for death was deemed a holy thing by the people of that gray country; and the nothingness of the tomb was not lightly to be desecrated; and the raising up of the dead by necromancy was held in abomination.

So, after a short interval, Mmatmuor and Sodosma were driven forth by the anger of the inhabitants, and were compelled to flee toward Cincor, a desert of the south, which was peopled only by the bones and mummies of a race that the pestilence had slain in former time.

The land into which they went lay drear and leprous and ashen below the huge, ember-colored sun. Its crumbling rocks and deathly solitudes of sand would have struck terror to the hearts of common men; and, since they had been thrust out in that barren place without food or sustenance, the plight of the sorcerers might well have seemed a desperate one. But, smiling secretly, with the air of conquerors who tread the approaches of a long-coveted realm, Sodosma and Mmatmuor walked steadily on into Cincor

Unbroken before them, through fields devoid of trees and grass, and across the channels of dried-up rivers, there ran the great highway by which travelers had gone formerly between Cincor and Tinarath. Here they met no living thing; but soon they came to the skeletons of a horse and its rider, lying full in the road, and wearing still the sumptuous harness and raiment which they had worn in the flesh. And Mmatmuor and Sodosma paused before the piteous bones, on which no shred of corruption remained; and they smiled evilly at each other.

'The steed shall be yours,' said Mmatmuor, 'since you are a little the elder of us two, and are thus entitled to precedence; and the rider shall serve us both and be the first to acknowledge fealty to us in Cincor.'

Then, in the ashy sand by the wayside, they drew a threefold circle; and standing together at its center, they performed the abominable rites that compel the dead to arise from tranquil nothingness and obey henceforward, in all things, the dark will of the necromancer. Afterward they sprinkled a pinch of magic powder on the nostril-holes of the man and the horse; and the white bones, creaking mournfully, rose up from where they had lain and stood in readiness to serve their masters.

So, as had been agreed between them, Sodosma mounted the skeleton steed and took up the jeweled reins, and rode in an evil mockery of Death on his pale horse; while Mmatmuor trudged on beside him, leaning lightly on an ebon staff; and the skeleton of the man, with its rich raiment flapping loosely, followed behind the two like a servitor.

After a while, in the gray waste, they found the remnant of another horse and rider, which the jackals had spared and the sun had dried to the leanness of old mummies. These also they raised up from death; and Mmatmuor bestrode the withered charger; and the two magicians rode on in state, like errant emperors, with a lich and a skeleton to attend them. Other bones and charnel remnants of men and beasts, to which they came anon, were duly resurrected in like fashion; so that they gathered to themselves an ever-swelling train in their progress through Cincor.

Along the way, as they neared Yethlyreom, which had been the capital, they found numerous tombs and necropoli, inviolate still after many ages, and containing swathed mummies that had scarcely withered in death. All these they raised up and called from sepulchral night to do their bidding. Some they commanded to sow and till the desert fields and hoist water from the sunken wells; others they left at diverse tasks, such as the mummies had performed in life. The century-long silence was broken by the noise and tumult of myriad activities; and the lank liches of weavers toiled at their shuttles; and the corpses of plowmen followed their furrows behind carrion oxen.

Weary with their strange journey and their oft-repeated incantations, Mmatmuor and Sodosma saw before them at last, from a desert hill, the lofty spires and fair, unbroken domes of Yethlyreom, steeped in the darkening stagnant blood of ominous sunset.

'It is a goodly land,' said Mmatmuor, 'and you and I will share it between us, and hold dominion over all its dead, and be crowned as emperors on the morrow in Yethlyreom.'

'Aye,' replied Sodosma, 'for there is none living to dispute us here; and those that we have summoned from the tomb shall move and breathe only at our dictation, and may not rebel against us.'

So, in the blood-red twilight that thickened with purple, they entered Yethlyreom and rode on among the lofty, lampless mansions, and installed themselves with their grisly retinue in that stately and abandoned palace, where the dynasty of Nimboth emperors had reigned for two thousand years with dominion over Cincor.

In the dusty golden halls, they lit the empty lamps of onyx by means of their cunning sorcery, and supped on royal viands, provided from past years, which they evoked in like manner. Ancient and imperial wines were poured for them in moonstone cups by the fleshless hands of their servitors; and they drank and feasted and revelled in fantasmagoric pomp, deferring till the morrow the resurrection of those who lay dead in Yethlyreom.

They rose betimes, in the dark crimson dawn, from the opulent palace-beds in which they had slept; for much remained to be done. Everywhere in that forgotten city, they went busily to and fro, working their spells on the people that had died in the last year of the pest and had lain unburied. And having accomplished this, they passed beyond Yethlyreom into that other city of high tombs and mighty mausoleums, in which lay the Nimboth emperors and the more consequential citizens and nobles of Cincor.

Here they bade their skeleton slaves to break in the sealed doors with hammers; and then, with their sinful, tyrannous incantations, they called forth the imperial mummies, even to the eldest of the dynasty, all of whom came walking stiffly, with lightless eyes, in rich swathings sewn with flame-bright jewels. And also, later, they brought forth to a semblance of life many generations of courtiers and dignitaries.

Moving in solemn pageant, with dark and haughty and hollow faces, the dead emperors and empresses of Cincor made obeisance to Mmatmuor and Sodosma, and attended them like a train of captives through all the streets of Yethlyreom. Afterward, in the immense throne-room of the palace, the necromancers mounted the high double throne, where the rightful rulers had sat with their consorts. Amid the assembled emperors, in gorgeous and funereal state, they were invested with sovereignty by the sere hands of the mummy of Hestaiyon, earliest of the Nimboth line, who had ruled in half-mythic years. Then all the descendants of Hestaiyon, crowding the room in a great throng, acclaimed with toneless, echo-like voices the dominion of Mmatmuor and Sodosma.

Thus did the outcast necromancers find for themselves an empire and a subject people in the desolate, barren land where the men of Tinarath had driven them forth to perish. Reigning supreme over all the dead of Cincor, by virtue of their malign magic, they exercised a baleful despotism. Tribute was borne to them by fleshless porters from outlying realms; and plague-eaten corpses, and tall mummies scented with mortuary balsams, went to and fro upon their errands in Yethlyreom, or heaped before their greedy eyes, from inexhaustible vaults, the cobweb-blackened gold and dusty gems of antique time.

Dead laborers made their palace-gardens to bloom with long-perished flowers; liches and skeletons toiled for them in the mines, or reared superb, fantastic towers to the dying sun. Chamberlains and princes of old time were their cupbearers, and stringed instruments were plucked for their delight by the slim hands of empresses with golden hair that had come forth untarnished from the night of the tomb. Those that were fairest, whom the plague and the worm had not ravaged overmuch, they took for their lemans and made to serve their necrophilic lust.

II

In all things, the people of Cincor performed the actions of life at the will of Mmatmuor and Sodosma. They spoke, they moved, they ate and drank as in life. They heard and saw and felt with a similitude of the senses that had been theirs before death; but their brains were enthralled by a dreadful necromancy. They recalled but dimly their former existence; and the state to which they had been summoned was empty and troublous and shadow-like. Their blood ran chill and sluggish, mingled with water of Lethe; and the vapors of Lethe clouded their eyes.

Dumbly they obeyed the dictates of their tyrannous lords, without rebellion or protest, but filled with a vague, illimitable weariness such as the dead must know, when having drunk of eternal sleep, they are called back once more to the bitterness of mortal being. They knew no passion or desire, or delight, only the black languor of their awakening from Lethe, and a gray, ceaseless longing to return to that interrupted slumber.

Youngest and last of the Nimboth emperors was Illeiro, who had died in the first month of the plague, and had lain in his high-built mausoleum for two hundred years before the coming of the necromancers.

Raised up with his people and his fathers to attend the tyrants, Illeiro had resumed the emptiness of existence without question and had felt no surprise. He had accepted his own resurrection and that of his ancestors as

one accepts the indignities and marvels of a dream. He knew that he had come back to a faded sun, to a hollow and spectral world, to an order of things in which his place was merely that of an obedient shadow. But at first he was troubled only, like the others, by a dim weariness and pale hunger for the lost oblivion.

Drugged by the magic of his overlords, weak from the age-long nullity of death, he beheld like a somnambulist the enormities to which his fathers were subjected. Yet, somehow, after many days, a feeble spark awoke in the sodden twilight of his mind.

Like something lost and irretrievable, beyond prodigious gulfs, he recalled the pomp of his reign in Yethlyreom, and the golden pride and exultation that had been his in youth. And recalling it, he felt a vague stirring of revolt, a ghostly resentment against the magicians who had haled him forth to this calamitous mockery of life. Darkly he began to grieve for his fallen state, and the mournful plight of his ancestors and his people.

Day by day, as a cup-bearer in the halls where he had ruled aforetime, Illeiro saw the doings of Mmatmuor and Sodosma. He saw their caprices of cruelty and lust, their growing drunkenness and gluttony. He watched them wallow in their necromantic luxury, and become lax with indolence, gross with indulgence. They neglected the study of their art, they forgot many of their spells. But still they ruled, mighty and formidable; and, lolling on couches of purple and rose, they planned to lead an army of the dead against Tinarath.

Dreaming of conquest, and of vaster necromancies, they grew fat and slothful as worms that have installed themselves in a charnel rich with corruption. And pace by pace with their laxness and tyranny, the fire of rebellion mounted in the shadowy heart of Illeiro, like a flame that struggles with Lethlean damps. And slowly, with the waxing of his wrath, there returned to him something of the strength and firmness that had been his in life. Seeing the turpitude of the oppressors, and knowing the wrong that had been done to the helpless dead, he heard in his brain the clamor of stifled voices demanding vengeance.

Among his fathers, through the palace-halls of Yethlyreom, Illeiro moved silently at the bidding of the masters, or stood awaiting their command. He poured in their cups of onyx the amber vintages, brought by wizardry from hills beneath a younger sun; he submitted to their contumelies and insults. And night by night he watched them nod in their drunkenness, till they fell asleep, flushed and gross, amid their arrogated splendor.

There was little speech among the living dead; and son and father, daughter and mother, lover and beloved, went to and fro without sign of recognition, making no comment on their evil lot. But at last, one midnight, when the tyrants lay in slumber, and the flames wavered in the necromantic lamps, Illeiro took counsel with Hestaiyon, his eldest ancestor, who had been famed as a great wizard in fable and was reputed to have known the secret lore of antiquity.

Hestaiyon stood apart from the others, in a corner of the shadowy hall. He was brown and withered in his crumbling mummy-cloths; and his lightless obsidian eyes appeared to gaze still upon nothingness. He seemed not to have heard the questions of Illeiro; but at length, in a dry, rustling whisper, he responded:

'I am old, and the night of the sepulcher was long, and I have forgotten much. Yet, groping backward across the void of death, it may be that I shall retrieve something of my former wisdom; and between us we shall devise a mode of deliverance.' And Hestaiyon searched among the shreds of memory, as one who reaches into a place where the worm has been and the hidden archives of old time have rotted in their covers; till at last he remembered, and said:

'I recall that I was once a mighty wizard; and among other things, I knew the spells of necromancy; but employed them not, deeming their use and the raising up of the dead an abhorrent act. Also, I possessed other knowledge; and perhaps, among the remnants of that ancient lore, there is something which may serve to guide us now. For I recall a dim, dubitable prophecy, made in the primal years, at the founding of Yethlyreom and the empire of Cincor. The prophecy was, that an evil greater than death would befall the

emperors and the people of Cincor in future times; and that the first and the last of the Nimboth dynasty, conferring together, would effect a mode of release and the lifting of the doom. The evil was not named in the prophecy: but it was said that the two emperors would learn the solution of their problem by the breaking of an ancient clay image that guards the nethermost vault below the imperial palace in Yethlyreom.'

Then, having heard this prophecy from the faded lips of his forefather, Illeiro mused a while, and said:

'I remember now an afternoon in early youth, when searching idly through the unused vaults of our palace, as a boy might do, I came to the last vault and found therein a dusty, uncouth image of clay, whose form and countenance were strange to me. And, knowing not the prophecy. I turned away in disappointment, and went back as idly as I had come, to seek the moted sunlight.'

Then, stealing away from their heedless kinfolk, and carrying jeweled lamps they had taken from the hall, Hestaiyon and Illeiro went downward by subterranean stairs beneath the palace; and, threading like implacable furtive shadows the maze of nighted corridors, they came at last to the lowest crypt.

Here, in the black dust and clotted cobwebs of an immemorial past, they found, as had been decreed, the clay image, whose rude features were those of a forgotten earthly god. And Illeiro shattered the image with a fragment of stone; and he and Hestaiyon took from its hollow center a great sword of unrusted steel, and a heavy key of untarnished bronze, and tablets of bright brass on which were inscribed the various things to be done, so that Cincor should be rid of the dark reign of the necromancers and the people should win back to oblivious death.

So, with the key of untarnished bronze, Illeiro unlocked, as the tablets had instructed him to do, a low and narrow door at the end of the nethermost vault, beyond the broken image; and he and Hestaiyon saw, as had been prophesied, the coiling steps of somber stone that led downward to an

undiscovered abyss, where the sunken fires of earth still burned. And leaving Illeiro to ward the open door, Hestaiyon took up the sword of unruined steel in his thin hand, and went back to the hall where the necromancers slept, lying a-sprawl on their couches of rose and purple, with the wan, bloodless dead about them in patient ranks.

Upheld by the ancient prophecy and the lore of the bright tablets, Hestaiyon lifted the great sword and struck off the head of Mmatmuor and the head of Sodosma, each with a single blow. Then, as had been directed, he quartered the remains with mighty strokes. And the necromancers gave up their unclean lives, and lay supine, without movement, adding a deeper red to the rose and a brighter hue to the sad purple of their couches.

Then, to his kin, who stood silent and listless, hardly knowing their liberation, the venerable mummy of Hestaiyon spoke in sere murmurs, but authoritatively, as a king who issues commands to his children. The dead emperors and empresses stirred, like autumn leaves in a sudden wind, and a whisper passed among them and went forth from the palace, to be communicated at length, by devious ways, to all the dead of Cincor.

All that night, and during the blood-dark day that followed, by wavering torches or the light of the failing sun, an endless army of plague-eaten liches, of tattered skeletons, poured in a ghastly torrent through the streets of Yethlyreom and along the palace-hall where Hestaiyon stood guard above the slain necromancers. Unpausing, with vague, fixed eyes, they went on like driven shadows, to seek the subterranean vaults below the palace, to pass through the open door where Illeiro waited in the last vault, and then to wend downward by a thousand thousand steps to the verge of that gulf in which boiled the ebbing fires of earth. There, from the verge, they flung themselves to a second death and the clean annihilation of the bottomless flames.

But, after all had gone to their release, Hestaiyon still remained, alone in the fading sunset, beside the cloven corpses of Mmatmuor and Sodosma. There, as the tablets had directed him to do, he made trial of those spells of elder necromancy which he had known in his former wisdom, and cursed the

dismembered bodies with that perpetual life-in-death which Mmatmuor and Sodosma had sought to inflict upon the people of Cincor. And maledictions came from the pale lips, and the heads rolled horribly with glaring eyes, and the limbs and torsos writhed on their imperial couches amid clotted blood. Then, with no backward look, knowing that all was done as had been ordained and predicted from the first, the mummy of Hestaiyon left the necromancers to their doom, and went wearily through the nighted labyrinth of vaults to rejoin Illeiro.

So, in tranquil silence, with no further need of words, Illeiro and Hestaiyon passed through the open door of the nether vault, and Illeiro locked the door behind them with its key of untarnished bronze. And thence, by the coiling stairs, they wended their way to the verge of the sunken flames and were one with their kinfolk and their people in the last, ultimate nothingness.

But of Mmatmuor and Sodosma, men say that their quartered bodies crawl to and fro to this day in Yethlyreom, finding no peace or respite from their doom of life-indeath. and seeking vainly through the black maze of nether vaults the door that was locked by Illeiro.

THE ENCHANTRESS OF SYLAIRE

'Why, you big ninny! I could never marry you,' declared the demoiselle Dorothée, only daughter of the Sieur des Flèches. Her lips pouted at Anselme like two ripe berries. Her voice was honey — but honey filled with bee-stings.

'You are not so ill-looking. And your manners are fair. But I wish I had a mirror that could show you to yourself for the fool that you really are.'

'Why?' queried Anselme, hurt and puzzled.

'Because you are just an addle-headed dreamer, pouring over books like a monk. You care for nothing but silly old romances and legends. People say that you even write verses. It is lucky that you are at least the second son of the Comte du Framboisier — for you will never be anything more than that.'

'But you loved me a little yesterday,' said Anselme, bitterly. A woman finds nothing good in the man she has ceased to love.

'Dolt! Donkey!' cried Dorothée, tossing her blonde ringlets in pettish arrogance. 'If you were not all that I have said, you would never remind me of yesterday. Go, idiot — and do not return.'

Anselme, the hermit, had slept little, tossing distractedly on his hard, narrow pallet. His blood, it seemed, had been fevered by the sultriness of the summer night.

Then, too, the natural heat of youth had contributed to his unease. He had not wanted to think of women — a certain woman in particular. But, after thirteen months of solitude, in the heart of the wild woodland of Averoine, he was still far from forgetting. Crueller even than her taunts was the remembered beauty of Dorothée des Flèches: the full-ripened mouth, the

round arms and slender waist, the breast and hips that had not yet acquired their amplest curves.

Dreams had thronged the few short intervals of slumber, bringing other visitants, fair but nameless, about his couch.

He rose at sundown, weary but restless. Perhaps he would find refreshment by bathing, as he had often done, in a pool fed from the river Isoile and hidden among alder and willow thickets. The water, deliciously cool at that hour, would assuage his feverishness.

His eyes burned and smarted in the morning's gold glare when he emerged from the hut of wattled osier withes. His thoughts wandered, still full of the night's disorder. Had he been wise, after all, to quit the world, to leave his friends and family, and seclude himself because of a girl's unkindness? He could not deceive himself into thinking that he had become a hermit through any aspiration toward sainthood, such as had sustained the old anchorites. By dwelling so much, alone, was he not merely aggravating the malady he had sought to cure?

Perhaps, it occurred to him belatedly, he was proving himself the ineffectual dreamer, the idle fool that Dorothee had accused him of being. It was weakness to let himself be soured by a disappointment.

Walking with downcast eyes, he came unaware to the thickets that fringed the pool. He parted the young willows without lifting his gaze, and was about to cast off his garments. But at that instant the nearby sound of splashing water startled him from his abstraction.

With some dismay, Anselme realized that the pool was already occupied. To his further consternation, the occupant was a woman. Standing near to the center, where the pool deepened, she stirred the water with her hands till it rose and rippled against the base of her bosom. Her pale wet skin glistened like white rose-petals dipped in dew.

Anselme's dismay turned to curiosity and then to unwilling delight. He told himself that he wanted to withdraw but feared to frighten the bather by a

sudden movement. Stooping with her clear profile and her shapely left shoulder toward him, she had not perceived his presence.

A woman, young and beautiful, was the last sight he had wished to see. Nevertheless, he could not turn his eyes away. The woman was a stranger to him, and he felt that she was no girl of the village or countryside. She was lovely as any chatelaine of the great castles of Averoigne. And yet surely no lady or demoiselle would bathe unattended in a forest pool.

Thick-curling chestnut hair, bound by a light silver fillet, billowed over her shoulders and burned to red, living gold where the sun-rays searched it out through the foliage. Hung about her neck, a light golden chain seemed to reflect the lusters of her hair, dancing between her breasts as she played with the ripples.

The hermit stood watching her like a man caught in webs of sudden sorcery. His youth mounted within him, in response to her beauty's evocation.

Seeming to tire of her play, she turned her back and began to move toward the opposite shore, where, as Anselme now noticed, a pile of feminine garments lay in charming disorder on the grass. Step by step she rose from the shoaling water, revealing hips and thighs like those of an antique Venus.

Then, beyond her, he saw that a huge wolf, appearing furtively as a shadow from the thicket, had stationed itself beside the heap of clothing. Anselme had never seen such a wolf before. He remembered the tales of werewolves, that were believed to infest that ancient wood, and his alarm was touched instantly with the fear which only preternatural things can arouse. The beast was strangely colored, its fur being a glossy bluish-black. It was far larger than the common gray wolves of the forest. Crouching inscrutably, half hidden in the sedges, it seemed to await the woman as she waded shoreward.

Another moment, thought Anselme, and she would perceive her danger, would scream and turn in terror. But still she went on, her head bent forward as if in serene meditation. 'Beware the wolf!' he shouted, his voice strangely loud and seeming to break a magic stillness. Even as the words

left his lips, the wolf trotted away and disappeared behind the thickets toward the great elder forest of oaks and beeches. The woman smiled over her shoulder at Anselme, turning a short oval face with slightly slanted eyes and lips red as pomegranate flowers. Apparently she was neither frightened by the wolf nor embarrassed by Anselme's presence.

'There is nothing to fear,' she said, in a voice like the pouring of warm honey. 'One wolf, or two, will hardly attack me.'

'But perhaps there are others lurking about,' persisted Anselme. 'And there are worse dangers than wolves for one who wanders alone and unattended through the forest of Averoine. When you have dressed, with your permission I shall attend you safely to your home, whether it be near or far.'

'My home lies near enough in one sense, and far enough in another,' returned the lady, cryptically. 'But you may accompany me there if you wish.'

She turned to the pile of garments, and Anselme went a few paces away among the alders and busied himself by cutting a stout cudgel for weapon against wild beasts or other adversaries. A strange but delightful agitation possessed him, and he nearly nicked his fingers several times with the knife. The misogyny that had driven him to a woodland hermitage began to appear slightly immature, even juvenile. He had let himself be wounded too deeply and too long by the injustice of a pert child.

By the time Anselme finished cutting his cudgel, the lady had completed her toilet. She came to meet him, swaying like a lamia. A bodice of vernal green velvet, baring the upper slopes of her breasts, clung tightly about her as a lover's embrace. A purple velvet gown, flowered with pale azure and crimson, moulded itself to the sinuous outlines of her hips and legs. Her slender feet were enclosed in fine soft leather buskins, scarlet-dyed, with tips curling pertly upward. The fashion of her garments, though oddly antique, confirmed Anselme in his belief that she was a person of no common rank.

Her raiment revealed, rather than concealed, the attributes of her femininity. Her manner yielded — but it also withheld.

Anselme bowed before her with a courtly grace that belied his rough country garb.

'Ah! I can see that you have not always been a hermit,' she said, with soft mockery in her voice.

'You know me, then,' said Anselme.

'I know many things. I am Sephora, the enchantress. It is unlikely that you have heard of me, for I dwell apart, in a place that none can find — unless I permit them to find it.'

'I know little of enchantment,' admitted Anselme. 'But I can believe that you are an enchantress.'

For some minutes they had followed a little used path that serpented through the antique wood. It was a path the hermit had never come upon before in all his wanderings. Lithe saplings and low-grown boughs of huge beeches pressed closely upon it. Anselme, holding them aside for his companion, came often in thrilling contact with her shoulder and arm. Often she swayed against him, as if losing her balance on the rough ground. Her weight was a delightful burden, too soon relinquished. His pulses coursed tumultuously and would not quiet themselves again.

Anselme had quite forgotten his eremitic resolves. His blood and his curiosity, were excited more and more. He ventured various gallantries, to which Sephora gave provocative replies. His questions, however, she answered with elusive vagueness. He could learn nothing, could decide nothing, about her. Even her age puzzled him: at one moment he thought her a young girl, the next, a mature woman.

Several times, as they went on, he caught glimpses of black fur beneath the low, shadow foliage. He felt sure that the strange black wolf he had seen by

the pool was accompanying them with a furtive surveillance. But somehow his sense of alarm was dulled by the enchantment that had fallen upon him.

Now the path steepened, climbing a densely wooded hill. The trees thinned to straggly, stunted pines, encircling a brown, open moorland as the tonsure encircles a monk's crown. The moor was studded with Druidic monoliths, dating from ages prior to the Roman occupation of Averaigne. Almost at its center, there towered a massive cromlech, consisting of two upright slabs that supported a third like the lintel of a door. The path ran straight to the cromlech.

'This is the portal of my domain,' said Sephora, as they neared it. 'I grow faint with fatigue. You must take me in your arms and carry me through the ancient doorway.'

Anselme obeyed very willingly. Her cheeks paled, her eyelids fluttered and fell as he lifted her. For a moment he thought that she had fainted; but her arms crept warm and clinging around his neck.

Dizzy with the sudden vehemence of his emotion, he carried her through the cromlech. As he went, his lips wandered across her eyelids and passed deliriously to the soft red flame of her lips and the rose pallor of her throat. Once more she seemed to faint, beneath his fervor.

His limbs melted and a fiery blindness filled his eyes. The earth seemed to yield beneath them like an elastic couch as he and Sephora sank down.

Lifting his head, Anselme looked about him with swiftly growing bewilderment. He had carried Sephora only a few paces — and yet the grass on which they lay was not the sparse and sun-dried grass of the moor, but was deep, verdant and filled with tiny vernal blossoms! Oaks and beeches, huger even than those of the familiar forest, loomed umbrageously on every hand with masses of new, golden-green leafage, where he had thought to see the open upland. Looking back, he saw that the gray, lichened slabs of the cromlech itself alone reared of that former landscape.

Even the sun had changed its position. It had hung at Anselme's left, still fairly low in the east, when he and Sephora had reached the moorland. But now, shining with amber rays through a rift in the forest, it had almost touched the horizon on his right.

He recalled that Sephora had told him she was an enchantress. Here, indeed, was proof of sorcery! He eyed her with curious doubts and misgivings,

'Be not alarmed,' said Sephora, with a honeyed smile of reassurance. 'I told you that the cromlech was the doorway to my domain. We are now in a land lying outside of time and space as you have hitherto known them. The very seasons are different here. But there is no sorcery involved, except that of the great ancient Druids, who knew the secret of this hidden realm and reared those mighty slabs for a portal between the worlds. If you should weary of me, you can pass back at any time through the doorway. — But I hope that you have not tired of me so soon --'

Anselme, though still bewildered, was relieved by this information. He proceeded to prove that the hope expressed by Sephora was well-founded. Indeed, he proved it so lengthily and in such detail that the sun had fallen below the horizon before Sephora could draw a full breath and speak again.

'The air grows chill,' she said, pressing against him and shivering lightly. 'But my home is close at hand.'

They came in the twilight to a high round tower among trees and grass-grown mounds.

'Ages ago,' announced Sephora, 'there was a great castle here. Now the tower alone remains, and I am its chatelaine, the last of my family. The tower and the lands about it are named Sylaire.'

Tall dim tapers lit the interior, which was hung with rich arrases, vaguely and strangely pictured. Aged, corpse-pale servants in antique garb went to and fro with the furtiveness of specters, setting wines and foods before the enchantress and her guest in a broad hall. The wines were of rare flavor and immense age, the foods were curiously spiced. Anselme ate and drank

copiously. It was like some fantastic dream, and he accepted his surroundings as a dreamer does, untroubled by their strangeness.

The wines were potent, drugging his senses into warm oblivion. Even stronger was the inebriation of Sephora's nearness.

However, Ansehne was a little startled when the huge black wolf he had seen that morning entered the hall and fawned like a dog at the feet of his hostess.

"You see, he is quite tame," she said, tossing the wolf bits of meat from her plate. 'Often I let him come and go in the tower; and sometimes he attends me when I go forth from Sylaire.'

'He is a fierce-looking beast,' Anselme observed doubtfully. It seemed that the wolf understood the words, for he bared his teeth at Anselme, with a hoarse, preternaturally deep growl. Spots of red fire glowed in his somber eyes, like coals fanned by devils in dark pits.

'Go away, Malachie,' commanded the enchantress, sharply. The wolf obeyed her, slinking from the hall with a malign backward glance at Anselme.

'He does not like you,' said Sephora. 'That, however, is perhaps not surprising.'

Anselme, bemused with wine and love, forgot to inquire the meaning of her last words.

Morning came too soon, with upward-slanting beams that fired the tree-tops around the tower.

'You must leave me for awhile,' said Sephora, after they had breakfasted. 'I have neglected my magic of late — and there are matters into which I should inquire.'

Bending prettily, she kissed the palms of his hands. Then, with backward glances and smiles, she retired to a room at the tower's top beside her bed-

chamber. Here, she had told Anselme, her grimoires and potions and other appurtenances of magic were kept.

During her absence, Aouselme decided to go out and explore the woodland about the tower. Mindful of the black wolf, whose tameness he did not trust despite Sephora's reassurances, he took with him the cudgel he had cut that previous day in the thickets near the Isoile.

There were paths everywhere, all leading to fresh loveliness. Truly, Sylaire was a region of enchantment. Drawn by the dreamy golden light, and the breeze laden with the freshness of spring flowers, Anselme wandered on from glade to glade.

He came to a grassy hollow, where a tiny spring bubbled from beneath mossed boulders. He seated himself on one of the boulders, musing on the strange happiness that had entered his life so unexpectedly. It was like one of the old romances, the tales of glamor and fantasy, that he had loved to read. Smiling, he remembered the gibes with which Dorothée des Flèches had expressed her disapproval of his taste for such reading-matter. What, he wondered, would Dorothée think now? At any rate, she would hardly care -

His reflections were interrupted. There was a rustling of leaves, and the black wolf emerged from the bosage in front of him, whining as if to attract his attention. The beast had somehow lost his appearance of fierceness.

Curious, and a little alarmed, Anselme watched in wonder while the wolf began to uproot with his paws certain plants that somewhat resembled wild garlic. These he devoured with palpable eagerness.

Anselme's mouth gaped at the thing which ensued. One moment the wolf was before him. Then, where the wolf had been, there rose up the figure of a man, lean, powerful, with blue-black hair and beard, and darkly flaming eyes. The hair grew almost to his brows, the beard nearly to his lower eye-lashes. His arms, legs, shoulders and chest were matted with bristles.

'Be assured that I mean you no harm,' said the man. 'I am Malachie du Marais, a sorcerer, and the one-time lover of Sephora. Tiring of me, and fearing my wizardry, she turned me into a werewolf by giving me secretly the waters of a certain pool that lies amid this enchanted domain of Sylaire. The pool is cursed from old time with the infection of lycanthropy — and Sephora has added her spells to its power. I can throw off the wolf shape for a little while during the dark of the moon. At other times I can regain my human form, though only for a few minutes, by eating the root that you saw me dig and devour. The root is very scarce.'

Anselme felt that the sorceries of Sylaire were more complicated than he had hitherto imagined. But amid his bewilderment he was unable to trust the weird being before him. He had heard many tales of werewolves, who were reputedly common in medieval France. Their ferocity, people said, was that of demons rather than of mere brutes.

'Allow me to warn you of the grave danger in which you stand,' continued Malachie du Marais. 'You were rash to let yourself be enticed by Sephora. If you are wise, you will leave the purlieu of Sylaire with all possible dispatch. The land is old in evil and sorcery, and all who dwell within it are ancient as the land, and are equally accursed. The servants of Sephora, who waited upon you yestereve, are vampires that sleep by day in the tower vaults and come forth by night. They go out through the Druid portal, to prey on the people of Averoine.'

He paused as if to emphasize the words that followed. His eyes glittered balefully, and his deep voice assumed a hissing undertone. 'Sephora herself is an ancient lamia, well-nigh immortal, who feeds on the vital forces of young men. She has had many lovers throughout the ages — and I must deplore, even though I cannot specify, their ultimate fate. The youth and beauty that she retains are illusions. If you could see Sephora as she really is, you would recoil in revulsion, cured of your perilous love; You would see her — unthinkably old, and hideous with infamies.'

'But how can such things be?' queried Anselme. 'Truly, I cannot believe you.'

Malachie shrugged his hairy shoulders. 'At least I have warned you. But the wolf-change approaches, and I must go. If you will come to me later, in my abode which lies a mile to the westward of Sephora's tower, perhaps I can convince you that my statements are the truth. In the meanwhile, ask yourself if you have seen any mirrors, such as a beautiful young woman would use, in Sephora's chamber. Vampires and lamias are afraid of mirrors — for a good reason.'

Anselme went back to the tower with a troubled mind. What Malachie had told him was incredible. Yet there was the matter of Sephora's servants. He had hardly noticed their absence that morning — and yet he had not seen them since the previous eve — And he could not remember any mirrors among Sephora's various feminine belongings.

He found Sephora awaiting him in the tower's lower hall. One glance at the utter sweetness of her womanhood, and he felt ashamed of the doubts with which Maiachie had inspired him.

Sephora's blue-gray eyes questioned him, deep and tender as those of some pagan goddess of love. Reserving no detail, he told her of his meeting with the werewolf.

'Ah! I did well to trust my intuitions,' she said. 'Last night, when the black wolf growled and glowered at you, it occurred to me that he was perhaps becoming more dangerous than I had realized; This morning, in my chamber of magic, I made use of my clairvoyant powers and I learned much. Indeed, I have been careless. Malachie has become a menace to my security. Also, he hates you, and would destroy our happiness.'

'Is it true, then,' questioned Anselme, 'that he was your lover, and that you turned him into a werewolf?'

'He was my lover — long, long ago. But the werewolf form was his own choice, assumed out of evil curiosity by drinking from the pool of which he told you. He has regretted it since, for the wolf shape, while giving him certain powers of harm, in reality limits his actions and his sorceries. He

wishes to return to human shape, and if he succeeds, will become doubly dangerous to us both.

'I should have watched him well — for I now find that he has stolen from me the recipe of antidote to the werewolf waters. My clairvoyance tells me that he has already brewed the antidote, in the brief intervals of humanity regained by chewing a certain root. When he drinks the potion, as I think that he means to do before long, he will regain human form -permanently. He waits only for the dark of the moon, when the werewolf spell is at its weakest.'

'But why should Malachie hate me?' asked Anselme. 'And how can I help you against him?'

'That first question is slightly stupid, my dear. Of course, he is jealous of you. As for helping me — well, I thought of a good trick to play on Malachie.'

She produced a small purple glass vial, triangular in shape, from the folds of her bodice.

'This vial,' she told him, 'is filled with the water of the werewolf pool. Through my clairvoyant vision, I learned that Malachie keeps his newly brewed potion in a vial of similar size, shape and color. If you can go to his den and substitute one vial for the other without detection, I believe that the results will be quite amusing.'

'Indeed, I will go,' Ansehne assured her.

'The present should be a favorable time,' said Sephora. 'It is now within an hour of noon; and Malachie often hunts at this time. If you should find him in his den, or he should return while you are there, you can say that you came in response to his invitation.'

She gave Anselme careful instructions that would enable to find the werewolf's den without delay. Also, she gave him a sword, saying that the blade had been tempered to the chanting of magic spells that made it

effective against such beings as Malachie. 'The wolf's temper has grown uncertain,' she warned. 'If he should attack you, your alder stick would ' prove a poor weapon.'

It was easy to locate the den, for well-used paths ran toward it with little deviation. The place was the mounded remnant of a tower that had crumbled down into grassy earth and mossy blocks. The entrance had once been a lofty doorway: now it was only a hole, such as a large animal would make in leaving and returning to its burrow.

Anselme hesitated before the hole. 'Are you there, Malachie du Marais?' he shouted. There was no answer, no sound of movement from within. Anselme shouted once more. At last, stooping on hands and knees, he entered the den.

Light poured through several apertures, latticed with wandering tree-roots, where the mound had fallen in from above. The place was a cavern rather than a room. It stank with carrion remnants into whose nature Anselme did not inquire too closely. The ground was littered with bones, broken stems and leaves of plants, and shattered or rusted vessels of alchemic use. A verdigris-eaten kettle hung from a tripod above ashes and ends of charred faggots. Rain-sodden grimoires lay mouldering in rusty metal covers. The three legged ruin of a table was propped against the wall. It was covered with a medley of oddments, among which Anselme discerned a purple vial resembling the one given him by Sephora.

In one corner was a litter of dead grass. The strong, rank odor of a wild beast mingled with the carrion stench.

Anselme looked about and listened cautiously. Then, without delay, he substituted Sephora's vial for the one on Malachie's table. The stolen vial he placed under his jerkin.

There was a padding of feet at the cavern's entrance. Anselme turned — to confront the black wolf. The beast came toward him, crouching tensely as if about to spring, with eyes glaring like crimson coals of Avernus. Anselme's

fingers dropped to the hilt of the enchanted sword that Sephora had given him.

The wolf's eyes followed his fingers, It seemed that he recognized the sword. He turned from Anselme, and began to chew some roots of the garlic-like plant, which he had doubtless collected to make possible those operations which he could hardly have carried on in wolfish form.

This time, the transformation was not complete. The head, and body of Malachie du Marais rose up again before Ansehne; but the legs were the hind legs of a monstrous wolf. He was like some bestial hybrid of antique legend.

'Your visit honors me,' he said, half snarling, with suspicion in his eyes, and voice. 'Few have cared to enter my poor abode, and I am grateful to you. In recognition of your kindness, I shall make you a present.'

With the padding movements of a wolf, he went over to the ruinous table and groped amid the confused oddments with which it was covered. He drew out an oblong silver mirror, brightly burnished, with jeweled handle, such as a great lady or damsel might own. This he offered to Anselme.

'I give you the mirror of Reality,' he announced. 'In it, all things are reflected according to their true nature. The illusions of enchantment cannot deceive it. You disbelieved me, when I warned you against Sephora. But if you hold this mirror to her face and observe the reflection, you will see that her beauty, like everything else in Sylaire, is a hollow lie — the mask of ancient horror and corruption. If you doubt me, hold the mirror to my face — now: for I, too, am part of the land's immemorial evil.'

Anselme took the silver oblong and obeyed Malachie's injunction. A moment, and his nerveless fingers almost dropped the mirror. He had seen reflected within it a face that the sepulcher should have hidden long ago -

The horror of that sight had shaken him so deeply that he could not afterwards recall the circumstances of his departure from the werewolf's lair. He had kept the werewolf's gift; but more than once he had been

prompted to throw it away. He tried to tell himself that what he had seen was merely the result of some wizard trick. He refused to believe that any mirror would reveal Sephora as anything but the young and lovely sweetheart whose kisses were still warm on his lips.

All such matters, however, were driven from Anselme's mind by the situation that he found when he re-entered the tower hall. Three visitors had arrived during his absence. They stood fronting Sephoia, who, with a tranquil smile on her lips, was apparently trying to explain something to them. Anselme recognized the visitors with much amazement, not untouched with consternation.

One of them was Dorothée des Flèches, clad in a trim traveling habit. The others were two serving men of her father, armed with longbows, quivers of arrows, broadswords and daggers. In spite of this array of weapons, they did not look any too comfortable or at home. But Dorothée seemed to have retained her usual matter-of-fact assurance.

'What are you doing in this queer place, Anselme?' she cried. 'And who is this woman, this chatelaine of Sylaire, as she calls herself?'

Anselme felt that she would hardly understand any answer that he could give to either query. He looked at Sephora, then back at Dorothée. Sephora was the essence of all the beauty and romance that he had ever craved. How could he have fancied himself in love with Dorothée, how could he have spent thirteen months in a hermitage because of her coldness and changeability? She was pretty enough, with the common bodily charms of youth. But she was stupid, wanting in imagination — prosy already in the flush of her girlhood as a middle-aged housewife. Small wonder that she had failed to understand him.

'What brings you here?' he countered. 'I had not thought to see you again.'

'I missed you, Anselme,' she sighed. 'People said that you had left the world because of your love for me, and had become a hermit. At last I came to seek you. But you had disappeared. Some hunters had seen you pass yesterday with a strange woman, across the moor of Druid stones. They

said you had both vanished beyond the cromlech, fading as if in air. Today I followed you with my father's serving men. We found ourselves in this strange region, of which no one has ever heard. And now this woman — '

The sentence was interrupted by a mad howling that filled the room with eldritch echoes. The black wolf, with jaws foaming and slavering, broke in through the door that had been opened to admit Sephora's visitors. Dorothee des Fleches began to scream as he dashed straight toward her, seeming to single her out for the first victim of his rabid fury.

Something, it was plain, had maddened him. Perhaps the water of the werewolf pool, substituted for the antidote, had served to redouble the original curse of lycanthropy.

The two serving men, bristling with their arsenal of weapons, stood like effigies. Anselme drew the sword given him by the enchantress, and leaped forward between Dorothee and the wolf. He raised his weapon, which was straightbladed, and suitable for stabbing. The mad werewolf sprang as if hurled from a catapult, and his red, open gorge was spitted on the out-thrust point. Anselme's hand was jarred on the sword-hilt, and the shock drove him backward. The wolf fell thrashing at Anselme's feet. His jaws had clenched on the blade. The point protruded beyond the stiff bristles of his neck.

Anselme tugged vainly at the sword. Then the black-furred body ceased to thrash — and the blade came easily. It had been withdrawn from the sagging mouth of the dead ancient sorcerer, Malachie du Marais, which lay before Anselme on the flagstones. The sorcerer's face was now the face that Anselme had seen in the mirror, when he held it up at Malachie's injunction.

'You have saved me! How wonderful!' cried Dorothee.

Anselme saw that she had started toward him with out-thrust arms. A moment more, and the situation would become embarrassing.

He recalled the mirror, which he had kept under his jerkin, together with the vial stolen from Malachie du Marais. What, he wondered, would Dorothee

see in its burnished depths?

He drew the mirror forth swiftly and held it to her face as she advanced upon him. What she beheld in the mirror he never knew but the effect was startling. Dorotheé gasped, and her eyes dilated in manifest horror. Then, covering her eyes with her hands, as if to shut out some ghastly vision, she ran shrieking from the hall. The serving men followed her. The celerity of their movements made it plain that they were not sorry to leave this dubious lair of wizards and witches.

Sephora began to laugh softly. Anselme found himself chuckling. For awhile they abandoned themselves to uproarious mirth. Then Sephora sobered.

'I know why Malachie gave you the mirror,' she said. 'Do you not wish to see my reflection in it?'

Anselme realized that he still held the mirror in his hand. Without answering Sephora, he went over to the nearest window, which looked down on a deep pit lined with bushes, that had been part of an ancient, half-filled moat. He hurled the silver oblong into the pit.

'I am content with what my eyes tell me, without the aid of any mirror,' he declared. 'Now let us pass to other matters which have been interrupted too long.'

Again the clinging deliciousness of Sephora was in his arms, and her fruit-soft mouth was crushed beneath his hungry lips.

The strongest of all enchantments held them in its golden circle.

THE END OF THE STORY

The following narrative was found among the papers of Christophe Morand, a young law-student of Tours, after his unaccountable disappearance during a visit at his father's home near Moulins, in November, 1798:

A sinister brownish-purple autumn twilight, made premature by the imminence of a sudden thunderstorm, had filled the forest of Averoine. The trees along my road were already blurred to ebon masses, and the road itself, pale and spectral before me in the thickening gloom, seemed to waver and quiver slightly, as with the tremor of some mysterious earthquake. I spurred my horse, who was woefully tired with a journey begun at dawn, and had fallen hours ago to a protesting and reluctant trot, and we galloped adown the darkening road between enormous oaks that seemed to lean toward us with boughs like clutching fingers as we passed.

With dreadful rapidity, the night was upon us, the blackness became a tangible clinging veil; a nightmare confusion and desperation drove me to spur my mount again with a more cruel rigor; and now, as we went, the first far-off mutter of the storm mingled with the clatter of my horse's hoofs, and the first lightning flashes illumed our way, which, to my amazement (since I believed myself on the main highway through Averoine), had inexplicably narrowed to a well-trodden footpath. Feeling sure that I had gone astray, but not caring to retrace my steps in the teeth of darkness and the towering clouds of the tempest, I hurried on, hoping, as seemed reasonable, that a path so plainly worn would lead eventually to some house or chateau, where I could find refuge for the night. My hope was wellfounded, for within a few minutes I descried a glimmering light through the forest-boughs, and came suddenly to an open glade, where, on a gentle eminence, a large building loomed, with several litten windows in the lower story, and a top that was well-nigh indistinguishable against the bulks of driven cloud.

'Doubtless a monastery,' I thought, as I drew rein, and descending from my exhausted mount, lifted the heavy brazen knocker in the form of a dog's head and let it fall on the oaken door. The sound was unexpectedly loud and sonorous, with a reverberation almost sepulchral, and I shivered involuntarily, with a sense of startlement, of unwonted dismay. This, a moment later, was wholly dissipated when the door was thrown open and a tall, ruddyfeatured monk stood before me in the cheerful glow of the cressets that illumed a capacious hallway.

'I bid you welcome to the abbey of Perigon,' he said, in a suave rumble, and even as he spoke, another robed and hooded figure appeared and took my horse in charge. As I murmured my thanks and acknowledgments, the storm broke and tremendous gusts of rain, accompanied by evernearning peals of thunder, drove with demoniac fury on the door that had closed behind me.

"It is fortunate that you found us when you did," observed my host. "Twere ill for man and beast to be abroad in such a hell-brew."

Divining without question that I was hungry as well as tired, he led me to the refectory and set before me a bountiful meal of mutton, brown bread, lentils and a strong excellent red wine.

He sat opposite me at the refectory table while I ate, and, with my hunger a little mollified, I took occasion to scan him more attentively. He was both tall and stoutly built, and his features, where the brow was no less broad than the powerful jaw, betokened intellect as well as a love for good living. A certain delicacy and refinement, an air of scholarship, of good taste and good breeding, emanated from him, and I thought to myself: 'This monk is probably a connoisseur of books as well as of wines.' Doubtless my expression betrayed the quickening of my curiosity, for he said, as if in answer:

'I am Hilaire, the abbot of Perigon. We are a Benedictine order, who live in amity with God and with all men, and we do not hold that the spirit is to be enriched by the mortification or impoverishment of the body. We have in our butteries an abundance of wholesome fare, in our cellars the best and

oldest vintages of the district of Averroigne. And, if such thiags interest you, as mayhap they do, we have a library that is stocked with rare tomes, with precious manuscripts, with the finest works of heathendom and Christendom, even to certain unique writings that survived the holocaust of Alexandria.'

'I appreciate your hospitality,' I said, bowing. 'I am Christophe Morand, a law-student, on my way home from Tours to my father's estate near Moulins. I, too, am a lover of books, and nothing would delight me more than the privilege of inspecting a library so rich and curious as the one whereof you speak.'

Forthwith, while I finished my meal, we fell to discussing the classics, and to quoting and capping passages from Latin, Greek or Christian authors. My host, I soon discovered, was a scholar of uncommon attainments, with an erudition, a ready familiarity with both ancient and modern literature that made my own seem as that of the merest beginner by comparison. He, on his part, was so good as to commend my far from perfect Latin, and by the time I had emptied my bottle of red wine we were chatting familiarly like old friends.

All my fatigue had now flown, to be succeeded by a rare sense of well-being, of physical comfort combined with mental alertness and keenness. So, when the abbot suggested that we pay a visit to the library, I assented with alacrity.

He led me down a long corridor, on each side of which were cells belonging to the brothers of the order, and unlocked, with a huge brazen key that depended from his girdle, the door of a great room with lofty ceiling and several deep-set windows. Truly, he had not exaggerated the resources of the library; for the long shelves were overcrowded with books, and many volumes were piled high on the tables or stacked in corners. There were rolls of papyrus, of parchment, of vellum; there were strange Byzantine or Coptic bibles; there were old Arabic and Persian manuscripts with floriated or jewel-studded covers; there were scores of incunabula from the first printing-presses; there were innumerable monkish copies of antique

authors, bound in wood or ivory, with rich illuminations and lettering that was often in itself a work of art.

With a care that was both loving and meticulous, the abbot Hilaire brought out volume after volume for my inspection. Many of them I had never seen before; some were unknown to me even by fame or rumor. My excited interest, my unfeigned enthusiasm, evidently pleased him, for at length he pressed a hidden spring in one of the library tables and drew out a long drawer, in which, he told me, were certain treasures that he did not care to bring forth for the edification or delectation of many, and whose very existence was undreamed of by the monks.

'Here,' he continued, 'are three odes by Catullus which you will not find in any published edition of his works. Here, also, is an original manuscript of Sappho — a complete copy of a poem otherwise extant only in brief fragments; here are two of the lost tales of Miletus, a letter of Perides to Aspasia, an unknown dialogue of Plato and an old Arabian work on astronomy, by some anonymous author, in which the theories of Copernicus are anticipated. And, lastly, here is the somewhat infamous *Histoire d'Amour*, by Bernard de Vaillantcoeur, which was destroyed immediately upon publication, and of which only one other copy is known to exist.'

As I gazed with mingled awe and curiosity on the unique, unheard-of treasures he displayed, I saw in one corner of the drawer what appeared to be a thin volume with plain untitled binding of dark leather. I ventured to pick it up, and found that it contained a few sheets of ciosely written manuscript in old French.

'And this?' I queried, turning to look at Hilaire, whose face, to my amazement, had suddenly assumed a melancholy and troubled expression.

'It were better not to ask, my son.' He crossed himself as he spoke, and his voice was no longer mellow, but harsh, agitated, full of a sorrowful perturbation. 'There is a curse on the pages that you hold in your hand: an evil spell, a malign power is attached to them, and he who would venture to peruse them is henceforward in dire peril both of body and soul.' He took

the little volume from me as he spoke, and returned it to the drawer, again crossing himself carefully as he did so.

'But, father,' I dared to expostulate, 'how can such things be? How can there be danger in a few written sheets of parchment?'

'Christophe, there are things beyond your understanding, things that it were not well for you to know. The might of Satan is manifestable in devious modes, in diverse manners; there are other temptations than those of the world and the flesh, there are evils no less subtle than irresistible, there are hidden heresies, and necromancies other than those which sorcerers practise.'

'With what, then, are these pages concerned, that such occult peril, such unholy power lurks within them?'

'I forbid you to ask.' His tone was one of great rigor, with a finality that dissuaded me from further questioning.

'For you, my son,' he went on, 'the danger would be doubly great, because you are young, ardent, full of desires and curiosities. Believe me, it is better to forget that you have ever seen this manuscript.' He closed the hidden drawer, and as he did so, the melancholy troubled look was replaced by his former benignity.

'Now,' he said, as he turned to one of the book-shelves, 'I will show you the copy of Ovid that was owned by the poet Petrarch.' He was again the mellow scholar, the kindly, jovial host, and it was evident that the mysterious manuscript was not to be referred to again. But his odd perturbation, the dark and awful hints he had let fall, the vague terrific terms of his proscription, had all served to awaken my wildest curiosity, and, though I felt the obsession to be unreasonable, I was quite unable to think of anything else for the rest of the evening. All manner of speculations, fantastic, absurd, outrageous, ludicrous, terrible, defiled through my brain as I duly admired the incunabula which Hilaire took down so tenderly from the shelves for my delectation.

At last, toward midnight, he led me to my room — a room especially reserved for visitors, and with more of comfort, of actual luxury in its hangings, carpets and deeply quilted bed than was allowable in the cells of the monks or of the abbot himself. Even when Hilaire had withdrawn, and I had proved for my satisfaction the softness of the bed allotted me, my brain still whirled with questions concerning the forbidden manuscript. Though the storm had now ceased, it was long before I fell asleep; but slumber, when it finally came, was dreamless and profound.

When I awoke, a river of sunshine clear as molten gold was pouring through my window. The storm had wholly vanished, and no lightest tatter of cloud was visible anywhere in the pale-blue October heavens. I ran to the window and peered out on a world of autumnal forest and fields all asparkle with the diamonds of rain. All was beautiful, all was idyllic to a degree that could be fully appreciated only by one who had lived for a long time, as I had, within the walls of a city, with towered buildings in lieu of trees and cobbled pavements where grass should be. But, charming as it was, the foreground held my gaze only for a few moments; then, beyond the tops of the trees, I saw a hill, not more than a mile distant, on whose summit there stood the ruins of some old chateau, the crumbling, brokendown condition of whose walls and towers was plainly visible. It drew my gaze irresistibly, with an overpowering sense of romantic attraction, which somehow seemed so natural, so inevitable, that I did not pause to analyze or wonder; and once having seen it, I could not take my eyes away, but lingering at the window for how long I knew not, scrutinizing as closely as I could the details of each timeshaken turret and bastion. Some undefinable fascination was inherent in the very form, the extent, the disposition of the pile — some fascination not dissimilar to that exerted by a strain of music, by a magical combination of words in poetry, by the features of a beloved face. Gazing, I lost myself in reveries that I could not recall afterward, but which left behind them the same tantalizing sense of innominable delight which forgotten nocturnal dreams may sometimes leave.

I was recalled to the actualities of life by a gentle knock at my door, and realized that I had forgotten to dress myself. It was the abbot, who came to inquire how I had passed the night, and to tell me that breakfast was ready

whenever I should care to arise. For some reason, I felt a little embarrassed, even shamefaced, to have been caught day-dreaming; and though this was doubtless unnecessary, I apologized for my dilatoriness. Hilaire, I thought, gave me a keen, inquiring look, which was quickly withdrawn, as, with the suave courtesy of a good host, he assured me that there was nothing whatever for which I need apologize.

When I had breakfast, I told Hilaire, with many expressions of gratitude for his hospitality, that it was time for me to resume my journey. But his regret at the announcement of my departure was so unfeigned, his invitation to tarry for at least another night was so genuinely hearty, so sincerely urgent, that I consented to remain. In truth, I required no great amount of solicitation, for, apart from the real liking I had taken to Hilaire, the mystery of the forbidden manuscript had entirely enslaved my imagination, and I was loth to leave without having learned more concerning it. Also, for a youth with scholastic leanings, the freedom of the abbot's library was a rare privilege, a precious opportunity not to be passed over.

'I should like,' I said, 'to pursue certain studies while I am here, with the aid of your incomparable collection.'

'My son, you are more than welcome to remain for any length of time, and you can have access to my books whenever it suits your need or inclination.' So saying, Hilaire detached the key of the library from his girdle and gave it to me. 'There are duties,' he went on, 'which will call me away from the monastery for a few hours today, and doubtless you will desire to study in my absence.'

A little later, he excused himself and departed. With inward felicitations on the longed-for opportunity that had fallen so readily into my hands, I hastened to the library, with no thought save to read the proscribed manuscript. Giving scarcely a glance at the laden shelves, I sought the table with the secret drawer, and fumbled for the spring. After a little anxious delay, I pressed the proper spot and drew forth the drawer. An impulsion that had become a veritable obsession, a fever of curiosity that bordered upon actual madness, drove me, and if the safety of my soul had really

depended upon it, I could not have denied the desire which forced me to take from the drawer the thin volume with plain unlettered binding.

Seating myself in a chair near one of the windows, I began to peruse the pages, which were only six in number. The writing was peculiar, with letter-forms of a fantasticality I had never met before, and the French was not only old but well-nigh barbarous in its quaint singularity. Notwithstanding the difficulty I found in deciphering them, a mad, unaccountable thrill ran through me at the first words, and I read on with all the sensations of a man who had been bewitched or who had drunken a philtre of bewildering potency.

There was no title, no date, and the writing was a narrative which began almost as abruptly as it ended. It concerned one Gerard, Comte de Venteillon, who, on the eve of his marriage to the renowned and beautiful demoiselle, Eleanor des Lys, had met in the forest near his chateau a strange, half-human creature with hoofs and horns. Now Gerard, as the narrative explained, was a knightly youth of indisputably proven valor, as well as a true Christian; so, in the name of our Savior, Jesus Christ, he bade the creature stand and give an account of itself.

Laughing wildly in the twilight, the bizarre being capered before him, and cried:

'I am a satyr, and your Christ is less to me than the weeds that grow on your kitchen-middens.'

Appalled by such blasphemy, Gerard would have drawn his sword to slay the creature, but again it cried, saying:

'Stay, Gerard de Venteillon, and I will tell you a secret, knowing which, you will forget the worship of Christ, and forget your beautiful bride of tomorrow, and turn your back on the world and on the very sun itself with no reluctance and no regret.'

Now, albeit half unwillingly, Gerard lent the satyr an ear and it came closer and whispered to him. And that which it whispered is not known; but before

it vanished amid the blackening shadows of the forest, the satyr spoke aloud once more, and said:

'The power of Christ has prevailed like a black frost on all the woods, the fields, the rivers, the mountains, where abode in their felicity the glad, immortal goddesses and nymphs of yore. But still, in the cryptic caverns of earth, in places far underground, like the hell your priests have fabled, there dwells the pagan loveliness, there cry the pagan ecstasies.' And with the last words, the creature laughed again its wild unhuman laugh, and disappeared among the darkening boles of the twilight trees.

From that moment, a change was upon Gerard de Venteillon. He returned to his chateau with downcast mien, speaking no cheery or kindly word to his retainers, as was his wont, but sitting or pacing always in silence, and scarcely heeding the food that was set before him. Nor did he go that evening to visit his betrothed, as he had promised; but, toward midnight, when a waning moon had arisen red as from a bath of blood, he went forth clandestinely by the postern door of the chateau, and followed an old, halfobliterated trail through the woods, found his way to the ruins of the Chateau des Faussesflammes, which stands on a hill opposite the Benedictine abbey of Perigon.

Now these ruins (said the manuscript) are very old, and have long been avoided by the people of the district; for a legendry of immemorial evil clings about them, and it is said that they are the dwelling-place of foul spirits, the rendezvous of sorcerers and succubi. But Gerard, as if oblivious or fearless of their ill renown, plunged like one who is devil-driven into the shadow of the crumbling walls, and went, with the careful-groping of a man who follows some given direction, to the northern end of the courtyard. There, directly between and below the two centermost windows, which, it may be, looked forth from the chamber of forgotten chatelaines, he pressed with his right foot on a flagstone differing from those about it in being of a triangular form. And the flagstone moved and tilted beneath his foot, revealing a flight of granite steps that went down into the earth. Then, lighting a taper he had brought with him, Gerard descended the steps, and the flagstone swung into place behind him.

On the morrow, his betrothed, Eleanor des Lys, and all her bridal train, waited vainly for him at the cathedral of Vyones, the principal town of Averoigne, where the wedding had been set. And from that time his face was beheld by no man, and no vaguest rumor of Gerard de Venteillon or of the fate that befell him has ever passed among the living...

Such was the substance of the forbidden manuscript, and thus it ended. As I have said before, there was no date, nor was there anything to indicate by whom it had been written or how the knowledge of the happenings related had come into the writer's possession. But, oddly enough, it did not occur to me to doubt their veridity for a moment; and the curiosity I had felt concerning the contents of the manuscript was now replaced by a burning desire, a thousandfold more powerful, more obsessive, to know the ending of the story and to learn what Gerard de Venteillon had found when he descended the hidden steps.

In reading the tale, it had of course occurred to me that the ruins of the Chateau des Faussesflames, described therein, were the very same ruins I had seen that morning from my chamber window; and pondering this, I became more and more possessed by an insane fever, by a frenetic, unholy excitement. Returning the manuscript to the secret drawer, I left the library and wandered for awhile in an aimless fashion about the corridors of the monastery. Chancing to meet there the same monk who had taken my horse in charge the previous evening, I ventured to question him, as discreetly and casually as I could, regarding the ruins which were visible from the abbey windows.

He crossed himself, and a frightened look came over his broad, placid face at my query.

'The ruins are those of the Chateau des Faussesflames,' he replied. 'For untold years, men say, they have been the haunt of unholy spirits, of witches and demons; and festivals not to be described or even named are held within their walls. No weapon known to man, no exorcism or holy water, has ever prevailed against these demons; many brave cavaliers and monks have disappeared amid the shadows of Faussesflames, never to

return; and once, it is told, an abbot of Perigon went thither to make war on the powers of evil; but what befell him at the hands of the succubi is not known or conjectured. Some say that the demons are abominable hags whose bodies terminate in serpentine coils; others that they are women of more than mortal beauty, whose kisses are a diabolic delight that consumes the flesh of men with the fierceness of hell-fire... As for me, I know not whether such tales are true; but I should not care to venture within the walls of Faussesflammes.'

Before he had finished speaking, a resolve had sprung to life full-born in my mind: I felt that I must go to the Chateau des Faussesflammes and learn for myself, if possible, all that could be learned. The impulse was immediate, overwhelming, ineluctable; and even if I had so desired, I could no more have fought against it than if I had been the victim of some sorcerer's involution. The proscription of the abbot Hilaire, the strange unfinished tale in the old manuscript, the evil legendry at which the monk had now hinted — all these, it would seem, should have served to frighten and deter me from such a resolve; but, on the contrary, by some bizarre inversion of thought, they seemed to conceal some delectable mystery, to denote a hidden world of ineffable things, of vague undreamable pleasures that set my brain on fire and made my pulses throb deliriously. I did not know, I could not conceive, of what these pleasures would consist; but in some mystical manner I was as sure of their ultimate reality as the abbot Hilaire was sure of heaven.

I determined to go that very afternoon, in the absence of Hilaire, who, I felt instinctively, might be suspicious of any such intention on my part and would surely be inimical toward its fulfillment.

My preparations were very simple: I put in my pockets a small taper from my room and the heel of a loaf of bread from the refectory; and making sure that a little dagger which I always carried was in its sheath, I left the monastery forthwith. Meeting two of the brothers in the courtyard, I told them I was going for a short walk in the neighboring woods. They gave me a jovial 'pax vobiscum' and went upon their way in the spirit of the words.

Heading directly as I could for Faussesflammes, whose turrets were often lost behind the high and interlacing boughs, I entered the forest. There were no paths, and often I was compelled to brief detours and divagations by the thickness of the underbrush. In my feverous hurry to reach the ruins, it seemed hours before I came to the top of the hill which Faussesflammes surmounted, but probably it was little more than thirty minutes. Climbing the last declivity of the boulder-strewn slope, I came suddenly within view of the chateau, standing close at hand in the center of the level table which formed the summit. Trees had taken root in its broken-down walls, and the ruinous gateway that gave on the courtyard was half-choked by bushes, brambles and nettle-plants. Forcing my way through, not without difficulty, and with clothing that had suffered from the bramblethorns, I went, like Gerard de Venteillon in the old manuscript, to the northern end of the court. Enormous evil-looking weeds were rooted between the flagstones, rearing their thick and fleshy leaves that had turned to dull sinister maroons and purples with the onset of autumn. But I soon found the triangular flagstone indicated in the tale, and without the slightest delay or hesitation I pressed upon it with my right foot.

A mad shiver, a thrill of adventurous triumph that was mingled with something of trepidation, leaped through me when the great flagstone tilted easily beneath my foot, disclosing dark steps of granite, even as in the story. Now, for a moment, the vaguely hinted horrors of the monkish legends became imminently real in my imagination, and I paused before the black opening that was to engulf me, eondering if some satanic spell had not drawn me thither to perils of unknown terror and inconceivable gravity.

Only for a few instants, however, did I hesitate. Then the sense of peril faded, the monkish horrors became a fantastic dream, and the charm of things unformulable, but ever closer at hand, always more readily attainable, tightened about me like the embrace of amorous arms. I lit my taper, I descended the stair; and even as behind Gerard de Venteillon, the triangular block of stone silently resumed its place in the paving of the court above me. Doubtless it was moved by some mechanism operable by a man's weight on one of the steps; but I did not pause to consider its modus

operandi, or to wonder if there were any way by which it could be worked from beneath to permit my return.

There were perhaps a dozen steps, terminating in a low, narrow, musty vault that was void of anything more substantial than ancient, dust-encumbered cobwebs. At the end, a small doorway admitted me to a second vault that differed from the first only in being larger and dustier. I passed through several such vaults, and then found myself in a long passage or tunnel, half blocked in places by boulders or heaps of rubble that had fallen from the crumbling sides. It was very damp, and full of the noisome odor of stagnant waters and subterranean mold. My feet splashed more than once in little pools, and drops fell upon me from above, fetid and foul as if they had oozed from a charnel.

Beyond the wavering circle of light that my taper maintained, it seemed to me that the coils of dim and shadowy serpents slithered away in the darkness at my approach; but I could not be sure whether they really were serpents, or only the troubled and retreating shadows, seen by an eye that was still unaccustomed to the gloom of the vaults.

Rounding a sudden turn in the passage, I saw the last thing I had dreamt of seeing — the gleam of sunlight at what was apparently the tunnel's end. I scarcely know what I had expected to find, but such an eventuation was somehow altogether unanticipated. I hurried on, in some confusion of thought, and stumbled through the opening, to find myself blinking in the full rays of the sun.

Even before I had sufficiently recovered my wits and my eyesight to take note of the landscape before me, I was struck by a strange circumstance: Though it had been early afternoon when I entered the vaults, and though my passage through them could have been a matter of no more than a few minutes, the sun was now nearing the horizon. There was also a difference in its light, which was both brighter and mellower than the sun I had seen above Averroigne; and the sky itself was intensely blue, with no hint of autumnal pallor.

Now, with ever-increasing stupefaction, I stared about me, and could find nothing familiar or even credible in the scene upon which I had emerged. Contrary to all reasonable expectation, there was no semblance of the hill upon which Faussesflammes stood, or of the adjoining country; but around me was a placid land of rolling meadows, through which a golden-gleaming river meandered toward a sea of deepest azure that was visible beyond the tops of laureltrees... But there are no laurel-trees in Averoine, and the sea is hundreds of miles away: judge, then, my complete confusion and dumbfoundment.

It was a scene of such loveliness as I have never before beheld. The meadow-grass at my feet was softer and more lustrous than emerald velvet, and was full of violets and many-colored asphodels. The dark green of ilex-trees was mirrored in the golden river, and far away I saw the pale gleam of a marble acropolis on a low summit above the plain. All things bore the aspect of a mild and clement spring that was verging upon an opulent summer. I felt as if I had stepped into a land of classic myth, of Grecian legend; and moment by moment, all surprise, all wonder as to how I could have come there, was drowned in a sense of ever-growing ecstasy before the utter, ineffable beauty of the landscape.

Near by, in a laurel-grove, a white roof shone in the late rays of the sun. I was drawn toward it by the same allurements, only far more potent and urgent, which I had felt on seeing the forbidden manuscript and the ruins of Faussesflammes. Here, I knew with an esoteric certainty, was the culmination of my quest, the reward of all my mad and perhaps impious curiosity.

As I entered the grove, I heard laughter among the trees, blending harmoniously with the low murmur of their leaves in a soft, balmy wind. I thought I saw vague forms that melted among the boles at my approach; and once a shaggy, goat-like creature with human head and body ran across my path, as if in pursuit of a flying nymph.

In the heart of the grove, I found a marble place with a portico of Doric columns. As I neared it, I was greeted by two women in the costume of

ancient slaves; and though my Greek is of the meagerest, I found no difficulty in comprehending their speech, which was of Attic purity.

'Our mistress, Nycea, awaits you,' they told me. I could no longer marvel at anything, but accepted my situation without question or surmise, like one who resigns himself to the progress of some delightful dream. Probably, I thought, it was a dream, and I was still lying in my bed at the monastery; but never before had I been favored by nocturnal visions of such clarity and surpassing loveliness. The interior of the palace was full of a luxury that verged upon the barbaric, and which evidently belonged to the period of Greek decadence, with its intermingling of Oriental influences. I was led through a hallway gleaming with onyx and polished porphyry, into an opulently furnished room, where, on a couch of gorgeous fabrics, there reclined a woman of goddess-like beauty.

At sight of her, I trembled from head to foot with the violence of a strange emotion. I had heard of the sudden mad loves by which men are seized on beholding for the first time a certain face and form; but never before had I experienced a passion of such intensity, such all-consuming ardor, as the one I conceived immediately for this woman. Indeed, it seemed as if I had loved her for a long time, without knowing that it was she whom I loved, and without being able to identify the nature of my emotion or to orient the feeling in any manner.

She was not tall, but was formed with exquisite voluptuous purity of line and contour. Her eyes were of a dark sapphire blue, with molten depths into which the soul was fain to plunge as into the soft abysses of a summer ocean. The curve of her lips was enigmatic, a little mournful, and gravely tender as the lips of an antique Venus. Her hair, brownish rather than blond, fell over her neck and ears and forehead in delicious ripples confined by a plain fillet of silver. In her expression, there was a mixture of pride and voluptuousness, of regal imperiousness and feminine yielding. Her movements were all as effortless and graceful as those of a serpent.

'I knew you would come,' she murmured in the same softvoweled Greek I had heard from the lips of her servants. 'I have waited for you long; but

when you sought refuge from the storm in the abbey of Perigon, and saw the manuscript in the secret drawer, I knew that the hour of your arrival was at hand. Ah! you did not dream that the spell which drew you so irresistibly, with such unaccountable potency, was the spell of my beauty, the magical allurements of my love!

'Who are you?' I queried. I spoke readily in Greek, which would have surprised me greatly an hour before. But now, I was prepared to accept anything whatever, no matter how fantastic or preposterous, as part of the miraculous fortune, the unbelievable adventure which had befallen me.

'I am Nycea,' she replied to my question. 'I love you, and the hospitality of my palace and of my arms is at your disposal. Need you know anything more?'

The slaves had disappeared. I flung myself beside the couch and kissed the hand she offered me, pouring out protestations that were no doubt incoherent, but were nevertheless full of an ardor that made her smile tenderly. Her hand was cool to my lips, but the touch of it fired my passion. I ventured to seat myself beside her on the couch, and she did not deny my familiarity. While a soft purple twilight began to fill the corners of the chamber, we conversed happily, saying over and over again all the sweet absurd litanies, all the felicitous nothings that come instinctively to the lips of lovers. She was incredibly soft in my arms, and it seemed almost as if the completeness of her yielding was unhindered by the presence of bones in her lovely body.

The servants entered noiselessly, lighting rich lamps of intricately carved gold, and setting before us a meal of spicy meats, of unknown savorous fruits and potent wines. But I could eat little, and while I drank, I thirsted for the sweeter wine of Nycea's mouth.

I do not know when we fell asleep; but the evening had flown like an enchanted moment. Heavy with felicity, I drifted off on a silken tide of drowsiness, and the golden lamps and the face of Nycea blurred in a blissful mist and were seen no more.

Suddenly, from the depths of a slumber beyond all dreams, I found myself compelled into full wakefulness. For an instant, I did not even realize where I was, still less what had aroused me. Then I heard a footfall in the open doorway of the room, and peering across the sleeping head of Nycea, saw in the lamplight the abbot Hilaire, who had paused on the threshold, A look of absolute horror was imprinted upon his face, and as he caught sight of me, he began to gibber in Latin, in tones where something of fear was blended with fanatical abhorrence and hatred. I saw that he carried in his hands a large bottle and an aspergillus. I felt sure that the bottle was full of holy water, and of course divined the use for which it was intended.

Looking at Nycea, I saw that she too was awake, and knew that she was aware of the abbot's presence. She gave me a strange smile, in which I read an affectionate pity, mingled with the reassurance that a woman offers a frightened child.

'Do not fear for me,' she whispered.

'Foul vampire! accursed lamia! she-serpent of hell!' thundered the abbot suddenly, as he crossed the threshold of the room, raising the aspergillus aloft. At the same moment, Nycea glided from the couch, with an unbelievable swiftness of motion, and vanished through an outer door that gave upon the forest of laurels. Her voice hovered in my ear, seeming to come from an immense distance:

'Farewell for awhile, Christophe. But have no fear. You shall find me again if you are brave and patient.'

As the words ended, the holy water from the aspergillus fell on the floor of the chamber and on the couch where Nycea had lain beside me. There was a crash as of many thunders, and the golden lamps went out in a darkness that seemed full of falling dust, of raining fragments. I lost all consciousness, and when I recovered, I found myself lying on a heap of rubble in one of the vaults I had traversed earlier in the day. With a taper in his hand, and an expression of great solicitude, of infinite pity upon his face, Hilaire was stooping over me. Beside him lay the bottle and the dripping aspergillus.

'I thank God, my son, that I found you in good time,' he said. 'When I returned to the abbey this evening and learned that you were gone, I surmised all that had happened. I knew you had read the accursed manuscript in my absence, and had fallen under its baleful spell, as have so many others, even to a certain reverend abbot, one of my predecessors. All of them, alas! beginning hundreds of years ago with Gerard de Venteillon, have fallen victims to the lamia who dwells in these vaults.'

'The lamia?' I questioned, hardly comprehending his words.

'Yes, my son, the beautiful Nycea who lay in your arms this night is a lamia, an ancient vampire, who maintains in these noisome vaults her palace of beatific illusions. How she came to take up her abode at Faussesflammes is not known, for her coming antedates the memory of men. She is old as paganism; the Greeks knew her; she was exorcised by Apollonius of Tyana; and if you could behold her as she really is, you would see, in lieu of her voluptuous body, the folds of a foul and monstrous serpent. All those whom she loves and admits to her hospitality, she devours in the end, after she has drained them of life and vigor with the diabolic delight of her kisses. The laurel-wooded plain you saw, the ilex-bordered river, the marble palace and all the luxury therein, were no more than a satanic delusion, a lovely bubble that rose from the dust and mold of immemorial death, of ancient corruption. They crumbled at the kiss of the holy water I brought with me when I followed you. But Nycea, alas! has escaped, and I fear she will still survive, to build again her palace of demoniacal enchantments, to commit again and again the unspeakable abomination of her sins.'

Still in a sort of stupor at the ruin of my new-found happiness, at the singular revelations made by the abbot, I followed him obediently as he led the way through the vaults of Faussesflammes. He mounted the stairway by which I had descended, and as he neared the top and was forced to stoop a little, the great flagstone swung upward, letting in a stream of chill moonlight. We emerged; and I permitted him to take me back to the monastery.

As my brain began to clear, and the confusion into which I had been thrown resolved itself, a feeling of resentment grew apace — a keen anger at the interference of Hilaire. Unheeding whether or not he had rescued me from dire physical and spiritual perils, I lamented the beautiful dream of which he had deprived me. The kisses of Nycea burned softly in my memory, and I knew that whatever she was, woman or demon or serpent, there was no one in all the world who could ever arouse in me the same love and the same delight. I took care, however, to conceal my feelings from Hilaire, realizing that a betrayal of such emotions would merely lead him to look upon me as a soul that was lost beyond redemption.

On the morrow, pleading the urgency of my return home, I departed from Perigon. Now, in the library of my father's house near Moulins, I write this account of my adventures. The memory of Nycea is magically clear, ineffably dear as if she were still beside me, and still I see the rich draperies of a midnight chamber illumined by lamps of curiously carved gold, and still I hear the words of her farewell:

'Have no fear. You shall find me again if you are brave and patient.'

Soon I shall return, to visit again the ruins of the Chateau des Faussesflames, and redescend into the vaults below the triangular flagstone. But, in spite of the nearness of Perigon to Faussesflames, in spite of my esteem for the abbot, my gratitude for his hospitality and my admiration for his incomparable library, I shall not care to revisit my friend Hilaire.

THE EPIPHANY OF DEATH

I find it peculiarly difficult to express the exact nature of the sentiment which Tomeron had always evoked in me. However, I am sure that the feeling never partook, at any time, of what is ordinarily known as friendship. It was a compound of unusual esthetic and intellectual elements, and was somehow closely allied in my thoughts with the same fascination that has drawn me ever since childhood toward all things that are remote in space and time, or which have about them the irresolvable twilight of antiquity. Somehow, Tomeron seemed never to belong to the present; but one could readily have imagined him as living in some bygone age. About him, there was nothing whatever of the lineaments of our own period; and he even went so far as to affect in his costume an approximation to the garments worn several centuries ago. His complexion was extremely pale and cadaverous, and he stooped heavily from poring over ancient tomes and no less ancient maps. He moved always with the slow, meditative pace of one who dwells among far-off memories and reveries; and he spoke often of people and events and ideas that have long since been forgotten. For the most part, he was apparently unheedful of present things, and I felt that for him the huge city of Ptolemides, in which we both dwelt, with all its manifold clamor and tumult, was little more than a labyrinth of painted vapors. There was a like vagueness in the attitude of others toward Tomeron; and though he had always been accepted without question as a representative of the noble and otherwise extinct family from whom he claimed descent, nothing appeared to be known about his actual birth and antecedents. With two servants, who were both deaf-mutes, who were very old and who likewise wore the raiment of a former age, he lived in the semi-ruinous mansion of his ancestors, where it was said, none of the family had dwelt for many generations. There he pursued the occult and recondite studies that were so congenial to his mind; and there, at certain intervals, I was wont to visit him,

I cannot recall the precise date and circumstances of the beginning of my acquaintance with Tomeron. Though I come of a hardy line that is noted for the sanity of its constitution, my faculties had been woefully shaken by the horror of the happening with which that acquaintance ended. My memory is not what it was, and there are certain lacunae for which my readers must contrive to forgive me. The only wonder is, that my powers of recollection have survived at all, beneath the hideous burden they have had to bear; for, in a more than metaphoric sense, I have been as one condemned to carry with him, at all times and in all places, the loathsome incubi of things long dead and corrupt.

I can readily recall, however, the studies to which Tomeron had devoted himself, the lost demonian volumes from Hyperborea and Mu and Atlantis with which his library shelves were heaped to the ceiling, and the queer charts, not of any land that lies above the surface of the earth, on which he pored by perpetual candle-light. I shall not speak of these studies, for they would seem too fantastic and too macabre for credibility; and that which I have to relate is incredible enough in itself; I shall speak, however, of certain strange ideas with which Tomeron was much preoccupied, and concerning which he so often discoursed to me in that deep, guttural and monotonous voice of his, that had the reverberation of unsounded caverns in its tones and cadences. He maintained that life and death were not the fixed conditions that people commonly believed them to be; that the two realms were often intermingled in ways not readily discerned, and had penumbral border-lands; that the dead were not always the dead, nor the living the living, as such terms are habitually understood. But the manner in which he spoke of these ideas was extremely vague and general; and I could never induce him to specify his meaning or to proffer some concrete illustration that would render it more intelligible to a mentality such as mine, that unused to dealing in the cobwebs of abstraction, Behind his words, there hovered, or seemed to hover, a legion of dark, amorphous images that I could never formulate or depict to myself in any way, until the final denouement of our descent into the catacombs of Ptolemides.

I have already said that my feeling for Tomeron was never anything that could be classified as friendship. But even from the first, I was well aware

that Tomeron had a curious fondness for me — a fondness whose nature I could not comprehend, and with which I could hardly even sympathize. Though he fascinated me at all times, there were occasions when my interest was not unalloyed with an actual sense of repulsion. At whiles, his pallor was too cadaverous, too suggestive of fungi that have grown in the dark, or of leprous bones by moonlight; and the stoop of his shoulders conveyed to my brain the idea that they bore a burden of centuries through which no man could conceivably have lived. He aroused always a certain awe in me; and the awe was sometimes mingled with an indeterminate fear.

I do not remember how long our acquaintance had continued; but I do remember that he spoke with increasing frequency, toward the end, of those bizarre ideas at which I have hinted. Always I felt that he was troubled about something for he often looked at me with a mournful gleam in his hollow eyes; and sometimes he would speak, with peculiar stress, of the great regard that he had for me.

And one night he said, 'Theolus, the time is coming when you must know the truth — must know me as I am, and not as I have been permitted to seem. There is a term to all things, and all things are obedient to inexorable laws. I would that it were otherwise, but neither I nor any man, among the living or among the dead, can lengthen at will the term of any state or condition of being, or alter the laws that decree such conditions.'

Perhaps it was well that I did not understand him, and that I was unable to attach much importance to his words or to the singular intentness of his bearing as he uttered them. For a few more days, I was spared the knowledge which I now carry.

Then one evening, Tomeron spoke thus: 'I am now compelled to ask an odd favor of you, which I hope you will grant in consideration of our long friendship. The favor is, that you accompany me this very night to those vaults of my family which lie in the catacombs of Ptolemides.'

Though much surprised by the request, and not altogether pleased, I was nevertheless unable to deny him. I could not imagine the purpose of such a

visit as the one proposed; but, as was my wont, I forbore to interrogate Tomeron, and merely told him that I would accompany him to the vaults if such were his desire.

'I thank you, Theolus, for this proof of friendship,' he replied earnestly, 'Believe me, I am loath to ask it; but there has been a certain deception, an odd misunderstanding which cannot go on any longer. Tonight, you will learn the truth.'

Carrying torches, we left the mansion of Tameron and sought the ancient catacombs of Ptolemides, which lie beyond the walls and have long been disused, for there is now a fine necropolis in the very heart of the city. The moon had gone down beyond the desert that encroaches toward the catacombs; and we were forced to light our torches long before we came to the subterranean adits; for the rays of Mars and Jupiter in a sodden and funereal sky were not enough to illumine the perilous path we followed among mounds and fallen obelisks and broken graves. At length we discovered the dark and weed-choked entrance of the charnels; and here Tomeron led the way with a swiftness and surety of footing that bespoke long familiarity with the place.

Entering, we found ourselves in a crumbling passage where the bones of dilapidated skeletons were scattered amid the rubble that had fallen from the sides and roof. A choking stench of stagnant air and age-old corruption made me pause for an instant; but Tomeron scarcely appeared to perceive it, for he strode onward, lifting his torch and beckoning me to follow. We traversed many vaults in which mouldy bones verdigris-eaten sarcophagi were piled about the walls or strewn where desecrating thieves had left them in bygone years. The air was increasingly dank, chill and miasmatic; and mephitic shadows crouched or swayed before our torches in every niche and corner. Also, as we went onward, the walls became more ruinous and the bones we saw on every hand were greener with the mould of time.

At length we rounded a sudden angle of the low cavern we were following. Here we came to vaults that evidently belonged to some noble family, for they were quite spacious and there was but one sarcophagus in each vault.

'My ancestors and my family lie here,' announced Tomeron.

We reached the cavern's end and were confronted by a blank wall. At one side was the final vault, in which an empty sarcophagus stood open. The sarcophagus was wrought of the finest bronze and was richly carved.

Tomeron paused before the vault and turned to me. By the flickering, uncertain light I thought that I saw a look of strange and unaccountable distress on his features.

'I must beg you to withdraw for a moment,' he said, in a low and sorrowful voice. 'Afterward, you can return.'

Surprised and puzzled, I obeyed his request and went slowly back along the passage for some distance. Then I returned to the place where I had left him. My surprise was heightened when I found that he had extinguished his torch and had dropped it on the threshold of the final vault. And Tomeron himself was not visible anywhere.

Entering the vault, since there was seemingly no other place where he could have hidden himself, I looked about for him, but the room was empty. At least, I thought it empty till I looked again at the richly carved sarcophagus and saw that it was now tenanted, for a cadaver lay within, shrouded in a winding-sheet of a sort that has not been used for centuries in Ptolemaic times.

I drew near to the sarcophagus, and peering into the face of the cadaver, I saw that it bore a fearful and strange resemblance to the face of Tomeron, though it was bloated and puffed with the adipocere of death and was purple with the shadows of decay. And looking again, I saw that it was indeed Tomeron.

I would have screamed aloud with the horror that came upon me; but my lips were benumbed and frozen and I could only whisper Tomeron's name. But as I whispered it, the lips of the cadaver seemed to part, and the tip of its tongue protruded between them. And I thought that the tip trembled, as if Tomeron were about to speak and answer me. But gazing more closely, I saw that the trembling was merely the movement of worms as they twisted

up and down and to and fro and sought to crowd each other from Tomeron's tongue.

THE ETERNAL WORLD

Christopher Chandon went to his laboratory window for a last look at the mountain solitude about him, which, in all likelihood, he would never see again. With no faltering of his determination, and yet not wholly without regret, he stared at the rugged gully beneath, where the Gothic shade of firs and hemlocks was threaded by the brawling silver of a tiny stream. He saw the granite-sheeted slope beyond, and the two nearer peaks of the Sierras, whose slaty azure was tipped by the first autumn snow; and saw the pass between them that lay in a line with his appaent route through the time-space continuum.

Then he turned to the strange apparatus whose completion had cost him so many years of toil and experiment. On a raised platform in the centre of the room, there stood a large cylinder, not without resemblance to a diving-bell. Its base and lower walls were of metal, its upper half was made wholly of indestructible glass.

A hammock, inclined at an angle of forty degrees, was slung between its sides. In this hammock, Chandon meant to lash himself securely, to insure as much protection as would be feasible against the unknown velocities of his proposed flight. Gazing through the clear glass, he could watch with comfort whatever visual phenomena the journey might offer.

The cylinder had been set directly in front of an enormous disk, ten feet in diameter, with a hundred perforations in its silver surface. Behind it were ranged a series of dynamos, designed for the development of an obscure power, which, for want of a better name, Chandon had called the negative time-force. This power he had isolated with infinite labours from the positive energy of time, that fourth-dimensional gravity which causes and controls the rotation of events.

The negative power, amplified a thousand-fold by the dynamos, would remove to an incalculable distance in contemporary time and space

anything that stood in its path. It would not permit of travel into the past or future, but would cause an instant projection across the tempoaral stream that enfolds the entire cosmos in its endless, equal flowing.

Unfortunately, Chandon had not been able to construct a mobile machine, in which he could travel, as in a rocket-ship, and perhaps return as to his starting-point. He must plunge boldly and forever into the unknown. But he had furnished the cylinder with an oxygen apparatus, with electric light and heat and a month's supply of food and water. Even if his flight should end in empty space, or in some world whose conditions would render human survival impossible, he would at least live long enough to make a thorough observation of his surroundings. He had a theory, however, that his journey would not terminate in the midst of mere ether; that the cosmic bodies were nuclei of the time-gravity, and that the weakening of the propulsive force would permit the cylinder to be drawn to one of them.

The hazards of his venture were past foreseeing; but he preferred them to the safe, monotonous certitudes of earthly life. He had always chafed beneath a feeling of limitation, had longed only for the unexplored vastnesses. He could not brook the thought of any horizons, other than those which have never been overpassed.

With a strange thrilling in his heart, he turned from the alpine landscape and proceeded to lock himself in the cylinder. He had installed a timing device, which would automatically start the dynamos at a given hour.

Lying in the hammock beneath leather straps that he had buckled about his waist, ankles and shoulders, he still had a minute or so to wait before the turning on of the power. In those moments, for the first time, there swept upon him in an unleashed flood the full terror and peril of his experiment; and he was almost tempted to unbind himself and leave the cylinder before it was too late. He had all the sensations of one who is about to be blown from a cannon's mouth.

Suspended in a weird silence, from which all sound had been excluded by the air-tight walls, he resigned himself to the unknown, with many

conflicting surmises as to what would occur; He might or might not survive the passage through unfamiliar dimensions, at speed to which the velocity of light would be laggard. But if he did survive, he might reach the farthest galaxies in a mere flash.

His fears and surmises were terminated by something that came with the suddenness of sleep — or death. Everything seemed to dissolve and vanish in a bright flare; and then there passed before him a swarming, broken panorama, a babel of impressions, ineffably various and multiplied. It seemed to him that he possessed a thousand eyes with which to apprehend in one instant the flowing of many aeons, the passing of countless worlds.

The cylinder seemed no longer to exist; and he did not appear to be moving. But all the systems of time were going by him, and he caught the scraps and fragments of a million scenes: objects, faces, forms, angles and colours which he recalled later as one recalls the deliriously amplified and distorted visions of certain drugs.

He saw the giant evergreen forests of lichen, the continents of Brobdingnagian grasses, in planets remoter than the systems of Hercules. Before him there passed, like an architectural pageant, the mile-high cities that wear the sumptuous aerial motley of rose and emerald and Tyrian, wrought by the tangent beams of triple suns. He beheld unnameable things in spheres unlisted by astronomers. There crowded upon him the awful and limitless evolutionary range of transtellar life, the cyclorama of teeming morphologies.

It seemed as if the barriers of his brain had been extended to include the whole of the cosmic flux; that his thought, like the web of some mammoth and divine arachnid, had woven itself from world to world, from galaxy to galaxy, above the dread gulf of the infinite continuum.

Then, with the same suddenness that had marked its beginning, the vision came to an end and was replaced by something of a totally different character.

It was only afterwards that Chandon could figure out what had occurred, and divine the nature and laws of the new environment into which he had been projected. At the time (if one can use a word so inaccurate as time) he was wholly incapable of anything but a single contemplative visual impression — the strange world upon which he looked through the clear wall of the cylinder: a world that might have been the dream of some geometrician mad with infinity.

It was like some planetary glacier, fretted into shapes of ordered grotesquery, filled with a white, unglittering light, and obeying the laws of other perspectives than those of our own world. The distances on which he gazed were literally interminable; there was no horizon; and yet nothing seemed to dwindle in size or definitude, whatever its remoteness. Part of the impression received by Chandon was that this world arched back upon itself, like the interior surface of a hollow sphere; that the pale vistas returned overhead after they had vanished from his view.

Nearer to him than any other object in the scene, and preserving the same relative distance as in his laboratory, he perceived a large circular section of rough planking — that portion of the laboratory wall which had lain in the path of the negative beam. It hung motionless in air as if suspended by a field of invisible ice,

The foreground beyond the planking was thronged by innumerable rows of objects that were suggestive both of statues and of crystalloid formations. Wan as marble or alabaster, each of them presented a *mélange* of simple curves and symmetric angles, which somehow seemed to include the latency of almost endless geometrical development; They were gigantic, with a rudimentary division into head, limbs and body, as if they were living things. Behind them, at indefinite distances, were other forms that might have been the blind buds or frozen blossoms of unknown vegetable growths.

Chandon had no sense of the passing of time as he peered from the cylinder. He could remember nothing, could imagine nothing. He was unaware of his body, or the hammock in which he lay, except as a half-seen image on the

rim of vision. Somehow, in that strange, frozen impression, he felt the inert dynamism of the forms about him: the silent thunder, the unlaunched lightnings, as of cataleptic gods; the atom-folded heat and flame, as of unlit suns, Inscrutably they brooded before him, as they had done from all eternity and would continue to do forever. In this world, there could be no change, no event: all things must preserve the same aspect and the same attitude.

As he realized later, his attempt to change his own position in the time stream had led to an unforeseen result. He had projected himself beyond time into some further cosmos where the very ether, perhaps, was a non-conductor of the time-force, and in which, therefore, the phenomena of temporal sequence were impossible.

The sheer velocity of his flight had lodged him on the verge of this eternity, like some Arctic explorer caught in everlasting ice. There, obedient to the laws of timelessness, he seemed fated to remain. Life, as we know the term, was impossible for him; and yet — since death would involve a time-sequence, it was equally impossible for him to die. He must maintain the position in which he had landed, must hold the breath he had been breathing at the moment of his impact against the eternal. He was fixed in a catalepsy of the senses; in a bright Nirvana of contemplation, It would seem, according to all logic, that there was no escape from his predicament. However, I must now relate the strangest thing of all; the thing that was seemingly unaccountable; that defied the proven laws of the timeless sphere.

Into the glacial field of Chandon's vision, athwart the horizonless ranks of immutable figures, there came an intruding object; a thing that drifted as if through aeons; that grew upon the scene with the slowness of some millennial coral reef in a crystal sea.

Even from its first appearance, the object was plainly alien to the scene; was obviously, like Chandon's cylinder and the wall section, of non-eternal origin. It was black and lustrous, with more than the blackness of intrastellar space or of metals locked from light in the core of planets. It

forced itself upon the sight with ultra-material solidity; and yet it seemed to refuse the crystal daylight, to insulate itself from the never-varying splendour.

The thing disclosed itself as a sharp and widening wedge, driven upon the adamantine ether, and forming, by the same violent act of irruption, a new visual image in Chandon's paralytic eyes. In defiance of the mental laws of his surroundings, it caused him to form an idea of duration and movement.

Seen in its entirety, the thing was a large, spindle-shaped vessel, dwarfing Chandon's cylinder like an ocean liner beside a ship's dinghy. It floated aloof and separate - a seamless mass of unbroken ebon, swelling to an orb-like equator, and dwindling to a point at each end. The form was such as might have been calculated to pierce some obdurate medium.

The substance of which it had been wrought, and its motive power, were destined to remain unknown to Chandon. Perhaps it driven by some tremendous concentrating of the time-force with which he had played so ignorantly and ineptly.

The intruding vessel, wholly stationary, hung now above the rows of statuesque entities that were foremost in his field of vision. By infinite gradations, a huge circular door seemed to open in its bottom; and from the opening there issued a cranelike arm, of the same black material as the vessel. The arm ended in numerous pendent bars, that somehow gave the idea of fingerlike suppleness.

It descended upon the head of one of the strange geometric images; and the myriad bars, bending and stretching with slow but limitless fluidity, wrapped themselves like a net of chains about the crystalloid body; Then the figure was dragged upwards as if with herculean effort, and vanished at length, together with the shortening arm, in the vessel's interior.

Again the arm emerged, to repeat the bizarre, impossible abduction, and draw another of the enigmatic things from its everlasting station. And once more the arm descended; and a third entity was taken, like the theft of still another marble god from its marble heaven.

All this was done in profound silence — the immeasurable slowness of motion being muffled by the ether, and creating nothing that Chandon's ear could apprehend as sound.

After the third disappearance with its strange prey, the arm returned, extending itself diagonally and to greater length than before, till the black fingers barred the glass of Chandon's cylinder and closed upon it with their irresistible clutch.

He was scarcely aware of any movement; but it seemed to him that the ranks of white figures, the unhorizoned and never-dwindling vistas, were sinking slowly from his ken, like a foundering world. He saw the ebon bulk of the great vessel, towards which he was drawn by the shortening arm, till it filled his entire vision. Then the cylinder was lifted into the night-black opening, where it seemed that light was powerless to follow.

Chandon could see nothing; he was aware of nothing but solid darkness, enfolding the cylinder even as it had been enfolded by the white, achromatic light of timelessness. He felt about him the sense of long, tremendous vibration; a soundless pulsing that seemed to spread in circles from some dynamic centre; to pass over and beyond him through aeons, as if from some Titanic heart whose beats defied the environing eternity.

Simultaneously, he realized that his own heart was beating again, with the same protraction as this unknown pulse; that he drew breath and exhaled it in obedience to the cyclical vibration. In his benumbed brain, there grew the nascent idea of wonder; the first beginning of a natural thought-sequence. His body and mind were beginning to function once more, beneath the influence of the power that had been strong enough to intrude upon the timeless universe and pluck him from that petrifying ether.

The vibration began to swiften, spreading outwards in mighty ripples. It became audible as a cyclopean pounding; and Chandon somehow conceived the idea of giant-built machinery, turning and throbbing in an underworld prison. The vessel seemed to be forging onwards with resistless power through some material barrier. Doubtless it was wrenching itself free

from the eternal dimension, was tearing its way back into time. The blackness had persisted for a while, like a positive radiation rather than the mere absence of light. Now it cleared away and was replaced by an all-revealing, ruddy illumination. At the same time, the loud, engine-like vibration died to a muted throbbing. Perhaps the darkness had been in some manner associated with the full development of the strange force that had enabled the vessel to move and function in that ultra-temporal medium. With the return into time, and the diminishment of power, it had vanished.

The faculties of thought, feeling, cognition and movement, under their normal time-aspects, all came back to Chandon like the loosing of a dammed-up flood. He was able to correlate all that occurred to him, and infer in some measure the meaning of his unique experience. With growing awe and astonishment, he studied the scene that was visible from his position in the hammock.

The cylinder, with the weird, crystalloid figures looming near at hand, was reposing in a huge room probably the main hold of the vessel. The interior of this room was curved like a sphere; and all about and above, gigantic, unfamiliar machineries were disposed. Not far away, he saw the retracted crane or arm. It seemed that the force of gravitation inhered everywhere in the vessel's inner surface; for certain peculiar beings passed before Chandon as he watched, and ran upwards on the walls till they hung inverted from the ceiling with the nonchalance of flies.

There were perhaps a dozen of those beings within sight. No one with earthly biological prepossessions could even have imagined them very readily. Each of them possessed a roughly globular body with the upper hemisphere swelling mid-way between pole and equator to form two neckless, conical heads. The hemisphere terminated in many limbs and appendages, some of which were used for walking and others solely for prehension.

The heads were featureless, but a glittering, web-like membrane hung between them, trembling continually. Certain of the nether appendages,

waving like inquisitive tentacles, were tipped with organs that may have served for eyes, ears, nostrils and mouths.

These creatures shone with a silvery light and appeared to be almost translucent. In the centre of the pointed heads, a spot of coal-bright crimson glowed and faded with pulse-like regularity; and the spherical bodies darkened and lightened as if with the rhythmic interchange of rib-like zones of shadow beneath their surfaces. Chandon felt that they were formed of some non-protoplasmic substance, perhaps a mineral that had organized itself into living cells. Their movements were very quick and dexterous, with an inhuman poise; and they seemed able to perform many different motions with perfect simultaneity.

The earth-man was stricken to renewed immobility by the strangeness of it all. With vain, fantastical surmises, he sought to fathom the mystery. Who were these creatures, and what had been their purpose in penetrating the eternal dimension? Why had they removed certain of its inhabitants, together with him self? Whither was the vessel bound? Was it returning, somewhere in time and space, to the planetary world from which it had set forth on its weird voyage?

He could be sure of nothing; but he knew that he had fallen into the hands of super-scientific beings, who were expert navigators of space-time. They had been able to build a vessel such as he had merely dreamt of building; and perhaps they had explored and charted all the unknown deeps, and had deliberately planned their incursion into the frozen world beyond.

If they had not come to rescue him, he would never have escaped from the doom of timelessness, into which he had been hurled by his own clumsy effort to cross the secular stream.

Pondering, he turned to the giant things that were his companions. He could scarcely recognize them in the red glow: their pallid planes and angles seemed to have undergone a subtle rearrangement; and the light quivered upon them in bloody lustres, conferring an odd warmth, a suggestion of

awaking life. More than ever, they gave the impression of latent power, of frozen dynamism.

Then, suddenly, he saw an unmistakable movement from one of the statue-like entities, and realized that the thing had begun to alter its shape! The cold, marble substance seemed to flow like quicksilver. The rudimentary head assumed a stern, many-featured form, such as might belong to the demi-god of some foreign world. The limbs lightened, and new members of indeterminate use were put forth. The simple curves and angles multiplied themselves with mysterious complexity. A diamondshaped eye, glowing with blue fire, appeared in the face and was quickly followed by other eyes. The thing seemed to be undergoing, in a few moments, the entire process of some long-suspended evolution.

Chandon saw that the other figures were displaying singular alterations; though in each case the ensuing development was wholly individual. The geometric facets began to swell like opening buds, and flowed into lines of celestial beauty and grandeur. The boreal pallor was suffused with unearthly iridescence, with opal tones that raced and trembled in ever-living patterns, in belted arabesques, in rainbow hieroglyphs.

The human watcher felt the insurgence of a measureless élan, of a superstellar intellection, in these remarkable beings. A thrill of terror, electric, eerie, ran through him, The process he had just seen was too incalculable, too tremendous. Who, or what, could limit and control the unsealed activities of these Eternal Ones, aroused from their slumber? Surely he was in the presence of beings akin to gods, to the demons or genii of myth. That which he beheld was like the opening of the sea-recovered jars of Solomon.

He saw that the marvellous transformation had also been perceived by the owners of the vessel. These creatures, thronging from all parts of the spheroid interior, began to crowd around the timeless entities. Their mechanical, darting motions, the lifting and levelling of certain members that ended in eye-shaped organs, betrayed an unhuman excitement and curiosity. They seemed to be inspecting the transfigured forms with the air

of learned biologists who had been prepared for such an event and were gratified by its consummation.

The Timeless Ones, it appeared, were also curious regarding their captors. Their flaming eyes returned the stare of the periscopic tentacles, and certain odd horn-shaped appendages of their lofty crowns began to quiver inquisitively, as if with the reception of unknown sense-impressions. Then, suddenly, each of the three put forth a single, jointless arm, emitting in mid-air seven long, fan-like rays of purple light in lieu of a hand.

These rays, no doubt, were capable of receiving and conveying tactile impressions. Slowly and deliberately, like groping fingers, they reached out, and each of the fans, curving fluctu- antly where it encountered a rounded surface, began to play with a rhythmic flaring about the foremost of the double-headed creatures.

These beings, as if in alarm or discomfort, drew back and sought to elude the searching rays. The purple fingers lengthened, encircled them, held them helpless, ran about them in broadening, clinging zones, as if to explore their whole anatomy. From the two heads to the disc-like pads that served them for feet, the beings were swathed around with flowing rings and ribbons of light.

Others of the vessel's crew, beyond reach of the curious beams, had darted back to a more secure distance. One of them lifted certain of his members in a swift, emphatic gesture. As far as Chandon could see, the being had not touched any of the vessel's machinery. But as if in obedience to the gesture, a huge, round, mirror-like mechanism overhead began to revolve in its frame on massive pivots.

The mechanism appeared to be made of some pale, lucid substance, neither glass nor metal. Ceasing its rotation, as if the desired focus had been secured, the lens emitted a beam of hueless light, which somehow reminded Chandon of the chill, frozen radiance of the eternal world. This beam, falling on the timeless entities, was plainly repressive in its effect.

Immediately the finger-like rays relinquished their quarry, and faded back to the jointless arms, which were then retracted. The eyes closed like hidden jewels, the opal patterns grew cold and dull, and the strange, half-divine beings appeared to lose their complex angles, to regain their former quiescence, like devolving crystals. Yet, somehow, they were still alive, they still retained the nascent lines of their preternatural efflorescence.

In his awe and wonder before this miraculous tableau, Chandon had automatically freed himself from the leather bands, had risen from the hammock, and was standing with his face pressed against the wall of the cylinder. His change of position was noted by the vessel's crew, and their eye-tentacles were all raised and levelled upon him for a moment, following the devolution of the Timeless Ones.

Then, in response to another enigmatic gesture from one of their number, the giant lens rotated a little further, and the glacial beam began to shift and widen, till it played upon the cylinder though still including in its hueless range the dynamic figures.

The earth-man had the sensation of being caught in a motionless flood of something that was inexpressibly thick and viscid. His body seemed to congeal, his thoughts crawled with painful slowness through some obstructing medium that had permeated his very brain. It was not the complete arrest of all the life-processes that had been entailed by his impingement upon eternity. Rather, it was a deceleration of these processes; a subjection to some unthinkably retarded rhythm of time-movement and sequence.

Whole years seemed to intervene betwixt the beats of Chandon's heart. The crooking of his little finger would have required lustrums. Through tediously elongated time, his brain strove to form a single thought: the suspicion that his captors had been alarmed by his change of posture, and had apprehended some troublous demonstration of power from him, as from the Timeless Ones.

Then, through further decades, he conceived another thought: that he himself was perhaps regarded as one of the god-like beings by these alien time-voyagers. They had found him in eternity, amid the measureless ranks; and how were they to know that he, like themselves, had come originally from a temporal world.

With his altered sense of duration, the earth-man could form no proper conception of the length of the voyage in time-space. To him, it was almost another eternity, punctuated at lustrumlong intervals by the humming vibration of the machinery. To his delayed visual perception, the crew of the vessel seemed to move with incredible sluggishness, by imperceptible gradations. He, with his weird companions, had been set apart by the chill beam in a prison of slow time, while the ship itself was plunging through bottomless dimensions of secular and cosmic infinitude!

At last the voyage came to an end. Chandon felt the gradual dawning of an all-pervasive light that drowned the vessel's ruddy glow in fierce whiteness. By infinite degrees, the walls became perfectly transparent, together with the machinery, and he realized that the light was coming from a world without. Immense images, multiform and intricate, began to crowd with the slowness of creation itself upon the glaring splendour. Then — doubtless to permit the removal of the guarded captives — the retarding ray was switched off, and Chandon recovered his normal powers of cognition and movement.

He beheld an awesome vision through the clear wall, whose transparence was perhaps due to the complete turning-off of the vessel's motive-power. He saw that the vessel was reposing in a diamond-shaped area, surrounded with architectural piles whom very magnitude imposed itself like an irremovable weight upon his senses.

Far up, in a fiery orange sky, he saw the looming of bulbous Atlantean pillars with platform capitals; the thronging of strange cruciform towers; he viewed with amazement the eerie wonder of unnatural cupolas that were like inverted pyramids. He saw the spiral pinnacles that seemed to support an unbelievable burden of terraces; the slanting walls, like fluted mountain-

scarps, that formed the base of imagineless cumuli. All were wrought of some shining, night-black stone, like a marble quarried from an ultracosmic Erebus. They interposed their heavy, lowering, malignant masses between Chandon and the flames of a hidden sun that was incomparably more brilliant than our own.

Blinded by the glare and dizzied by those lofty piles; aware also of queer heaviness in all his bodily sensations, doubtless due to an increased gravity, the earth-man turned his attention to the foreground. The diamond area, he now saw, was thronged with people similar to the crew of the time-vessel. Like giant, silvery, globular-bodied insects, they came hurrying from all directions on the dark pavement. Arranged in a ring about the vessel, were colossal mounted mirrors, of the same type that had emitted the retarding ray. The gathering people stopped at some little distance, leaving a clear space between the ray-machines and the ship, as if for the landing of the crew and captives.

Now, as if in response to some hidden mechanism, a huge, circular door was opened in the seamless wall. The folded crane began to lengthen, and covered one of the timeless beings with its mesh of tentacles. Then the mysterious entity, still quiet and unresisting, was lifted through the aperture and deposited on the pavement outside.

The arm returned, and repeated this procedure with the second figure, which, in the meanwhile, had apparently realized the cessation of the retarding beam, and was less submissive than its fellow had been. It offered a rather tentative resistance, and began to swell as the tentacles enfolded it, and to put forth pseudopodic members and finger-like rays that plucked gently at the tightening mesh. However, in a few moments, the second being had joined its companion in the world without.

At the same time, a startling change had begun to manifest itself in the third figure. Chandon felt as if he were present at the epiphany of some aeon-veiled and secluded god, revealing himself in his true likeness from the molten chrysalis of matter. The transformation that occurred was as if some chill stalagmite should bureon forth in a thousand-featured shape of cloud

and fire. In one apocalyptic moment, the thing seemed to expand, to rush upwards, to change its entire substance, to develop organs and attributes such as could belong only to a super-material stage of evolution. Aeons of star-life, of world-life, of the slow alchemy of atoms, were abridged in that instant.

Chandon could form no clear conception of what was happening. The metamorphosis was too far beyond the normal interpretative range of human senses. He saw something that towered before him, filling the vessel to its roof and pressing terribly against the curved transparent surface. Then, with inestimable violence, the entire vessel broke in a thousand flying, glittering, glass-like fragments, that shrieked with the high, thin note of tortured things as they hurtled and fell in all directions.

Before the last fragments had fallen, the time-cylinder was caught and drawn upwards from the wreck as if by some mighty hand. Whether the looming giant had reached down with one of its non-human members, or whether the cylinder had been lifted by magnetic force, was never wholly clear to Chandon. All he could remember afterwards was the light, aerial soaring, in which he experienced a sudden and complete relief from the heavy gravitation of that unknown planet.

He seemed to float very swiftly to an elevation hard to estimate, from the absence of familiar scale; and then the cylinder came to rest on the cloud-like shoulder of the Timeless One, and clung there as securely as if it had landed on the shore of some far-off, separate world, aloof in space.

He was beyond awe or surprise or bewilderment. As if in some cataclysmic dream, he resigned himself to the unfolding of the swift miracle. He peered out from his airy vantage, and saw above him, like the topmost crag of a lofty cumulus, with stormy suns for eyes, the head of the being who had shattered the alien time-vessel and had risen above its ruins like a loosed and rebellious genie.

Far down, he beheld the black diamond area that swarmed with the silvery people. Then, from the pavement, there rushed heavenward, like the

pillared fomes of a monstrous explosion, the mounting and waxing forms of the other Timeless Ones. Tumultuous, awful, cyclonic, they rose beside the first, to complete that rebel trinity. Yet, vast and tall as they had grown, the pylons around them were taller; the terrace-bearing pinnades, the topsy-turvy pyramids, the cruciform towers, still frowned upon them from the glowing, coal-bright air like the dark, colossal guardians of a trans-galactic hell.

Chandon was aware of a thousand impressions. He felt the divine and limitless energies, waked from eternal sleep, that were flowering with such dynamic violence in time. And he felt, warring with these, endeavouring to subdue and constrain them, the jarring radiations and malignly concentrated powers of the new world. The very light was inimical and tyrannous in its fiery beating; the blackness of the lowering domes and peristyles was like the crushing fall of a thousand muted maces, swung by sullen, cruel, silent Anakim. The lens-machines on the pavement, revolving, glared upwards like the eyes of boreal Cyclops, and turned their frosted beams on the cloudy giants. At intervals, the sky lightened with a white-hot flaring, like the reflex of a million remote furnaces; and Chandon was aware of surly, infra-bass, reverberant, bell-toned clangours, of drum-notes loud as beaten worlds, that impinged upon him from all quarters of the throbbing air.

The enviring piles appeared to darken, as if they had gathered to themselves a more evil and positive ebon, and were raying it forth to stupefy the senses. But beyond this, beyond all physical perceptions, Chandon felt the black magnetism that surged in never-ceasing waves; that clamoured before the barriers of his will, that sought to usurp his mind, to wrest and shape his very thoughts into forms of monstrous thralldom.

Wordless, and conveyed in thronging images of terrible strangeness, he caught the biddings of inhuman bane, of transtellary hatred. The very stones of the massive buildings were joined with the brains of that exotic people in an effort to resume control of Chandon and the three Timeless Ones!

Darkly, the earth-man understood. He must not only submit to the silvery beings, he must do their will in all things. He and his companions had been

brought from eternity for a purpose -to aid their captors in some stupendous war with a rival people of the same world, Even as mankind employs in warfare explosives of Titanic potency, the silver creatures had desired to employ the time-loosed energies of the Eternal Ones against their otherwise equally matched foes! They had known the route through secret dimensions from time into timelessness. With wellnigh demoniac audacity, they had planned and executed the weird abduction; and they had assumed that Chandon was one of the eternal entities, with latencies of immense élan and god-like power.

The waves of evil monition rose ever higher. Chandon felt himself inundated, swamped. With televisic clearness, there grew in his mind a picture of the foe against whom he was being adjured to go forth. He saw the glaring perspectives of remote, unearthly lands, the mightily swarming piles of unhuman cities, lying beneath an incandescent sun that was vaster than Antares. For a moment, he felt himself hating these lands and cities with the cold, imagineless rancour of an otherworld psychology.

Then, as if he had been lifted above it by the giant upon whose shoulder he rode, Chandon knew that the black sea was no longer beating upon him. He was free from the clutching mesmerism, he could no longer conceive the alien emotions and pictures that had invaded his mind. Miraculous ease and sublime security enveloped him; he was the centre of a sphere of resistant and resilient force, which nothing could subdue or penetrate.

Sitting as if on a mountain throne, he saw that the demiurgic triad, contemptuous and defiant of the pygmies beneath, had resumed their magic growth and shooting upwards to attain and surpass the level of the topmost piles. A moment more, and he peered across the Babelian tiers of sullen stone, crowded with the silver people, and saw the outer avenues of a mammoth metropolis; and beyond these, the far-flung horizons of the unnamed planet.

He seemed to know the thoughts of the Timeless Ones as they looked forth on this world whose impious people had dreamt to enslave their illimitable essence. He knew that they saw and comprehended it all in a glance. He felt

them pause in momentary curiosity; and felt the swift, relentless anger, the irrevocable decision that followed,

Then, very tentatively and deliberately, as if they were testing their untried powers, the three beings began to destroy the city. From the head of Chandon's white, supernal bearer, there issued a circle of ruby flame, to detach itself, to spin and broaden in a great wheel as it slanted down and settled on one of the higher piles. Beneath that burning crown, the unnatural-angled domes and inverse pyramids began to quiver, and seemed to expand like a dark vapour. They lost their solid outlines, they lightened, they took on the patterns of shaken sand, they shuddered skyward in rhythmic circles of sombre, deathly iris, paling and vanishing upon the intolerable glare.

From the Timeless Ones, there emanated the visible and invisible agencies of annihilation; slowly at first, and then with cyclonic acceleration, as if their anger were mounting or they were becoming more engrossed in the awful and god-like game.

From out their celestial bodies, as from high crags, there leaped living rivers and raging cataracts of energy; there descended bolts, orbs, ellipsoid wheels of white or vari-coloured fire, to fall on the doomed city like a rain of ravening meteors. The builded cumuli dissolved into molten slag, the columns and piled terraces passed in driven wraiths of steam, under the burning tempest. The city ran in swift torrents of lava; it quivered away in spirals of spectral dust; it rose in black flames, in sullem auroras.

Over its ruins, there moved the Eternal Ones, clearing for themselves an instant way, Behind them, in the black and cleanswept levels whereon they had trodden, foci of dissolution appeared, and the very soil and stone dissolved in ever-spinning, widening vortices, that ate the surface of the planet and bored down upon its core. As if they had taken into their own substance the molecules and electrons of all that they had destroyed, the Eternal Ones grew ever taller and vaster.

Chandon beheld it all from his fantastic aerie with supernal remoteness and detachment. In a moving zone of inviolate peace, he saw the fiery rain that consumed the ultra-galactic Sodom; he saw the belts of devastation that ran and radiated, broadening ever, to the four quarters; he peered from an ever-loftier height upon vast horizons, that fled as in reeling terror before the timeless giants.

Faster and faster played the lethal orbs and beams. They spawned in mid-air, they gave birth to countless others. They were sown abroad like the dragon's teeth of fable, to follow the longitudes of the great planet to its poles. The stricken city was soon left behind, and the giants marched on monstrous seas and deserts, on broad plains and high mountain-walls, where other cities shone far down like littered pebbles.

There were tides of atomic fire that went before to wash down the prodigious alps. There were vengeful, flying globes that turned the seas into instant vapour, that smote the deserts to molten, stormy oceans. There were arcs, circles, quadrilaterals of annihilation, growing always, that sank downwards through the basic stone.

The fire-bright noon was muffled with chaotic murk. A bloody Cyclops, a red Laocoon, battling with serpent-coils of cloud and shadow, the mighty sun seemed to stagger in mid-heaven, to rush dizzily to and fro as the world reeled beneath that intolerable trampling of macrocosmic Titans. The lands below were veiled by mephitic fumes, riven momentarily to disclose the heaving and foundering continents.

Now to that stupendous chaos the very elements of the doomed world were adding their unleashed energies. Clouds that were black Himalayas with realm-wide lightning, followed behind the destroyers. The ground crumbled to release the central fires in volcaucic geysers, in skyward-flowing cataracts. The seas ebbed, revealing dismal peaks and long-submerged ruins, as they roared in their nether channels to be sucked down through earthquake-riven beds to feed the boiling cauldrons of internal disruption.

The air went mad with thunders as of Typhon breaking forth from his underworld dungeon; with roaring as of spire-tongued fires in the red pits of a crumbling inferno; with moaning and whining as of djinns trapped by the fall of mountains in some unscalable abyss; with howling as of frantic demons, loosed from primordial tombs,

Above the tumult, higher and higher, Chandon was borne, till he looked down from the calm altitude of ether; till he gazed from a sun-like vantage upon the seething and shattered orb, and saw the huge sun itself from an equal height in space. The cataclysmic moan, the mad thunder, seemed to die away. The seas of catastrophic ruin eddied like a shallow backwash about the feet of the Timeless Ones. The furious, all-devouring maelstroms were no more than some ephemeral puff of dust, stirred by the casual step of a passer-by.

Then, beneath him, there was no longer the nebulous wrack of a world. The being upon whose shoulder he still clung, like an atom to some planetary parapet, was striding through cosmic emptiness; and spurned by its departure, the ruinous ball was flung abysswards after the receding sun around which it had revolved with all its vanished enigmas of alien life and civilization.

Dimly the earth-man saw the inconceivable vastness to which the Eternal Ones had attained. He beheld their glimmering outlines, the vague masses of their forms, with stars behind them, seen as through the luminous veil of comets. He was perched on a nebular thing, huge as the orbit of systems, and moving with more than the velocity of light, that strode through unnamed galaxies, through never-charted dimensions of space and time. He felt the immeasurable eddying of ether, he saw the labyrinthine swirling of stars, that formed and faded and were replaced by the fleeing patterns of other stellar mazes. In sublime security, in his sphere of dream-like ease and motion, Chandon was borne on without knowing why or whither; and, like the participant of some prodigious dream, he did not even ask himself such questions as these.

After infinities of dying light, of whirling and falling emptiness; after the transit of many skies, of unnumbered systems, there came to him the sense of a sudden pause. For one moment, from the still gulf, he gazed on a tiny sun with its entourage of nine planets, and wondered vaguely if the sun were some familiar astronomic body.

Then, with ineffable lightness and velocity, it seemed to him that he was falling towards one of the nearer worlds. The blurred and broadening mass of its seas and continents surged up to meet him; he seemed to descend, meteor-like, on a region of rough mountains sharp with snowy pinnacles that rose above sombre spires of pine.

There, as if he had been deposited by some all-mighty hand, the cylinder came to rest; and Chandon peered out with the eerie startlement of an awakened dreamer, to see around him the walls of his own Sierran laboratory! The Timeless Ones, omniscient, by some benignant whim, had returned him to his own station in time and space; and then had gone on, perhaps to the conquest of other universes; perhaps to find again the white, eternal world of their origin and to fold themselves anew in the pale Nirvana of immutable contemplation.

THE EXPERT LOVER

"Tom is terribly in love with you, Dora. He'd stand on his head in a thistle-patch if you told him to. You won't find a better provider in Auburn. [With that job of his, he's as good as Government bonds.]"

"Yes, I know Tom is fond of me [and I know he has a good position at the P. G. & E.]. But, Annabelle, he is such a complete dud when it comes to love-making. All he can say is: 'Gee, but you're pretty, Dora,' or: 'I'm sure crazy about you,' or: 'Dora, you're the only girl for me.'"

"I suppose Tom isn't much on romantic conversation. But what do you expect? Most men aren't."

"Well," sighed Dora, impatiently, "I'd really like a little romance. And I can't see it in Tom. He's about as romantic as potatoes with onions. Everything about him is so obvious and commonplace --- even his name. And when he tries to hug me, he makes me think of a grocer grabbing a sack of flour."

"All the same, there are worse fish in the sea, dearie."

Dora Cahill, a dreamy-looking blonde, and her bosom-friend, Annabelle Rivers, a vivacious and alert brunette, were sitting out a dance at Rock Creek hall. Tom Masters, the object of their discussion, who was Dora's escort, had been sent off to dance with one of the wallflowers. Dora was a little tired, and, as usual, more than a little bored. She knew that Tom's eyes, eager and imploring, were often upon her as he whirled past in the throng on the dance-floor; but vouchsafing him only an occasional languid glance, she continued to chat with Annabelle.

"I wish I could meet a real lover," she mused — "someone with snap and verve and technique — someone who was eloquent and poetic and persuasive, and could carry me away, in spite of myself."

"That kind has usually had a lot of practice," warned Annabelle. "And practice means that they have the habit."

"Well, I'd rather have a Don Juan than a dumbbell."

"You can take your choice, dear. Personally, I'd prefer something dependable and solid, even if he didn't scintillate."

"Pardon me, Miss Cahill." The two girls looked up. The speaker was Jack Barnes, a man who Dora knew slightly; another man, whom she was sure she had never seen before, stood beside him.

"Permit me to introduce my friend, Mr. Colin — Lancelot Colin," said Barnes. Dora's eyes met the eyes of the stranger, and she acknowledged the introduction, a little breathlessly. Her first thought was: "What a heavenly name!" and then: "What a heavenly man!" Mr. Colin, who stood bowing with a perfect suavity and an ease that was Continental rather than American, was really enough to have taken away the breath of more than one girl with romantic susceptibilities. He was dark and immaculate, with the figure of a soldier and the face of an artist. There was in indefinite air of gallantry about him, a sense of mystery, of ardour and poetry. Dora contrasted him with Tom, who was broad and ruddy, and about whom there was nothing to excite one's imagination or tease one's curiosity. She was frankly thrilled.

Annabelle was now included in the introduction, but, beyond a courteous murmur of acknowledgment, the newcomer seemed to show no interest in her. His eyes, large and full-lidded, with a hint of weariness and sophistication in their brown depths, were fixed with a sparkling intensity upon Dora.

"May I have the pleasure of dancing with you, Miss Cahill?" His voice, a musical and vibrant baritone, completed the impression of a consummately romantic personality.

Dora consented, without her usual languid hesitation, and found herself instantly whirled away in the paces of a fox-trot. She decided at once that

Mr. Colin was a superb dancer; also that he was what is commonly known as a "quick worker," for no sooner were they on the floor than he murmured in her ear:

"You look as if you had just stepped out of a bower of roses. I've been watching you all evening, and I simply had to know you."

"There really isn't much about me that is worth knowing." Dora gave him her demurest smile.

"Ah! but you are wonderful!" rhapsodized Mr. Colin. "Your eyes are the blue of mountain lakes under a vernal sky, your cheeks are softer than wild rose petals. And you dance like a dryad in the April woods."

He continued in the same strain, so eloquently and to such good effect that Dora was convinced by the end of the dance that she had found the expert lover from whom she had been expressing her desire to Annabelle only a few minutes before. When the music stopped, and Mr. Colin suggested that they go for a few minutes' stroll in the moonlight, she assented readily, and she did not even notice the disconsolate Tom, who followed them with a look of glum and glowering astonishment.

Outside, the large and mellow moon of a California May was just freeing itself from the tree-tops. Automobiles were parked all about the country dance-hall, and in some of them low murmurs and laughter were audible.

"We could sit in my car," observed Mr. Colin, pointing out a stylish roadster. "But you'd rather take a little walk, wouldn't you? It would be more romantic, somehow."

He had accurately gauged her preferences, for Dora had a poetic streak in her nature, and loved moonlight and idyllic surroundings. When they paused, a minute later, in a grassy meadow encircled by oaks and alders, she felt that one of her dearest dreams was coming true. How often she had pictured to herself a moonlight stroll with a handsome and fervent and eloquent lover!

"I adore you! I loved you madly from the very first moment that I saw you tonight!" There was a convincing ardor in his low tones, and Dora thrilled.

"But how can you? You don't know anything about me." Dora made the usual feminine demurs. She was already more than half in love with Mr. Colin, and wholly in love with romance; but she knew, or had been told, that men were prone to despise immediate conquest or concession.

He caught her in his arms, pouring out passionate and half-incoherent words, and would have kissed her; but she turned her lips aside and resisted firmly; and after a little he did not persist. He was learned in the ways and reactions of women, and he knew that it was something more than the moonlight that had softened her lips and brightened her eyes. He could afford to wait. So he contented himself with taking her hand and pressing his lips to it with a fervor and a courtliness of gesture that were new to Dora's experience. From that moment she adored him.

Both were a little silent as they returned to the dance-hall. But the air was full of vibrant potentialities, of things unsaid and undone as yet, but not to be long deferred. Another fox-trot, and still another, in the course of which Mr. Colin managed to say some more charming things.

"Will you go riding with me tomorrow afternoon?" he queried. "More than one nook of Arcady could be explored in an afternoon."

"Yes," breathed Dora, assenting to the observation as well as to the question.

It was now late in the evening, and the gay throng of dancers and onlookers had begun to thin out.

"It is time for me to go home," said Dora, "so I'll have to say good-night." She had become aware, as one who awakens partially from a blissful dream, that Tom was hovering gloomily somewhere in the near background.

"I wish that tonight were eternal — or that it were already tomorrow," murmured Mr. Colin, with a gallant bow and a glance full of ardor and

passion that caused Dora to flush and the waiting Tom to grit his teeth quite audibly.

"Say, who is that fellow anyway?" Tom demanded when he and Dora were seated in his Buick and were on their way back to Auburn.

"A Mr. Lancelot Colin." For ears duller even than Tom's, the unwonted warmth and softness of her tone would have betrayed something of the inward thrill with which she uttered the syllables.

"Never heard of him. Must be a newcomer," Tom snorted, and stepped on the gas. The way in which the car leapt forward was more eloquent of his mood than many words. He said nothing more till they were inside the town limits. Then:

"Do you like him?" he snapped.

"Very much." Dora's tone was sweet and tranquil. She ignored Tom's brusqueness. Her thoughts were far away, in a delicious land of glamour and romance and perpetual moonlight.

Tom relapsed into sulky silence, and nothing more was said till they stopped in front of Dora's home.

"Tomorrow is Sunday," Tom observed. "What are you planning to do? I'd like to take you for a drive."

"I'm sorry, Tom, but I've already made an engagement."

"With that Colin bird, I suppose."

"Tom, you are really quite rude tonight."

"Sorry," he grumbled, in a tone that was scarcely apologetic. "Well, I guess I'd better be going. Good night." And he drove away at a speed that was somewhat in excess of the official limit.

Sunday morning came and passed for Dora in a mellow haze of sunlit dreams, of golden glowing anticipations. With the early afternoon arrived Mr. Colin, in his roadster. Dora was in the front yard among her mother's roses when he drove up and got out, immaculately dressed as on the previous evening, and, to Dora's romantic eyes, even more handsome and dashing.

"I suspected that you dwelt among roses," he said, as he came up the garden walk and bowed in his courtier fashion. "Now I know it.

"Dora dimpled. "Who taught you to be so gallant, kind sir?"

"You have taught me—you alone."

"I don't see how I could teach anything to anyone."

"You can inspire — and that is the best kind of teaching."

"You must come in and meet my parents," said Dora, a little later. "You can talk to them while I powder my nose."

Dora's mother and father, both stout and staid and placidly middle-aged, gave Mr. Colin a welcome that was tinged with little more than the usual amount of interest that they manifested toward her beaux. For them, he was merely one more possible suitor of a girl who seemed uncommonly "choosy" and difficult to marry off. Perceiving that he was handsome, obviously a gentleman, and apparently well-to-do, they surveyed him with a regard that was hopeful rather than otherwise — but not too hopeful.

"Mr. Colin is going to take me for a ride," announced Dora. She went upstairs to perform the perennial feminine rite of re-powdering her nose, which, to a superficial masculine eye, would have seemed little in need of such ministrations. When she returned, Mr. Colin was chatting agreeably and successfully with her parents, who appeared to look upon him with increased favor. It was evident that he was really a clever young man.

When they were seated in the roadster, he said with a mysterious air: "I know a perfectly wonderful place where I shall take you. But you aren't to know where it is beforehand."

"How heavenly!" breathed Dora. "I'm sure it will be wonderful." "For me, any place would be fairyland with you. But when one can have the ideal companion and the ideal setting, then true perfection is to be attained. Life can offer no more."

He turned the car northward on the Colfax road. As they drove along, she turned the conversation to himself with feminine deftness. He told her that he had artistic ambitions, possessed independent means, and had come to Auburn with the idea of painting a few landscapes of the local scenery, which he had visited and explored years before and of which he had become much enamored. He was from San Francisco, where his people lived. His father, he explained, was a wealthy realtor and was none too favorably disposed toward his artistic ambitions. His mother, however, was on his side.

Dora was fascinated. She had never known an artist, and all that Mr. Colin told her served to confirm the romantic interest that he had aroused.

"Well, I think that's really enough about myself," he laughed. "Now let's talk about something worth while." He began to ply her with compliments, which, to Dora's ear, were marvelously poetic; but, for the time, he did not speak of the passion he had avowed on the previous evening.

Now they had left the highway and were traveling a narrow side-road that ran toward Bear River. This was soon abandoned for a still narrower road that turned and twisted among brush-oak, chaparral and manzanita. Presently Mr. Colin turned the car aside in a grassy meadow, in front of a grove of tall pines. Except for the road, there was no trace of human life.

They left the car and plunged into the pine grove for several hundred yards. Suddenly, and, for Dora, quite unexpectedly, they came upon a little glade in which there grew a solitary redwood. Here they might have been a hundred miles from civilization, in the midst of the primeval mountain

forest, for any evidence to the contrary. Sunlight sifted goldenly through the pine-tops, and a jay scolded them from somewhere in the dark-green branches. Dora exclaimed with delight.

There was a fallen log at hand to provide them with a seat, and of this they availed themselves at Mr. Colin's suggestion.

"Do you like this?" The very tone of his query was a caress.

"I adore it."

"And I adore you. Say that you love me a little, Dora."

"I like you very much."

"Can't you do better than that?" He was very close beside her and his breath was in her hair as she half-averted her face, fearing that he would see the traitorous softness of her eyes, the tender flush of her cheeks.

"We hardly know each other, Lancelot."

"I know you well enough to realize that no one else could ever make me feel what I feel for you." His arm was about her now, and she did not resist. She had intended to make him wait, to prolong the wooing; but now, in a flash, her will to do so had fled, and all her thoughts seemed to dissolve in a delicious langour.

With a gentle hand he turned her face toward him, and kissed her — a long, passionate, full-blooded kiss, that seemed as if it could never end. Finally she withdrew her lips and hid her face against his shoulder.

"Do you love me?" he whispered, almost fiercely.

"Yes, I love you."

Two weeks had passed for Dora in a golden and fire-shot mist of romance. At first she was very happy, with the sensation of treading on air that sometimes accompanies the first stages of a great emotion. There were

many long walks, rides and cosy evenings with Mr. Colin, who was manifestly a model of devotion and ardor. For some reason, which he told her he would explain later, he had wished to delay the announcement of their engagement; and he had hinted that it would be at least a year before he would be in a position to marry. This had not troubled her — she had been too happy not to trust her lover implicitly. But of late he had appeared self-absorbed and not quite so unfailingly attentive as at first. She wondered, anxiously, if he were growing a little tired. Even when he told her that he was at work upon a new painting, which he hoped would mark a real achievement, she was not entirely reassured. She had seen some of his pictures — amateurish watercolors, not lacking in a certain shallow feeling for tonal harmony — and had thought them quite wonderful. She tried to content herself with his explanation, reflecting that an artist must work, after all, even if he were in love.

One day, in the Auburn post-office, she came upon Mr. Colin chatting gaily with her friend Annabelle, who was smiling at him with all of her wonted animation. Dora was a little surprised, remembering that he had shown no interest in that vivacious brunette on the evening when they had met at Rock Creek. Absorbed entirely in her lover, she had seen little of Annabelle since that occasion.

"Hello, dearie," warbled Annabelle. "I was just asking Mr. Colin what had become of you. You and he seem to have pre-empted each other entirely, and no one else has a look-in."

"I have been busy," said Dora, vaguely.

"I know all about that," laughed Annabelle. "I'll say you have. Well, so long." She walked away with a mirthful glance that included both, but lingered somehow a little longer upon Mr. Colin than upon Dora.

"Since when have you been chumming with Annabelle?" Dora turned to her lover with mock-earnestness.

"I'd hardly call it that." His tone was negligent. "She asked me about you, and I was trying to be civil. She's really quite amusing, though."

Dora thought little of the incident; but one afternoon, a few days later, it occurred to her that she would really like to see Annabelle; also, that Annabelle might well be feeling neglected. She was still vaguely discontented, and troubled by Mr. Colin's fits of preoccupation and by something that was almost absent-minded about his kisses and gallantries. She felt the need of renewing her old friendship with Annabelle, who had always cheered her in hours of depression or boredom.

The Rivers home was on the other side of Auburn from where Dora lived. She sauntered slowly through the winding streets under the shade of elms and maples and eucalypti, and went in at the familiar picket-gate. She was going down the garden-path to the house when she heard Annabelle's voice nearby, in an arbor that was thickly covered with Cherokee rose-vines, now in full flower. She could not see Annabelle or her companion, but the words came clearly:

"I thought you were in love with Dora Now behave... or I'll tell on you." There followed a voluptuous giggle, and then the voice of a man, Mr. Colin's vibrant baritone:

"Your lips are too sweet for anything but kisses. You look as if you had always lived in a rose-arbor."

"If Dora heard you say that "

"Why be always mentioning Dora, when we have you to talk about?"

.. And when there are better things to do even than talk?"

"Now you behave... or ..." The sentence was cut short by the unmistakable sound of a kiss.

Dora had the sensation of stumbling blindly among ashes and ruins when she left the garden of Annabelle's home. By an automatic rather than conscious impulse she closed the gate behind her as quietly as she could. Her throat was dry, and she could scarcely control the tears that welled

beneath her eyelids. Somehow, she reached her home, and flung herself on the sofa in the sitting-room.

She began to weep. Her parents were away, and for this she was vaguely thankful. No one would see her in the first overwhelming shock of her grief and disillusionment.

An hour later the telephone rang, and she sprang automatically to answer it. The voice was that of Tom Masters, whose occasional gruff but recurrent invitations she had refused ever since her meeting with Mr. Colin.

"Say, Dora, how about the dance at Rock Creek next Saturday night?" There was an almost forlorn stubbornness in his tone. "I thought I'd ring up and ask."

"Oh, all right, Tom, I guess I can go with you."

THE FLIRT

Someone introduced him to her as she stepped from the surf at the bathing beach. She was blonde as a daffodil, and her one-piece suit of vivid green clung to her closely as a folded leaf to the flower-bud. She smiled upon him, with an air of tender and subtle sadness; and her slow, voluptuous eyelids fell before his gaze with the pensive languor of closing petals. There was a diffidence and seduction in the [virginal] curve of her cheek; she was modest and demure, with an under note of elusive provocation; and her voice was a plaintive soprano.

Twenty minutes later, they sat among the dunes at the end of the beach, where a white wall of sand concealed them from the crowd. Her bathing suit, only half-dry, still clung and glistened; but their flirtation had already ripened and flourished with an ease that surprised him.

"Surely I knew you in ancient Greece," he was saying. "Your hair retains the sunlight of the Golden Age, your eyes the blue of perished heavens that shone on the vale of Tempe. Tell me, what queen or goddess were you? In what fane of chalcedony, or palace of ebony and gold, did I, a long-forgotten poet, sing before you the hymns or lyrics of my adoration?... Do you not remember me?"

"Oh, yes, I remember you," she said, in her plaintive soprano. "But I was not a queen or a goddess: I was only a yellow lily ^growing in a forest glade by the banks of some forgotten stream; and you were the faun who passed by and trampled me [in pursuit of a fleeing nymph]^[in the garden of Lais; and you were the prince who passed by and trampled me on your way to her chamber door]."

"Poor little flower!" he cried, with a compassion he did not need to feign: It was impossible to resist the dove-like mournful cadence in her voice, the submissive sorrow and affection of her gaze . She said nothing, but her head drooped nearer to his shoulder, and her lips took on a more sorrowful and

seductive curve. Even if she were not half so lovely and desirable, he felt that it would be impardonably brutal not to kiss her Her lips were cool as flowers after an April rain, and they clung softly to his, as if in gratitude for his tenderness and pity

The next day, he looked for her in vain among the bathers at the beach. She had promised to be there—had promised with many lingering kisses and murmurs. Disconsolate, remembering with a pang the gentle pressure of her mouth, the light burden of her body so loath to part from his arms, he strolled towards the dune in whose shelter they had sat. He paused, hearing voices from behind it, and listened involuntarily, for one of the voices was hers. The other, low and indistinct, with a note of passion, was a man's voice ...With the dove-like soprano

whose tones were so fresh and vibrant in his memory, he heard her say: "I was only a yellow lily growing in a forest glade by the banks of some forgotten stream; and you were the faun who passed by and trampled me."

THE FLOWER-WOMEN

'Athlé,' said Maal Dweb, 'I suffer from the frightful curse of omnipotence. In all Xiccarph, and in the five outer planets of the triple suns, there is no one, there is nothing, to dispute my domination. Therefore my ennui has become intolerable.'

The girlish eyes of Athlé regarded the enchanter with a gaze of undying astonishment, which, however, was not due to his strange avowal. She was the last of the fifty-one women that Maal Dweb had turned into statues in order to preserve their frail, corruptible beauty from the worm-like gnawing of time. Since, through a laudable desire to avoid monotony, he had resolved never to repeat again this particular sorcery, the magician had cherished Athlé with the affection which an artist feels for the final masterpiece of a series. He had placed her on a little dais, beside the ivory chair in his chamber of meditation. Often he addressed to her his queries or monologues; and the fact that she did not reply or even hear was to him a signal and unfailing recommendation.

'There is but one remedy for this boredom of mine,' he went on — 'the abnegation, at least for a while, of that all too certain power from which it springs. Therefore, I, Maal Dweb, the ruler of six worlds and all their moons, shall go forth alone, unheralded, and without other equipment than that which any fledgling sorcerer might possess. In this way, perhaps I shall recover the lost charm of incertitude, the foregone enchantment of peril. Adventures that I have not foreseen will be mine, and the future will wear the alluring veil of the mysterious. It remains, however, to select the field of my adventurings.'

Maal Dweb arose from his curiously carved chair and waved back the four automatons of iron, having the likeness of armed men, that sprang to attend him. He passed along the halls of his palace, where painted hangings told in vermilion and purple the dread legends of his power. Through ebon valves

that opened noiselessly at the uttering of a high-pitched word, he entered the chamber in which was his planetarium.

The room was walled, floored, and vaulted with a dark crystal, full of tiny, numberless fires, that gave the illusion of unbounded space with all its stars. In midair, without chains or other palpable support, there hung an array of various globes that represented the three suns, the six planets, and thirteen moons of the system ruled by Maal Dweb. The miniature suns, amber, emerald, and carmine, bathed their intricately circling worlds with an illumination that reproduced at all times the diurnal conditions of the system itself; and the pigmy satellites maintained always their corresponding orbits and relative positions.

The sorcerer went forward, walking as if on some unfathomable gulf of night, with stars and galaxies beneath him. The poising worlds were level with his shoulders as he passed among them. Disregarding the globes that corresponded to Mornoth, Xiccarph, Ulassa, Nough, and Rhul, he came to Voltap, the outermost, which was then in aphelion on the farther side of the room.

Votalp, a large and moonless world, revolved imperceptibly as he studied it. For one hemisphere, he saw, the yellow sun was at that time in total eclipse behind the sun of carmine; but in spite of this, and its greater distance from the solar triad. Votalp was lit with sufficient clearness. It was mottled with strange hues like a great cloudy opal; and the mottlings were microscopic oceans, isles, mountains, jungles, and deserts. Fantastic sceneries leapt into momentary salience, taking on the definitude and perspective of actual landscapes, and then faded back amid the iridescent blur. Glimpses of teeming, multifarious life, incredible tableaux, monstrous happenings, were beheld by Maal Dweb as he looked down like some celestial spy.

It seemed, however that he found little to divert or inveigle him in these outré doings and exotic wonders. Vision after vision rose before him, summoned and dismissed at will, as if he were turning the pages of a familiar volume. The wars of gigantic wyverns, the matings of half-vegetable monsters, the queer algae that had filled a certain ocean with their

living and moving labyrinths, the remarkable spawn of certain polar glaciers: all these elicited no gleam or sparkle in his dulled eyes of blackish emerald.

At length, on that portion of the planet which was turning into the double dawn from its moonless night, he perceived an occurrence that drew and held his attention. For the first time, he began to calculate the precise latitude and longitude of the surrounding milieu.

'There,' he said to himself, 'is a situation not without interest. In fact, the whole affair is quaint and curious enough to warrant my intervention. I shall visit Votalp.'

He withdrew from the planetarium and made a few preparations for his meditated journey. Having changed his robe of magisterial sable and scarlet for a hodden mantle, and having removed from his person every charm and talisman, with the exception of two phylacteries acquired during his novitiate, he went forth into the garden of his mountain-built palace. He left no instructions with the many retainers who served with him: for these retainers were automatons of iron and brass, who would fulfill their various duties without injunction till he returned.

Traversing the-curious labyrinth which he alone could solve, he came to the verge of the sheer mesa, where pythonlike lianas drooped into space, and metallic palms deployed their armaments of foliage against the far-flung horizons of the world Xiccarph. Empires and cities, lying supine beneath his magical dominion, were unrolled before him; but, giving them hardly a glance, he walked along the estrade of black marble at the very brink, till he reached a narrow promontory around which there hung at all times a deep and hueless cloud, obscuring the prospect of the lands below and beyond.

The secret of this cloud, affording access to multiple dimensions and deeply folded realms of space conterminous with far worlds, was known only to Maal Dweb. He had built a silver drawbridge on the promontory; and by lowering its airy span into the cloud, he could pass at will to the farther zones of Xiccarph, or could cross the very void between the planets.

Now, after making certain highly recondite calculations, he manipulated the machinery of the light drawbridge so that its other end would fall upon the particular terrain he desired to visit in Votalp. Then, assuring himself that his calculations and adjustments were flawless, he followed the silver span into the dim, bewildering chaos of the cloud. Here, as he groped in a gray blindness, it seemed that his body and members were drawn out over infinite gulfs, and were bent through impossible angles. A single misstep would have plunged him into spatial regions from which all his cunning sorcery could have contrived no manner of return or release; but he had often trod these hidden ways, and he did not lose his equilibrium. The transit appeared to involve whole centuries of time; but finally he emerged from the cloud and came to the farther end of the drawbridge.

Before him was the scene that had lured his interest in Votalp. It was a semi-tropic valley, level and open in the foreground, and rising steeply at the other extreme, with all its multiform fantasies of vegetation, toward the cliffs and chasms of sable mountains horned with blood-red stone. The time was still early dawn; but the amber sun, freeing itself slowly from the occultation of the sun of carmine, had begun to lighten the hues and shadows of the valley with strange copper and orange. The emerald sun was still below the horizon.

The terminus of the bridge had fallen on a mossy knoll, behind which the hueless cloud had gathered, even as about the promontory in Xiccarph. Maal Dweb descended the knoll, feeling no concern whatever for the bridge. It would remain as he had left it, till the time of his return; and if, in the interim, any creatures from Votalp should cross the gulf and invade his mountain citadel, they would meet a fearful doom in the snares and windings of the labyrinth; or, failing this, would be exterminated by his iron servitors.

As he went down the knoll into the valley, the enchanter heard an eery, plaintive singing, like that of sirens who bewail some irremediable misfortune. The singing came from a sisterhood of unusual creatures, half woman and half flower, that grew on the valley bottom beside a sleepy stream of purple water. There were several scores of these lovely and

charming monsters, whose feminine bodies of pink and pearl reclined amid the vermilion velvet couches of billowing petals to which they were attached. These petals were borne on mattress-like leaves and heavy, short, well-rooted stems. The flowers were disposed in irregular circles, clustering thickly toward the center, and with open intervals in the outer rows.

Maal Dweb approached the flower-women with a certain caution; for he knew that they were vampires. Their arms ended in long tendrils, pale as ivory, swifter and more supple than the coils of darting serpents, with which they were wont to secure the unwary victims drawn by their singing. Of course, knowing in his wisdom the inexorable laws of nature, he felt no disapproval of such vampirism; but, on the other hand, he did not care to be its object.

He circled about the strange family at a little distance, his movements hidden from their observation by their boulders overgrown with tall, luxuriant lichens of red and yellow. Soon he neared the straggling outer plants that were upstream from the knoll on which he had landed; and in confirmation of the vision beheld in the mimic world in his planetarium, he found that the turf was upheaved and broken where five of the blossoms, growing apart from their companions, had been disrooted and removed bodily. He had seen in his vision the rape of the fifth flower, and he knew that the others were now lamenting her.

Suddenly, as if they had forgotten their sorrow, the wailing of the flower-women turned to a wild and sweet and voluptuous singing, like that of the Lorelei. By this token, the enchanter knew that his presence had been detected. Inured though he was to such bewitchments, he found himself far from insensible to the perilous luring of the voices. Contrary to his intention, forgetful of the danger, he emerged from the lee of the lichen-crested rocks. By insidious degrees, the melody fired his blood with a strange intoxication, it sang in his brain like some bewildering wine. Step by step, with a temporary loss of prudence for which, later, he was quite unable to account, he approached the blossoms.

Now, pausing at an interval that he deemed safe in his bemusement, he beheld plainly the half-human features of the vampires, leaning toward him with fantastic invitation. Their weirdly slanted eyes, like oblong opals of dew and venom, the snaky coiling of their bronze-green hair, the bright, baneful scarlet of their lips, that thirsted subtly even as they sang, awoke within him the knowledge of his peril. Too late, he sought to defy the captiously woven spell. Unwinding with a movement swift as light, the long pale tendrils of one of the creatures wrapped him round, and he was drawn, resisting vainly, toward her couch.

At the moment of his capture, the whole sisterhood had ceased their singing. They began to utter little cries of triumph, shrill and sibilant. Murmurs of expectation, like the purrings of hungry flame, arose from the nearest, who hoped to share in the good fortune of the sorcerer's captress.

Maal Dweb, however, was now able to utilize his faculties. Without alarm or fear, he contemplated the lovely monster who had drawn him to the verge of her velvet bed, and was fawning upon him with sinisterly parted lips.

Using a somewhat primary power of divination, he apprised himself of certain matters concerning the vampire. Having learnt the true, occult name which this creature shared with all others of her kind, he then spoke the name aloud in a firm but gentle tone; and winning thus, by an elemental law of magic, the power of mastery over his captress and her sisters, he felt the instant relaxation of the tendrils. The flower-woman, with fear and wonder in her strange eyes, drew back like a startled lamia; but Maal Dweb, employing the half-articulate sounds of her own language, began to soothe and reassure her. In a little while he was on friendly terms with the whole sisterhood. These simple and naive beings forgot their vampire intentions, their surprise and wonderment, and seemed to accept the magician very much as they accepted the three suns and the meteoric conditions of the planet Votalp.

Conversing with them, he soon verified the information obtained through the mimic globe. As a rule their emotions and memories were short-lived,

their nature being closer to that of plants or animals than of humankind; but the loss of five sisters, occurring on successive mornings, had filled them with grief and terror that they could not forget. The missing flowers had been carried away bodily. The depredators were certain reptilian beings, colossal in size and winged like pterodactyls, who came down from their new-built citadel among the mountains at the valley's upper extreme. These beings, known as the Ispazars, seven in number, had become formidable sorcerers and had developed an intellection beyond that of their kind, together with many esoteric faculties. Preserving the cold and evilly cryptic nature of reptiles, they had made themselves the masters of an abhuman science. But, until the present, Maal Dweb had ignored them and had not thought it worth while to interfere with their evolution.

Now, through an errant whim, in his search for adventure, he had decided to pit himself against the Ispazars, employing no other weapons of sorcery than his own wit and will, his remembered learning, his clairvoyance, and the two simple amulets that he wore on his person.

'Be comforted,' he said to the flower-women, 'for verily I shall deal with these miscreants in a fitting manner.'

At this; they broke into a shrill babble, repeating tales the bird-people of the valley had told them regarding the fortress of the Ispazars, whose walls rose sheerly from a hidden peak unscaled by man, and were void of portal or window save in the highmost ramparts, where the flying reptiles went in and out. And they told him other tales, concerning the ferocity and cruelty of the Ispazars...

Smiling as if at the chatter of children, he diverted their thoughts to other matters, and told them many stories of odd and curious marvels, and queer happenings in alien worlds. In the meanwhile he perfected his plan for obtaining entrance to the citadel of the reptilian wizards.

The day went by in such divertissements; and one by one the three suns of the system fell beyond the valley's rim. The flower-women grew inattentive, they began to nod and drowse in the richly darkening twilight;

and Maal Dweb proceeded with certain preparations that formed an essential part of his scheme.

Through his power of second-sight, he had determined the identity of the victim whom the reptiles would carry away in their next raid, on the morrow. This creature, as it happened, was the one who had sought to ensnare him. Like the others, she was now preparing to fold herself for the night in her voluminous couch of petals. Confiding part of his plan to her, Maal Dweb manipulated in a singular fashion. one of the amulets which he wore, and by virtue of this manipulation, reduced himself to the proportions of a pigmy. In this state, with the assistance of the drowsy siren, he was able to conceal himself in a hollow space among the petals; and thus embowered. like a bee in a rose he slept securely through the short, moonless night of Votalp.

The dawn awakened him, glowing as if through lucent curtains of ruby and purple. He heard the flower-women murmuring sleepily to one another as they opened their blossoms to the early suns. Their murmurs, however, soon changed into shrill cries of agitation and fear; and above the cries, there came a vibrant drumming as of great dragonwings. He peered from his hiding-place and saw in the double dawn the descent of the Ispazars, from whose webbed vans a darkness fell on the valley. Nearer they drew, and he saw their cold and scarlet eyes beneath scaly brows, their long, undulant bodies, their lizard limbs, and prehensile claws; and he heard the deep, articulate hissing of their voices. Then the petals closed about him blindly, shuddering and constrictive, as the flower-women recoiled from the swooping monsters. All was confusion, terror, tumult; but he knew, from his observation of the previous rape, that two of the Ispazars had encircled the flower's stem with their python-like tails, and were pulling it from the ground as a human sorcerer might pull a mandrake plant.

He felt the convulsive agony of the disrooted blossom, he heard the lamentable shrieking of her sisters. Then there came a heavier beating of the drum-loud wings, and the feeling of giddy ascension and flight.

Through all this, Maal Dweb maintained the utmost presence of mind; and he did not betray himself to the Ispazars. After many minutes, there was a slackening of the headlong flight, and he knew that the reptiles were nearing their citadel. A moment more, and the ruddy gloom of the shut petals darkened and purpled about him as if they had peered from the sunlight into a place of deep shadow. The thrumming of wings ceased abruptly, the living flower was dropped from a height on some hard surface and Maal Dweb was nearly hurled from his hiding place by the violence of her fall. Moaning faintly, twitching a little, she lay where her captors had flung her. The enchanter heard the hissing voices of the reptile wizards, the rough, sharp slithering of their tails on a stone floor, as they withdrew.

Whispering words of comfort to the dying blossom, he felt the petals relax about him. He crept forth very cautiously, and found himself in an immense, gloomily vaulted hall, whose windows were like the mouths of a deep cavern. The place was a sort of alchemy, a den of alien sorceries and abhorrent pharmaceuticals. Everywhere, in the gloom, there were vats, cupels, furnaces, alembics, and matrasses of unhuman form, bulking and towering colossally to the pigmy eyes of Maal Dweb. Close at hand, a monstrous cauldron fumed like a crater of black metal, its curving sides ascending far above the magician's head. None of the Ispazars was in sight; but, knowing that they might resume at any moment, he hastened to make ready against them, feeling, for the first time in many years, the thrill of peril and expectation.

Manipulating the second amulet, he regained his normal proportions. The room, though still spacious, was no longer a hall of giants, and the cauldron beside him sank and lessened till its rim rose only to his shoulder. He saw now that the cauldron was filled with an unholy mixture of ingredients, among which were finely shredded portions of the missing flower-women, together with the gall of chimeras and the ambergris of leviathans. Heated by unseen fires, it boiled tumultuously, foaming with black, pitchy bubbles, and putting forth a nauseous vapor.

With the shrewd eye of a past master of all chemic lore, Maal Dweb proceeded to estimate the cauldron's various contents, and was then able to

divine the purpose for which the brewage was intended. The conclusion to which he was driven appalled him slightly, and served to heighten his respect for the power and science of the reptile sorcerers. He saw, indeed, that it would be highly advisable to arrest their evolution.

After brief reflection, it occurred to him that, in accordance with chemical laws, the adding of certain simple components to the brewage would bring about, an eventuation neither desired nor anticipated by the Ispazars. On high tables about the walls of the alchemy, there were jars, flasks, and vials containing subtle drugs and powerful elements, some of which were drawn from the more arcanic kingdoms of nature. Disregarding the moon-powder, the coals of starfire, the jellies made from the brains of gorgons, the ichor of salamanders, the dust of lethal fungi, the marrow of sphinxes, and other equally quaint and pernicious matters, the magician soon found the essences that he required. It was the work of an instant to pour them into the seething cauldron; and having done this, he awaited with composure. the return of the reptiles.

The flower-woman, in the meanwhile, had ceased to moan and twitch. Maal Dweb knew that she was dead, since beings of this genus were unable to survive when uprooted with such violence from their natal soil. She had folded herself to the face in her straitened petals, as if in a red and blackening shroud. He regarded her briefly, not without commiseration; and at that moment he heard the voices of the seven Ispazars, who had now re-entered the alchemy.

They came toward him among the crowded vessels, walking erect in the fashion of men on their short lizard legs, their ribbed and sabled wings retracted behind them, and their eyes glaring redly in the gloom. Two of them were armed with long, sinuous-bladed knives; and others were equipped with enormous adamantine pestles, to be employed, no doubt, in bruising the flesh of the floral vampire.

When they saw the enchanter; they were both startled and angered. Their necks and torsos began to swell like the hoods of cobras, and a great hissing rose among them, like the noise of jetted steam. Their aspect would have

struck terror to the heart of any common man; but Maal Dweb confronted them calmly, repeating aloud, in low, even tones, a word of sovereign protective power.

The Ispazars hurled themselves toward him, some running along the floor with an undulant slithering motion, and others rising on rapid-beating vans to attack him from above. All, however, dashed themselves vainly on the sphere of unseen force he had drawn about him through the utterance of the word of power. It was a strange thing to see them clawing vengefully at the void air, or striking futile, blows with their weapons, which rang as if on a brazen wall.

Now, perceiving that the man before them was a sorcerer, the reptile magicians began to make use of their own abhuman sorcery. They called from the air great bolts of livid flame, python-shapen, which leaped and writhed incessantly, warring with the sphere of protective power, driving it back as a shield is driven by press of numbers in battle, but never breaking it down entirely. Also, they chanted evil, siblant runes that were designed to charm away the magician's memory, and cause him to forget his magic. Sore was the travail of Maal Dweb as he fought the serpent fires and runes; and blood mingled with the sweat of his brow from that endeavor. But still, as the bolts struck nearer and the singing loudened, he kept uttering the unforgotten word; and the word still protected him.

Now, above the snaky chanting, he heard the deep hiss of the cauldron, boiling more turbulently than before because of those matters which he had added to its contents. And he saw, between the ever-writhing bolts, that a more voluminous vapor, dark as the steam of a primal fen, was mounting from the cauldron and spreading throughout the alchemy.

Soon the Ispazars were immersed in the fumes, as in a cloud of darkness; and dimly they began to coil and twist, convulsed with a strange agony. The python flames died out on the air; and the hissings of the Ispazars became inarticulate as those of common serpents. Then falling to the floor, while the black mist gathered and thickened above them, they crawled to and fro

on their bellies in the fashion of true reptiles; and, emerging at times from the vapor, they shrank and dwindled as if hell-fire had consumed them.

All this was even as Maal Dweb had planned. He knew that the Ispazars had forgotten their sorcery and science; and a swift devolution, flinging them back to the lowest state of serpenthood, had come upon them through the action of the vapor. But, before the completion of the change, he admitted one of the seven Ispazars to the sphere that now served to protect him from the fumes. The creature fawned at his feet like a tame dragon, acknowledging him for its master. Then, presently, the cloud of vapor began to lift, and he saw the other Ispazars, who were now little larger than fensnakes. Their wings had withered into useless frills, and they crept and hissed on the floor, amid the alembics and crucibles and athanors of their lost science.

Maal Dweb regarded them for a little, not without pride in his own sorcery. The struggle had been difficult, even dangerous; and he reflected that his boredom had been thoroughly overcome, at least for the nonce. From a practical standpoint, he had done well; for, in ridding the flower-women of their persecutors, he had also eradicated a possible future menace to his own dominion over the worlds of the three suns.

Turning to that Ispazar which he had spared for a necessary purpose, he seated himself firmly astride its back, behind the thick jointing of the vans. He spoke a magic word that was understood by the monster. Bearing him between its wings, it rose and flew obediently through one of the windows; and, leaving behind it for ever the citadel that was not to be scaled by man, nor by any wingless creature, it carried the magician over the red horns of the sable mountains, across the valley where dwelt the sisterhood of floral vampires, and descended on the mossy knoll at the end of that silver drawbridge whereby he had entered Votalp. There Maal Dweb dismounted; and, followed by the crawling Ispazar, he began his return journey to Xiccarph through the hueless cloud, above the multi-dimensional deeps.

Midway in that peculiar transit, he heard a sharp, sudden clapping of wings. It ceased with remarkable abruptness, and was not repeated. Looking back,

he found that the Ispazar had fallen from the bridge, and was vanishing brokenly amid irreconcilable angles, in the gulf from which there was no return.

THE FULFILLED PROPHECY

You may set this story down as a case of coincidence. Indeed, you may not believe it at all. But the facts are well authenticated, and to my mind are far too remarkable to be accounted for by the coincidence theory.

I found the first part in an old Telegu manuscript, written perhaps seven centuries ago, and which today is in a private library in Madras. If fate or curiosity should ever take you to that city, and you obtain access to this library, you will discover this manuscript, and may read it for yourself.

The thing purported to have been written by one Vikram Roo, a priest, who in his time was of much importance in Rajahpur, a Kingdom of the Deccan, which ceased to exist, politically speaking, about three centuries ago.

Skipping a considerable amount of literature pertaining to himself, and the virtues of Natha Singh, the then Rajah of Rajahpur, the manuscript ran somewhat as follows:

It was during the reign of this most beneficent ruler (Natha Singh) that the strange event which I am about to relate, occurred.

It happened in the order of things set down by the fate that the omniscient Natha Singh, on a Wednesday, called his viziers about him and sat on his throne in the Hall of Audience to dispense justice to his subjects.

And it came to pass that many cases were judged by the omnipotent ruler, whose decisions were wise and just to all.

At length there entered the Audience Hall a wandering Jacquer. Upon his face were the marks of years, and his long locks were as the snows of the eternal Himalayas.

Natha Singh leaned towards him expectantly, and all present awaited his complaint in silence. For a space he spoke not, his eyes, which glowed

strangely, as one who sees many things, fixed upon the Rajah's countenance. At length he spoke, and his words fell heavily upon the ears of the hearers.

"Know ye Natha Singh" he said, "that thy Kingdom shall come to an end. This shall not happen in thy days, or in the days of thy sons. But many years hence when thou and many that shall follow thee are but memories of yesterday, then shall come from the North a great army. And at the head shall ride a warrior on a white horse, whose birth was in a far land. He is a mighty general, and his men are as the sands of the sea. And before them the warriors of the Rajah shall melt as even as snow in the desert. And on that day shall Rajahpur fall, and those dwelling therein be given over to the sword. And before the sun has set, the reigning Rajah shall die, and his Kingdom pass to his conquerors. And after him there shall be no more of thy race, and Rajahpur shall be but a province of a mighty empire. And upon thy throne he of the White Horse shall rule, as a governor holding office under an emperor."

The Jacquer ceased. For a space he stood silently, and then he turned to go. Slowly he passed from the Audience Hall and into the streets of Rajahpur. For a time there seemed a presage of gloom within the Hall, and the Rajah wondered if indeed, this strange prophecy should ever be fulfilled.

But the Jacquer had passed from Rajahpur, and no man might say whither he had gone. In his eyes was the look of one who has seen many things.

Several months later, while at Hyderabad I came across the sequel. A friend to whom I related the story contained in Vikram Roo's manuscript, supplied me with a history of the wars of Akbar. Opening one of the volumes, he pointed out a passage describing the fall of Rajahpur. The book was by a native historian, little known, even in India, nowadays, and was authentic in every particular. The author, who lived during the reign of Shah Jihan, had taken great pains to make his work complete and accurate. The passage pointed out by my friend was as follows:

"Abd-ul-Marrash, the famous general, after his conquests in Rajputana, was sent by Akbar to conduct a war in the Deccan. His extensive and successful services had earned him the entire confidence of his Master, and, in this new campaign he more than fulfilled Akbar's expectations. Abd-ul-Marrash carried all before him. Several minor states he crushed at one blow—— At length he came to Rajahpur, a large and important Kingdom situated in a fertile plain of the Southern Deccan, and ruled over by a prince named Nasir Singh. Nasir's army, which he led in person, met Abd-ul-Marrash on the plains without the walls. The great general, mounted on a white horse, headed the charge, and carried his foes before him like reeds in a storm. Soon all was over, and Nasir Singh's army, in which was the flower of Rajahpur, lay dead upon the field, or was captive to the conqueror. Nasir himself escaped and reached the city in safety.

"Rajahpur was taken the same day; Abd-ul-Marrash, too impatient to await the following day, pressed on, and ordered an immediate attack. All was carried, Rajahpur sacked, and Nasir Singh slain in a vain attempt at escape, before sunset.

"As a reward for his distinguished services, Abd-ul-Marrash was created subadar, or governor, of this new province."

THE GARDEN OF ADOMPHA

"Lord of the sultry, red parterres And orchards sunned by hell's unsettling flame! Amid thy garden blooms the Tree which bears Unnumbered heads of demons for its fruit; And, like a slithering serpeat, runs the root That is called Baaras; And there the forky, pale mandragoras, Self-torn from out the soil, go to and fro, Calling upon thy name: Till man new-damned will deem that devils pass, Crying in wrathful frenzy and strange woe."

-Ludar's Litany to Thasaidon

It was well known that Adompha, king of the wide orient isle of Sotar, possessed amid his far-stretching palace grounds a garden secret from all men except himself and the court magician, Dwerulas. The square-built granite walls of the garden, high and formidable as those of a prison, were plain for all to see, rearing above the stately beefwood and camphor trees, and broad plots of multi-coloured blossoms. But nothing had ever been ascertained regarding its interior: for such care as it required was given only by the wizard beneath Adompha's direction; and the twain spoke thereof in deep riddles that none could interpret. The thick brazen door responded to a mechanism whose mystery they shared with none other; and the king and Dwerulas, whether separately or together, visited the garden only at those hours when others were not abroad. And none could verily boast that he had beheld even so much as the opening of the door.

Men said that the garden had been roofed over against the sun with great sheets of lead and copper, leaving no cranny through which the tiniest star could peer down. Some swore that the privacy of its masters during their visits was ensured by a lethean slumber which Dwerulas, through his magic art, was wont to lay at such times upon the whole vicinity.

A mystery so salient could hardly fail to provoke curiosity, and sundry different beliefs arose concerning the garden's nature. Some averred that it was filled with evil plants of nocturnal habit, that yielded their swift and

mordant poisons for Adompha's use, along with more insidious and baleful essences employed by the warlock in the working of his enchantments. Such tales, it seemed, were perhaps not without authority: since, following the construction of the closed garden, there had been at the royal court numerous deaths attributable to poisoning, and disasters that were plainly the sendings of a wizard, together with the bodily vanishment of people whose mundane presence no longer pleased Adompha or Dwerulas.

Other tales, of a more extravagant kind, were whispered among the credulous. That legend of unnatural infamy, which had surrounded the king from childhood, assumed a more hideous tinge; and Dwerulas, who had reputedly been sold to the Archdemon before birth by his haggish mother, acquired a new blackness of renown as one exceeding all other sorcerers in the depth and starkness of his abandonment.

Waking from such slumber and such dreams as the juice of the black poppy had given him, King Adompha rose in the dead, stagnant hours between moonset and dawn. About him the palace lay hushed like a charnel-house, its occupants having yielded to their nightly sopor of wine, drugs and arrack. Around the palace, the gardens and the capital city of Loithé slept beneath slow stars of windless southern heavens. At this time Adompha and Dwerulas were wont to visit the high-walled close with little fear of being followed or observed.

Adompha went forth, pausing but briefly to turn the covert eye of his black bronze lantern into the lampless chamber adjoining his own. The room had been occupied by Thuloneah, his favourite odalisque for the seldom-equalled period of eight nights; but he saw without surprise or disconcertion that the bed of disordered silks was now empty. By this, he felt sure that Dwerulas had preceded him to the garden. And he knew, moreover, that Dwerulas had not gone idly or unburdened.

The grounds of the palace, steeped everywhere in unbroken shadow, appeared to maintain that secrecy which the king preferred. He came to the shut brazen door in the blankly towering wall; emitting, as he approached it, a sharp sibilation like the hissing of a cobra. In response to

the rising and falling of this sound, the door swung inwards silently and closed silently behind him.

The garden, planted and tilled so privily, and sealed by its metal roof from the orbs of heaven, was illumined solely by a strange, fiery globe that hung in mid-air at the centre. Adompha regarded this globe with awe, for its nature and purveyance were mysterious to him. Dwerulas claimed that it had risen from hell on a moonless midnight at his bidding, and was levitated by infernal power, and fed with the never-dying flames of that clime in which the fruits of Thasaïdon swelled to unearthly size and enchanted savour. It gave forth a sanguine light, in which the garden swam and weltered as if seen through a luminous mist of blood. Even in the bleak nights of winter, the globe yielded a genial warmth; and it fell never from its weird suspension, though without palpable support; and beneath it the garden flourished balefully, lush and exuberant as same parterre of the nether circles.

Indeed, the growths of that garden were such as no terrestrial sun could have fostered, and Dwerulas said that their seed was of like origin with the globe. There were pale, bifurcated trunks that strained upwards as if to disroot themselves from the ground, unfolding immense leaves like the dark and ribbed wings of dragons. There were amaranthine blossoms, broad as salvers, supported by arm-thick stems that trembled continually.

And there were many other weird plants, diverse as the seven hells, and having no common characteristics other than the scions which Dwerulas had grafted upon them here and there through his unnatural and necromantic art.

These scions were the various parts and members of human beings. Consumately, and with never failing success, the magician had joined them to the half-vegetable, half-animate stocks on which they lived and grew thereafter, drawing an ichor-like sap. Thus were preserved the carefully chosen souvenirs of a multitude of persons who had inspired Dwerulas and the king with distaste or ennui. On palmy boles, beneath feathery-tufted foliage, the heads of eunuchs hung in bunches, like enormous black drupes.

A bare, leafless creeper was flowered with the ears of delinquent guardsmen. Misshapen cacti were fruited with the breasts of women, or foliated with their hair. Entire limbs or torsos had been united with monstrous trees. Some of the huge salver-like blossoms bore palpitating hearts, and certain smaller blooms were centered with eyes that still opened and closed amid their lashes. And there were other graftings, too obscene or repellent for narration.

Adompha went forward among the hybrid growths, which stirred and rustled at his approach. The heads appeared to crane towards him a little, the ears quivered, the breasts shuddered lightly, the eyes widened or narrowed as if watching his progress.

These human remnants, he knew, lived only with the sluggish life of the plants, shared only in their sub-animal activity. He had regarded them with a curious and morbid esthetic pleasure, had found in them the infallible attraction of things enormous and hypernatural. Now, for the first time, he passed among them with a languid interest. He began to apprehend that fatal hour when the garden, with all its novel thaumaturgies, would offer no longer a refuge from his inexorable ennui.

At the core of the strange pleasance, where a circular space was still vacant amid the crowding growths, Adompha came to a mound of loamy fresh-dug earth. Beside it, wholly nude, and supine as if in death, there lay the odalisque Thuloneah. Near her, various knives, and other implements, together with vials of liquid balsams and viscid gums that Dwerulas used in his grafting, had been emptied upon the ground from a leathern bag. A plant known as the dedaim, with a bulbous, pulpy, whitishgreen bole from whose centre rose and radiated several leafless reptilian boughs, dripped upon Thuloneah's bosom an occasional drop of yellowish-red ichor from incisions made in its smooth bark.

Behind the loamy mound, Dwerulas rose to view with the suddenness of a demon emerging from his subterrene lair. In his hands he held the spade with which he had just finished digging a deep and grave-like hole. Beside the regal stature and girth of Adompha, he seemed no more than a wizened

dwarf. His aspect bore all the marks of immense age, as if dusty centuries had seared his flesh and sucked the blood from his veins. His eyes glowed in the bottom of pit-like orbits; his features were black and sunken as those of a long-dead corpse; his body was gnarled as some millennial desert cedar. He stooped incessantly so that his lank knotty arms hung almost to the ground. Adompha marvelled, as always, at the well-nigh demoniac strength of those arms; marvelled that Dwerulas could have wielded the heavy shovel so expeditiously, could have carried to the garden on his back without human aid the burden of those victims whose members he had utilized in his experiments. The king had never demeaned himself to assist at such labours; but, after indicating from time to time the people whose disappearance would in no wise displease him, had done nothing more than watch and supervise the baroque gardening.

'Is she dead?' Adompha questioned, eyeing the luxurious limbs and body of Thuloneah without emotion.

'Nay,' said Dwerulas, in a voice harsh as a rusty coffin-hinge, 'but I have administered to her the drowsy and over-powering juice of the dedaim. Her heart beats impalpably, her blood flows with the sluggishness of that mingled ichor. She will not reawaken... save as a part of the garden's life, sharing its obscure sentience. I wait now your further instructions. What portion... or portions?'

'Her hands were very deft,' said Adompha as if musing aloud, in reply to the half-uttered question 'They knew the subtle ways of love and were learned in all amorous arts. I would have you preserve her hands... but nothing else.'

The singular and magical operation had been completed. The fair, slim, tapering hands of Thuloneah, severed cleanly at the wrists, were attached with little mark of suture to the pale and lopped extremities of the two topmost branches of the dedaim. In this process the magician had employed the gums of infernal plants, and had repeatedly invoked the curious powers of certain underground genii, as was his wont on such occasions. Now, as if in suppliance, the semi-vegetable arms reached out towards Adompha with their human hands. The king felt a revival of his old interest in Dwerulas'

horticulture, a queer excitement woke within him before the mingled grotesquery and beauty of the grafted plant. At the same time there lived again in his flesh the subtle ardours of outworn nights... for the hands were filled with memories.

He had quite forgotten Thuloneah's body, lying close by with its maimed arms. Recalled from his reverie by the sudden movement of Dwerulas, he turned and saw the wizard stooping above the unconscious girl; who had not stirred during the whole course of the operation. Blood still flowed and puddled upon the dark earth from the stumps of her wrists. Dwerulas, with that unnatural vigour which informed all his movements, seized the odalisque in his pipy arms and swung her easily aloft. His air was that of a labourer resuming his unfinished task; but he seemed to hesitate before casting her into the hole that would serve as a grave; where, through seasons warmed and illumined by the hell- drawn globe, her golden, decaying body would feed the roots of that anomalous plant which bore her own hands for scions. It was as if he were loath to relinquish his voluptuous burden. Adompha, watching him curiously, was aware as never before of the stark evil and turpitude that flowed like an overwhelming fetor from Dwerulas' hunched body and twisted limbs.

Deeply as he himself had gone into all manner of iniquities, the king felt a vague revulsion. Dwerulas reminded him of a loathsome insect that he had once surprised during its ghoulish activities. He remembered how he had crushed the insect with a stone... and remembering, he conceived one of those bold and sudden inspirations that had always impelled him to equally sudden action. He had not, he told himself, entered the garden with any such thought: but the opportunity was too urgent and too perfect to be overpassed. The wizard's back was turned to him for the nonce; the arms of the wizard were encumbered with their heavy and pulchritudinous load. Snatching up the iron spade, Adompha brought it down on the small, withered head of Dwerulas with a fair amount of war-like strength inherited from heroic and piratic ancestors. The dwarf, still carrying Thuloneah, toppled forward into the deep pit.

Posing the spade for a second blow if such should be necessary, the king waited; but there was neither sound nor movement from the grave. He felt a certain surprise at having overcome with such ease the formidable magician, of whose superhuman powers he was half convinced; a certain surprise, too, at his own temerity. Then, reassured by his triumph, the king bethought him that he might try an experiment of his own: since he believed himself to have mastered much of Dwerulas' peculiar skill and lore through observation. The head of Dwerulas would form a unique and suitable addition to one of the garden plants. However, upon peering into the pit, he was forced to relinquish the idea: for he saw that he had struck only too well and had reduced the sorcerer's head to a state in which it was useless for his experiment, since such graftings required a certain integrity of the human part or member.

Reflecting, not without disgust, on the unlooked-for frailty of the skulls of magicians, which were as easily squashed as emus' eggs, Adompha began to fill the pit with loam. The prone body of Dwerulas, the huddled form of Thuloneah beneath it, sharing the same inertness, were soon covered from view by the soft and dissolving clods. The king, who had grown to fear Dwerulas in his heart, was aware of a distinct relief when he had tamped the grave down very firmly and had leveled it smoothly with the surrounding soil. He told himself that he had done well: for the magician's stock of learning had come latterly to include too many royal secrets; and power such as his, whether drawn from nature or from occult realms, was never quite compatible with the secure dominion and prolonged empire of kings.

At King Adompha's court and throughout the sea-bordering city of Loithé, the vanishment of Dwerulas became the cause of much speculation but little inquiry. There was a division of opinion as to whether Adompha or the fiend Thasaidon could be thanked for so salutary a riddance; and in consequence, the king of Sotar and the lord of the seven hells were both feared and respected as never before. Only the most redoubtable of men or demons could have made away with Dwerulas, who was said to have lived through a whole millenium never sleeping for one night, and crowding all his hours with iniquities and sorceries of a sub-tartarean blackness.

Following the inhumation of Dwerulas, a dim sentiment of fear and horror, for which he could not altogether account, had prevented the king from revisiting the sealed garden. Smiling impassively at the wild rumours of the court, he continued his search for novel pleasures and violent or rare sensations. In this, however, he met with small success: it seemed that every path, even the most outré and tortuous, led only to the hidden precipice of boredom. Turning from strange loves and cruelties, from extravagant pomps and mad music; from the aphrodisiac censers of far-sought blossoms, the quaintly shapen breasts of exotic girls, he recalled with new longing those semi-animate floral forms that had been endowed by Dwerulas with the most provocative charms of women.

So, on a latter night, at an hour midway between moonfall and sunrise, when all the palace and the city of Loithé were plunged in sodden slumber, the king arose from beside his concubine; and went forth to the garden that was now secret from all men excepting himself.

In answer to the cobra-like sibilation, which alone could actuate its cunning mechanism, the door opened to Adompha and closed behind him. Even as it closed, he grew aware that a singular change had come upon the garden during his absence. Burning with a bloodier light, a more torrid radiation, the mysterious air-hung globe glared down as it fanned by wrathful demons; and the plants, which had grown excessively in height, and were muffled and hooded with a heavier foliage than they had worn priorly, stood motionless amid an atmosphere that was like the heated breath of some crimson hell.

Adompha hesitated, doubtful of the meaning of these changes. For a moment he thought of Dwerulas, and recalled with a slight shiver certain unexplained prodigies and necromantic feats performed by the wizard... But he had slain Dwerulas and had buried him with his own royal hands. The waxing heat and radiance of that globe, the excessive growth of the garden, were no doubt due to some uncontrolled natural process.

Held by a strong curiosity, the king inhaled the giddy perfumes that came to assail his nostrils. The light dazzled his eyes filling them with

queer, unheard-of colours; the heat smote upon him as if from a nether solstice of infernal summer. He thought that he heard voices, almost inaudible at first, but mounting anon to a half-articulate murmur that seduced his ear with unearthly sweetness. At the same time he seemed to behold amid the stirless vegetation, in flashing glimpses, the half-veiled limbs of dancing bayaderes; limbs that he could not identify with any of the graftings made by Dwerulas.

Drawn by the charm of mystery and seized by a vague intoxication, the king went forward into the hell-born labyrinth. The plants recoiled gently when he neared them, and drew back on either side to permit his passage. As if in arboreal masquerade, they seemed to hide their human scions behind the mantles of their new-grown leafage. Then, closing behind Adompha, they appeared to cast off their disguise, revealing wilder and more anomalous fusions than he had remembered. They changed about him from instant to instant like shapes of delirium, so that he was never quite sure how much of their semblance was tree and flower, how much was woman and man. By turns he beheld a swinging of convulsed foliage, a commotion of riotous limbs and bodies. Then, by some undiscerned transition, it seemed that they were no longer rooted in the ground but were moving about him on dim, fantastic feet in ever-swiftening circles, like the dancers of some bewildering festival.

Around and around Adompha raced the forms that were both floral and human; till the dizzy madness of their motion swirled with an equal vertigo through his brain. He heard the soughing of a storm-driven forest, together with a clamouring of familiar voices that called him by name, that cursed or supplicated, mocked or exhorted, in myriad tones of warrior, councillor, slave, courtling, castrado or leman. Over all, the sanguine globe blazed down with an ever-brightening and more baleful effulgence, an ardour that became always more insupportable. It was as if the whole life of the garden turned and rose and flamed ecstatically to some infernal culmination.

King Adompha had lost all memory of Dwerulas and his dark magic. In his senses burned the ardour of the hell-risen orb, and he seemed to share the delirious motion and ecstasy of those obscure shapes by which he was

surrounded. A mad ichor mounted in his blood; before him hovered the vague images of pleasures he had never known or suspected: pleasures in which he would pass far beyond the ordained limits of mortal sensation.

Then, amid that whirling fantasmagoria, he heard the screeching of a voice that was harsh as some rusty hinge on the lifted lid of a sarcophagus. He could not understand the words: but, as if a spell of stillness had been uttered, the whole garden resumed immediately a hushed and hoded aspect. The king stood in a very stupor: for the voice had been that of Dwerulas! He looked about him wildly, bemazed and bewildered, seeing only the still plants with their mantling of profuse leafage. Before him towered a growth which he somehow recognized as the dedaim, though its bulb-shaped bole and elongated branches had put forth a matted-mass of dark, hair-like filaments.

Very slowly and gently, the two topmost branches of the dedaim descended till their tips were level with Adompha's face. The slender, tapering hands of Thuloneah emerged from their foliage and began to caress the king's cheeks with that loverlike adroitness which he still remembered. At the same moment, he saw the thick hairy matting fall apart upon the broad and flattish top of the dedaim's bole; and from it, as if rearing from hunched shoulders, the small, wizened head of Dwerulas rose up, to confront him...

Still gazing in vacuous horror at the crushed and blood-clotted cranium, at the features seared and blackened as if by centuries, at the eyes that glowed in dark pits like embers blown by demons, Adompha had the confused impression of a multitude of people that hurled themselves upon him from every side. There were no longer any trees in that garden of mad minglings and sorcerous transformations. About him in the fiery air swam faces that he recalled only too well: faces now contorted with rage, and the lethal lust of revenge. Through an irony which Dwerulas alone could have conceived, the soft fingers of Thuloneah continued to caress him, while he felt the clutching of numberless hands that tore all his garments into rags and shredded all his flesh with their nails.

THE GHOST OF MOHAMMED DIN

"I'll wager a hundred rupees that you won't stay there over-night," said Nicholson.

It was late in the afternoon, and we were seated on the veranda of my friend's bungalow in the Begum suburb at Hyderabad. Our conversation had turned to ghosts, on which subject I was, at the time, rather skeptical, and Nicholson, after relating a number of blood-curdling stories, had finished by remarking that a nearby house, which was said to be haunted, would give me an excellent chance to put the matter to the test.

"Done !" I answered, laughing.

"It's no joking matter," said my friend, seriously. "However, if you really wish to encounter the ghost, I can easily secure you the necessary permission. The house, a six-roomed bungalow, owned by one Yussuf Au Borah, is tenanted only by the spirit who appears to regard it as his exclusive property.

"Two years ago it was occupied by a Moslem merchant named Mohammed Din, and his family and servants. One morning they found the merchant dead — stabbed through the heart, and no trace of his murderer, whose identity still remains unrevealed.

"Mohammed Din's people left, and the place was let to a Parsee up from Bombay on business. He vacated the premises abruptly about midnight, and told a wild tale the next morning of having encountered a number of disembodied spirits, describing the chief one as Mohammed Din.

"Several other people took the place in turn, but their occupancy was generally of short duration. All told tales similar to the Parsee's. Gradually it acquired a bad reputation, and the finding of tenants became impossible."

"Have you ever seen the ghost yourself?" I asked.

"Yes; I spent a night, or rather part of one, there, for I went out of the window about one o'clock. My nerves were not strong enough to stand it any longer. I wouldn't enter the place again for almost any sum of money."

Nicholson's story only confirmed my intention of occupying the haunted house. Armed with a firm disbelief in the supernatural, and a still firmer intention to prove it all rot, I felt myself equal to all the ghosts, native and otherwise, in India. Of my ability to solve the mystery, if there were any, I was quite assured.

"My friend," said Nicholson to Yussuf Ali Borah an hour later, "wishes to spend a night in your haunted bungalow."

The person addressed, a fat little Moslem gentleman, looked at me curiously.

"The house is at your service, Sahib," he said, "I presume that Nicholson Sahib has told you the experiences of the previous tenants?"

I replied that he had. "If the whole thing is not a trumped-up story, there is doubtless some trickery afoot," said I, "and I warn you that the trickster will not come off unharmed. I have a loaded revolver, and shall not hesitate to use it if I meet any disembodied spirits."

Yussuf's only answer was to shrug his shoulders.

He gave us the keys, and we set out for the bungalow, which was only a few minutes' walk distant. Night had fallen when we reached it. Nicholson unlocked the door and we entered, and lighting a lamp I had brought with me, set out on a tour of inspection. The furniture consisted chiefly of two charpoys, three tabourets, an old divan quite innocent of cushions, a broken punkah, a three-legged chair and a dilapidated rug. Everything was covered with dust; the shutters rattled disconsolately, and all the doors creaked. The other rooms were meagrely furnished. I could hear rats running about in the dark. There was a compound adjoining, filled with rank reed and a solitary

pipal tree. Nicholson said that the ghost generally appeared in one of the rooms opening upon it, and this I selected as the one in which to spend the night. It was a fitting place for ghosts to haunt. The ceiling sagged listlessly, and the one charpoy which it contained had a wobbly look.

"Sleep well," said Nicholson. "You will find the atmosphere of this spirit-ridden place most conducive to slumber."

"Rats!" said I.

"Yes, there are plenty of rats here," he answered as he went out.

Placing the lamp on a tabouret, I lay down, with some misgivings as to its stability, on the charpoy. Happily, these proved unfounded, and laying my revolver close at hand, I took out a newspaper and began to read.

Several hours passed and nothing unusual happened. The ghost failed to materialize, and about eleven, with my fine skepticism greatly strengthened, and feeling a trifle ashamed concerning the hundred rupees which my friend would have to hand over the next morning, I lay down and tried to go to sleep. I had no doubt that my threat about the revolver to Yussuf Ali Borah had checked any plans for scaring me that might have been entertained.

Scarcely were my eyes closed when all the doors and windows, which had been creaking and rattling all evening, took on renewed activity. A light breeze had sprung up, and one shutter, which hung only by a single hinge, began to drum a tune on the wall. The rats scuttled about with redoubled energy, and a particularly industrious fellow gnawed something in the further corner for about an hour. It was manifestly impossible to sleep. I seemed to hear whisperings in the air, and once thought that I detected faint footsteps going and coming through the empty rooms. A vague feeling of eeriness crept upon me, and it required a very strong mental effort to convince myself that these sounds were entirely due to imagination.

Finally the breeze died down, the loose shutter ceased to bang, the rat stopped gnawing, and comparative quiet being restored, I fell asleep. Two hours later I woke, and taking out my watch, saw, though the lamp had

begun to burn dimly, that the hands pointed to two o'clock. I was about to turn over, when again I heard the mysterious footsteps, this time quite audibly. They seemed to approach my room, but when I judged them to be in the next apartment, ceased abruptly. I waited five minutes in a dead silence, with my nerves on edge and my scalp tingling.

Then I became aware that there was something between me and the opposite wall. At first it was a dim shadow, but as I watched, it darkened into a body. A sort of phosphorescent light emanated from it, surrounding it with pale radiance.

The lamp flared up and went out, but the figure was still visible. It was that of a tall native dressed in flowing white robes and a blue turban. He wore a bushy beard and had eyes like burning coals of fire. His gaze was directed intently upon me, and I felt cold shivers running up and down my spine. I wanted to shriek, but my tongue seemed glued to the roof of my mouth. The figure stepped forward and I noticed that the robe was red at the breast as though with blood.

This, then, was the ghost of Mohammed Din. Nicholson's story was true, and for a moment my conviction that the supernatural was all nonsense went completely to pieces. Only momentarily, however, for I remembered that I had a revolver, and the thought gave me courage. Perhaps it was a trick after all, and anger arose in me, and a resolve not to let the trickster escape unscathed.

I raised the weapon with a quick movement and fired. The figure being not over five paces distant, it was impossible to miss, but when the smoke had cleared it had not changed its position.

It began to advance, making no sound, and in a few moments was beside the charpoy. With one remaining vestige of courage I raised my revolver and pulled the trigger three times in succession, but without visible effect. I hurled the weapon at the figure's head, and heard it crash against the opposite wall an instant later. The apparition, though visible, was without tangibility.

Now it began to disappear. Very slowly at first it faded, then more rapidly until I could make out only the bare outlines. Another instant and all was gone but the outline of one hand, which hung motionless in the air. I got up and made a step towards it, then stopped abruptly, for the outlines again began to fill in, the hand to darken and solidify. Now I noticed something I had not before seen — a heavy gold ring set with some green gem, probably an emerald, appeared to be on the middle finger.

The hand began to move slowly past me towards the door opening into the next apartment. Lighting the lamp, I followed, all fear being thrown aside and desiring to find the explanation of the phenomenon. I could hear faint footfalls beneath the hand, as though the owner, though invisible, were still present. I followed it through the adjoining apartment and into the next, where it again stopped and hung motionless. One finger was pointed toward the further corner, where stood a tabouret, or stand.

Impelled, I think, by some force other than my own volition, I went over and lifting the tabouret, found a small wooden box, covered with dust, beneath.

Turning about I saw that the hand had disappeared.

Taking the box with me, I returned to my room. The thing was made of very hard wood and in size was perhaps ten inches in length by eight in width and four in height. It was light, and the contents rustled when I shook it. I guessed them to be letters or papers, but having nothing to pry the box open with, I concluded to wait until morning before trying to.

Strange as it may seem I soon fell asleep. You would naturally think that a man would not feel inclined to slumber immediately after encountering a disembodied spirit. I can give no explanation of it.

The sun was streaming through the window when I awoke, and so cheerful and matter-of-fact was the broad daylight that I wondered if the events of the night were not all a dream. The presence of the box, however, convinced me that they were not.

Nicholson came in and appeared much surprised and a trifle discomfited to find me still in possession.

"Well," he inquired, "what happened? What did you see?"

I told him what had occurred and produced the box as proof.

An hour afterwards, Nicholson, with a short native sword and considerable profanity, was trying to pry the thing open. He finally succeeded. Within were a number of closely-written sheets of paper and some letters, most of which were addressed to Mohammed Din.

The papers were mostly in the form of memoranda and business accounts such as would be made by a merchant. They were written in execrable Urdu, hopelessly jumbled together, and though all were dated, it was no small task to sort them out. The letters were mostly regarding business affairs, but several, which were written in a very fair hand, were from a cousin of Mohammed Din's, one Ali Bagh, an Agra horse-trader. These, too, with one exception, were commonplace enough. Nicholson knitted his brows as he read it, and then handed it to me. The greater part, being of little interest, has escaped my memory, but I recollect that the last paragraph ran thus:

"I do not understand how you came by the knowledge, nor why you wish to use it to ruin me. It is all true. If you have any love for me, forbear."

"What does that mean?" asked Nicholson. "What secret did Mohammed Din possess that he could have used to ruin his cousin?"

We went through the memoranda carefully, and near the bottom found the following, dated April 21, 1881, according to our notation:

"To-day I found the letters which I have long been seeking. They are ample proof of what I have long known, but have hitherto been unable to substantiate, that Ali Bagh is a counterfeiter, the chief of a large band. I have but to turn them over to the police, and he will be dragged away to

jail, there to serve a term of many years. It will be good revenge — part compensation, at least, for the injuries he has done me.

"That explains Ali Bagh's letter," said Nicholson. "Mohammed Din was boastful enough to write to him, telling him that he knew of his guilt and intended to prove it."

Next were several sheets in a different hand and signed "Mallek Khan." Mallek Khan, it seemed, was a friend of Ali Bagh's, and the sheets were in the form of a letter. But being without fold, it was quite evident they had not been posted.

The communication related to certain counterfeiting schemes, and the names of a number of men implicated appeared. This, plainly, was the proof alluded to by Mohammed Din, and which he had threatened his cousin to turn over to the police.

There was nothing else of interest save the following in Mohammed Din's hand, dated April 17th, 1881:

"To-morrow I shall give the papers to the authorities. I have delayed too long, and was very foolish to write to Ali Bagh.

"I passed a man in the street today who bore a resemblance to my cousin. . . . I could not be sure But if he is here, then may Allah help me, for he will hesitate at nothing. . . ."

What followed was illegible.

"On the night of April 21st," said Nicholson, "Mohammed Din was killed by a person or persons unknown." He paused and then went on: "This Ali Bagh is a man with whom I have had some dealings in horses, and an especially vicious crook it was that he got three hundred rupees out of me for. He has a bad reputation as a horse-dealer, and the Agra police have long been patiently seeking evidence of his implication in several bold counterfeiting schemes. Mallek Khan, one of his accomplices, was arrested, tried and sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment, but refused to turn

State's evidence on Ali Bagh. The police are convinced that Ali Bagh was as much, if not more implicated, than Mallek Khan, but they can do nothing for lack of proof. The turning over of these papers, however, as poor Mohammed Din would have done had he lived, will lead to his arrest and conviction.

"It was Ali Bagh who killed Mohammed Din, I am morally convinced, his motive, of course, being to prevent the disclosure of his guilt. Your extraordinary experience last night and the murdered man's papers point to it. Yet we can prove nothing, and your tale would be laughed at in court."

Some blank sheets remained in the bottom of the box, and my friend tilted them out as he spoke. They fluttered to the veranda and something rolled out from amongst them and lay glittering in the sunshine. It was a heavy gold ring set with an emerald — the very same that I had seen upon the apparition's finger several hours before.

A week or so later, as the result of the papers that Nicholson sent to the Agra police, accompanied by an explanatory note, one Ali Bagh, borse-trader, found himself on trial, charged with counterfeiting. It was a very short trial, his character and reputation going badly against him, and it being proven that he was the leader of the gang of which Mallek Khan was thought to be a member, he was sentenced to a somewhat longer term in jail than his accomplice.

THE GHOUL

During the reign of the Caliph Vathek, a young man of good repute and family, named Nouredin Hassan, was haled before the Cadi Alimed ben Becar at Bussorah. Now Nouredin was a comely youth, of open mind and gentle mien; and great was the astonishment of the Cadi and of all others present when they heard the charges that were preferred against him. He was accused of having slain seven people one by one, on seven successive nights, and of having left the corpses in a cemetery near Bussorah, where they were found lying with their bodies and members devoured in a fearsome manner, as if by jackals. Of the people he was said to have slain, three were women two were traveling merchants, one was a mendicant, and one a gravedigger.

Abmed ben Becar was filled with the learning and wisdom of honorable years, and withal was possessed of much perspicacity. But he was deeply perplexed by the strangeness and atrocity of these crimes and by the mild demeanor and well-bred aspect of Nouredin Hassan, which he could in no wise reconcile with them. He heard in silence the testimony of witnesses who had seen Nouredin bearing on his shoulders the body of a woman at yester-eve in the cemetery; and others who on several occasions had observed him coming from the neighborhood at unseemly hours when only thieves and murderers would be abroad. Then, having considered all these, he questioned the youth closely.

"Nouredin Hassan," he said, "thou hast been charged with crimes of exceeding foulness, which thy bearing and lineaments belie. Is there haply some explanation of these things by which thou canst clear thyself, or in some measure mitigate the heinousness of thy deeds, if so it be that thou art guilty? I adjure thee to tell me the truth in this matter."

Now Nouredin Hassan arose before the Cadi; and the heaviness of extreme shame and sorrow was visible on his countenance.

"Alas, O Cadi," he replied, "for the charges that have been brought against me are indeed true. It was I and no other, who slew these people; nor can I offer an extenuation of my act."

The Cadi was sorely grieved and astonished when he heard this answer.

"I must perforce believe thee," he said sternly. "But thou hast confessed a thing which will make thy name hence forward an abomination in the ears and mouths of men. I command thee to tell me why these crimes were committed, and what offense these persons had given thee, or what injury they had done to thee; or if perchance thou slewest them for gain, like a common robber."

"There was neither offense given nor injury wrought by any of them against me," replied Nouredin. "And I did not kill them for their money or belongings or apparel, since I had no need of such things, and, aside from that, have always been an honest man."

"Then," cried Ahmed ben Becar, greatly puzzled, "what was thy reason if it was none of these?"

Now the face of Nouredin Hassan grew heavier still with sorrow; and he bowed his head in a shamefaced manner that bespoke the utterness of profound remorse. And standing thus before the Cadi, he told this story:

The reversals of fortune, O Cadi, are swift and grievous, and beyond the foreknowing or advertence of man. Alas! for less than a fortnight ago I was the happiest and most guiltless of mortals, with no thought of wrongdoing toward anyone. I was wedded to Amina, the daughter of the jewel-merchant Aboul Cogia; and I loved her deeply and was much beloved by her in turn; and moreover we were at this time anticipating the birth of our first child. I had inherited from my father a rich estate and many slaves; the cares of life were light upon my shoulders; and I had, it would seem, every reason to count myself among those Allah had blest with an earthly foretaste of Heaven.

Judge, then, the excessive nature of my grief when Amina died in the same hour when she was to have been delivered. From that time, in the dire extremity of my lamentation, I was as one bereft of light and knowledge; I was deaf to all those who sought to condole with me, and blind to their friendly offices.

After the burial of Amina my sorrow became a veritable madness, and I wandered by night to her grave in the cemetery near Bussorah and flung myself prostrate before the newly lettered tombstone, on the earth that had been digged that very day. My senses deserted me, and I knew not how long I remained on the damp clay beneath the cypresses, while the horn of a decrescent moon arose in the heavens.

Then, in my stupor of abandonment, I heard a terrible voice that bade me rise from the ground on which I was lying. And lifting my head a little, I saw a hideous demon of gigantic frame and stature, with eyes of scarlet fire beneath brows that were coarse as tangled rootlets, and fangs that overhung a cavernous mouth, and earth-black teeth longer and sharper than those of the hyena. And the demon said to me:

"I am a ghuil, and it is my office to devour the bodies of the dead. I have now come to claim the corpse that was interred today beneath the soil on which thou art lying in a fashion so unmannerly. Begone, for I have fasted since yester-night, and I am much anhungered."

Now, at the sight of this demon, and the sound of his dreadful voice, and the still more dreadful meaning of his words, I was like to have swooned with terror on the cold clay. But I recovered myself in a manner, and besought him, saying:

"Spare this grave, I implore thee; for she who lies buried therein is dearer to me than any living mortal; and I would not that her fair body should be the provendor of an unclean demon such as thou."

At this the ghoul was angered, and I thought that he would have done me some bodily violence. But again I besought him, swearing by Allah and Mohammed with many solemn oaths that I would grant him anything

procurable and would do for him any favor that lay in the power of man if he would leave undespoiled the new-made grave of Amina. And the ghoul was somewhat mollified, and he said:

"If thou wilt indeed perform for me a certain service, I shall do as thou askest." And I replied:

"There is no service, whatsoever its nature, that I will not do for thee in this connection, and I pray thee to name thy desire."

Then the ghoul said: "It is this, that thou shalt bring me each night, for eight successive nights, the body of one whom thou hast slain with thine own hand. Do this, and I shall neither devour nor dig the body that lies interred hereunder."

Now was I seized by utter horror and despair, since I had bound myself in all honor to grant the ghoul his hideous requirement. And I begged him to change the terms of the stipulation, saying to him:

"Is it needful to thee, O eater of corpses, that the bodies should be those of people whom I myself have slain?"

And the ghoul said: "Yea, for all others would be the natural provendor of myself or of my kin in any event. I adjure thee by the promise thou hast given to meet me here tomorrow night, when darkness has wholly fallen or as soon thereafter as thou art able, bringing the first of the eight bodies."

So saying, he strode off among the cypresses, and began to dig in another newly made grave at a little distance from that of Amina.

I left the graveyard in even direr anguish than when I had come, thinking of that which I must do in fulfillment of my sworn promise, to preserve the body of Amina from the demon. I know not how I survived the ensuing day, torn as I was between sorrow for the dead and my horror of the coming night with its repugnant duty.

When darkness had descended I went forth by stealth to a lonely road near the cemetery; and waiting there amid the low-grown branches of the trees, I slew the first passer with a sword and carried his body to the spot appointed by the ghoul. And each night thereafter, for six more nights, I returned to the same vicinity and repeated this deed, slaying always the very first who came, whether man or woman, or merchant or beggar or gravedigger. And the ghoul awaited me on each occasion, and would begin to devour his provender in my presence, with small thanks and scant ceremony. Seven persons did I slay in all, till only one was wanting to complete the agreed number; and the person I slew yester-night was a woman, even as the witnesses have testified. All this I did with utmost repugnance and regret, and sustained only by the remembrance of my plighted word and the fate which would befall the corpse of Amina if I should break the bond.

This, O Cadi, is all my story. Alas! For these lamentable crimes have availed me not, and I have failed in wholly keeping my bargain with the demon, who will doubtless this night consume the body of Amina in lieu of the one corpse that is still lacking. I resign myself to thy judgment, O Ahmed ben Becar, and I beseech thee for no other mercy than that of death, wherewith to terminate my double grief and my twofold remorse.

When Nouredin Hassan had ended his narrative, the amazement of all who had heard him was verily multiplied, since no man could remember hearing a stranger tale. And the Cadi pondered for a long time and then gave judgment, saying:

"I must needs marvel at thy story, but the crimes thou hast committed are none the less heinous, and Iblis himself would stand aghast before them. However, some allowance must be made for the fact that thou hadst given thy word to the ghoul and wast bound as it were in honor to fulfill his demand, no matter how horrible its nature. And allowance must likewise be made for thy connubial grief which caused thee to forfend thy wife's body from the demon, Yet I cannot judge thee guiltless, though I know not the punishment which is merited in a case so utterly without parallel. Therefore, I set thee free, with this injunction, that thou shalt make atonement for thy

crimes in the fashion that seem eth best to thee, and shalt render justice to thyself and to others in such degree as thou art able."

"I thank thee for this mercy," replied Nouredin Hassan; and he then withdrew from the court amid the wonderment of all who were present. There was much debate when he had gone, and many were prone to question the wisdom of the Cadi's decision. Some there were who maintained that Nouredin should have been sentenced to death without delay for his abominable actions though others argued for if the sanctity of his oath to the ghoul, and would have exculpated him altogether or in part. And tales were told and instances were cited regarding the habits of ghouls and the strange plight of men who had surprised such demons in their nocturnal delvings. And again the discussion returned to Nouredin, and the judgment of the Cadi was once more upheld or assailed with divers arguments. But amid all this, Ahmed ben Becar was silent, saying only:

"Wait, for this man will render justice to himself and to all othes concerned, as far as the rendering thereof is possible."

So indeed, it happened, for on the morning of the next day another body was found in the cemetery near Bussorah lying half-devoured on the grave of Nouredin Hassan's wife, Amina. And the body was that of Nouredin, self-slain, who in this manner had not only fulfilled the injunction of the Cadi but had also kept his bargain with the ghoul by providing the required number of corpses.

THE GORGON

Yet it is less the horror than the grace which turns the gazer's spirit into
stone.

-- Shelley.

I have no reason to expect that anyone will believe my story. If it were another's tale, probably I should not feel inclined to give it credence myself. I tell it herewith, hoping that the mere act of narration, the mere shaping of this macabre day-mare adventure into words will in some slight measure serve to relieve my mind of its execrable burden. There have been times when only a hair's-breadth has intervened betwixt myself and the seething devil-ridden world of madness; for the hideous knowledge, the horror-blackened memories which I have carried so long, were never meant to be borne by the human intellect.

A singular confession, no doubt, for one who has always been a connoisseur of horrors. The deadly, the malign, and baleful things that lurk in the labyrinth of existence have held for me a fascination no less potent than unholy. I have sought them out and looked upon them as one who sees the fatal eyes of the basilisk in a mirror; or as a savant who handles corrosive poisons in his laboratory with mask, and gloves. Never did they have for me the least hint of personal menace, since I viewed them with the most impersonal detachment. I have investigated many clues of the spectral, the ghastly, the bizarre, and many mazes of terror from which others would have recoiled with caution or trepidation... But now I could wish that there were one lure which I had not followed, one labyrinth which my curiosity had not explored...

More incredible than all else, perhaps, is the very fact that the thing occurred in Twentieth Century London. The sheer anachronism and fabulosity of the happening has made me doubt the verities of time and space; and ever since then I have been as one adrift on starless seas of

confusion, or roaming through unmapped dimensions. Never have I been quite able to re-orient myself, to be altogether sure that I have not gone astray in other centuries, in other lands than those declared by the chronology and geography of the present. I have continual need of modern crowds, of glaring lights, of laughter and clangor and tumult to reassure me; and always I am afraid that such things are only an insubstantial barrier; that behind them lies the realm of ancient horror and immemorial malignity of which I have had this one abominable glimpse. And always it seems to me that the veil will dissolve at any moment, and leave me face to face with an ultimate Fear.

There is no need to detail the events that brought me to London. It should be enough to say that I had endured a great grief, the death of the only woman whom I had loved. I travelled as others have done, to forget, to seek distraction among the novelties of foreign scenes; and I tarried long in London. because its gray and mist-enfolded vastness, its ever-varying throngs, its inexhaustible maze of thoroughfares and lanes and houses, were somehow akin to oblivion itself, and offered more of refuge from my sorrow than brighter cities had given.

I do not know how many weeks or months I lingered in London. Time meant little to me, except as an ordeal to be undergone; and I recked not of its disposal. It is hard to remember what I did or where I went; for all things were blurred in a negligible monotone.

However, my meeting with the old man is clear as any present impression — and perhaps clearer. Among the faint recollections of that period, it is etched as with some black acid. I can not recall the name of the street on which I saw him; but it was not far from the Strand, and was full of a late afternoon crowd, beneath a heaven of high fog through which the sun had not penetrated for days or weeks.

I was strolling idly along, amid hurrying faces and figures that meant no more to me than the featureless heavens or the uniform shops. My thoughts were idle, empty, immaterial; and in those days (since I had been brought face to face with an all-too-real horror) I had relinquished my search for the

darker mysteries of existence. I was without forewarning, without anticipation of anything but the daily drabness of the London streets and people. Then, from that anonymous welter of humanity, the man stood before me with the terrifying suddenness of an apparition; and I could not have sworn from which direction he had come.

He was not unusual in frame or stature, apart from the erectness with which he carried himself notwithstanding his extreme and manifest age. Nor were his garments uncommon, aside from the fact that they too were excessively old, and seemed to exhale an air of greater antiquity than was warranted even by their cut and fabric. It was not these, but the man's visage, which electrified all my drowsy faculties into a fascinated and awe-struck attention. With the mortal pallor of his deeply wrinkled features, like graven ivory, with his long, curling hair and beard that were white as moon-touched vapor, with his eyes that glowed in their hollow sockets like the coals of demon fires in underworld caverns, he would have made a living model for Charon, the boatman who ferries the dead to Hades across the silence of the Styx. He seemed to have stepped from an age and land of classic mythology, into the teeming turmoil of that London street; and the strange impression which he made upon me was in no wise modified by his habiliments. I paid so little attention to these that I could not remember their details afterward; though I think that their predominant color was a black that had begun to assume the green of time, and suggested the plumage of some sinister bird. My astonishment at the appearance of this singular old man was increased when I saw that no one else in the throng seemed to notice anything unusual or peculiar about him; but that all were hastening on their way with no more, at most, than the off-hand scrutiny which one would give to some aged beggar.

As for me, I had paused in my strolling, petrified with an instant fascination, an immediate terror which I could not analyse or define. The old man, too, had paused; and I saw that we were both a little withdrawn from the current of the crowd, which passed so obviously, intent on its own fears and allurements. Evidently realizing that he had caught my attention, and perceiving the effect which he had upon me, the old man stepped nearer. smiling with a hint of some horrible malevolence, some nameless

antique evil. I would have drawn back; but I was bereft of the power of movement. Standing at my very side, and searching me with the gaze of his coal-like orbs, he said to me in a low tone which could not have been overheard by any of the passers-by:

'I can see that you have a taste for horror. The dark and awful secrets of death. the equally dreadful mysteries of life, allure your interest. If you care to come with me, I will show you something which is the quintessence of all horror. You shall gaze on the head of Medusa with its serpent locks — that very head which was severed by the sword of Perseus.'

I was startled beyond measure by the strange words, uttered in accents which seemed to be heard by the mind rather than the ear. Somehow — unbelievable as this will seem — I have never been quite sure in what language he spoke: it may have been English, or it may have been Greek, which I know perfectly. The words penetrated my understanding without leaving any definite sense of their actual sound or linguistic nature. And of the voice itself, I know only that it was such as might issue from the very lips of Charon. It was guttural, deep, malign, with an echo of profound gulfs and sunless grottoes.

Of course, my reason strove to dismiss the unaccountable feelings and ideas that had surged upon me. I told myself that it was all imagination; that the man was probably some queer sort of madman, or else was a mere trickster, or a showman who took this method of drumming up custom. But his aspect and his words were of necromantic strangeness; they seemed to promise in a superlative degree the weirdness and bizarrerie which I had sought in former time, and of which, so far, I had found little hint in London. So I answered him quite seriously;

'Indeed, I should like to see the head of Medusa. But I always understood that it was quite fatal to gaze upon her — that those who beheld her were turned immediately into stone.'

'That can be avoided,' returned my interlocutor. 'I will furnish you with a mirror: and if you are truly careful, and succeed in restraining your

curiosity, you can see her even as Perseus did. But you will have to be very circumspect. And she is really so fascinating that few have been able to refrain from looking at her directly. Yes, you must be very cautious. He! he! he!' His laughter was more horrible even than his smile; and even as he laughed, he began to pluck my sleeve, with a knotted hand that was wholly in keeping with his face, and which might well have gripped through untold ages the dark oars of the Stygian barge.

'Come with me — it is not far,' he said. 'And you will never have a second opportunity. I am the owner of the Head; and I do not show it to many. But I can see that you are one of the few who are fitted to appreciate it.'

It is inexplicable to me that I should have accepted his invitation. The man's personality was highly abhorrent, the feeling he aroused in me was a mixture of irresistible fear and repugnance. In all likelihood he was a lunatic — perhaps a dangerous maniac; or, if not actually mad, was nurturing some ill design, some nefarious purpose to which I would lend myself by accompanying him. It was madness to go with him, it was folly even to listen to his words; and of course his wild claim concerning the ownership of the fabled Gorgon's head was too ridiculous even for the formality of disbelief. If such a thing had ever existed, even in mythic Greece, it was certainly not to be found in present-day London, in the possession of a doubtful-looking old man. The whole affair was more preposterous than a dream ... but nevertheless I went with him. I was under a spell — the spell of unknown mystery, terror, absurdity; and I could no more have refused his offer than a dead man could have refused the conveyance of Charon to the realms of Hades.

'My house is not far away,' he assured me, repetitiously, as we left the crowded street and plunged into a narrow, lightless alley. Perhaps he was right; though I have no precise idea of the distance which we traversed. The lanes and thoroughfares to which he led me were such as I could hardly have believed to exist in that portion of London; and I was hopelessly confused and astray in less than a minute. The houses were foul tenements, obviously of much antiquity, interspersed with a few decaying mansions that were doubtless even older, like remnants of some earlier city. I was

struck by the fact that we met no one, apart from rare and furtive stragglers who seemed to avoid us. The air had grown extremely chill, and was fraught with unwonted odors that somehow served to reinforce the sensations of coldness and utter age. Above all was a dead, unchanging sky, with its catafalque of oppressive and super- incumbent grayness. I could not remember the streets through which we passed, though I was sure that I must have traversed this section of the city before in my wanderings; and a queer perplexity was now mingled with my feeling of dismay and bemusement. It seemed to me that the old man was leading me into a clueless maze of unreality, of deception and dubiety, where nothing was normal or familiar or legitimate.

The air darkened a little, as with the first encroachment of twilight, though it still lacked an hour of sunset-time. In this premonitory dusk, which did not deepen, but became stationary in its degree of shadow, through which all things were oddly distorted and assumed illusory proportions, we reached the house which was our destination.

It was one of the dilapidated mansions, and belonged to a period which I was unable to name despite my extensive architectural knowledge. It stood a little apart from the surrounding tenements; and more than the dimness of the premature twilight seemed to adhere to its dark walls and lampless windows. It impressed me with a sense of vastness; yet I have never been quite sure concerning its exact dimensions: and I can not remember the details of its façade apart from the high and heavy door at the head of a flight of steps which were strangely worn as by the tread of incalculable generations.

The door swung open without sound beneath the gnarled fingers of the old man, who motioned me to precede him. I found myself in a long hall, illumed by silver lamps of an antique type such as I had never before seen in actual use. I think there were ancient tapestries and vases; and also a mosaic floor; but the lamps are the only things which I remember clearly. They burned with white flames that were preternaturally still and cold; and I thought that they had always burned in this manner, unflickering,

unreplenished, throughout a frozen eternity whose days were in no wise different from its nights.

At the end of the hall, we entered a room that was similarly litten, and whose furniture was more than reminiscent of the classic. At the opposite side was an open door, giving on a second chamber, which appeared to be crowded with statuary; for I could see the outlines of still figures that were silhouetted or partly illumined by unseen lamps

'Be seated,' said my host, indicating a luxurious couch. 'I will show you the Head in a few minutes; but haste is unseemly, when one is about to enter the very presence of Medusa.'

I obeyed; but my host remained standing. He was paler and older and more erect than ever in the chill lamplight; and I sensed a sinewy, unnatural vigor, a diabolic vitality, which was terrifyingly incongruous with his extreme age. I shivered with more than the cold of the evening air and the dank mansion. Of course, I still felt that the old man's invitation was some sort of preposterous foolery or trickery. But the circumstances among which I found myself were unexplainable and uncanny. However, I mustered enough courage to ask a few questions.

'I am naturally surprised,' I said, 'to learn that the Gorgon's head has survived into modern times. Unless the query is impertinent, will you not tell me how it came into your possession?'

'He! he!' laughed the old man, with a loathsome rictus. 'That is easily answered: I won the Head from Perseus at a game of dice, when he was in his dotage.' 'But how is that possible?' I countered. 'Perseus lived several thousand years ago.'

'Yes, according to your notation. But time is not altogether the simple matter which you believe it to be. There are short-cuts between the ages, there are deviations and overlappings among the epochs, of which you have no idea. ... Also, I can see that you are surprised to learn that the Head is in London... But London after all is only a name; and there are shiftings, abbreviations, and interchanges of space as well as of time.'

I was amazed by his reasoning, but was forced to admit internally that it did not lack a certain logic.

'I see your point,' I conceded... 'And now, of course, you will show me the Gorgon's head?'

'In a moment. But I most warn you again to be supremely careful; and also, you must be prepared for its exceeding and overwhelming beauty no less than for its horror. The danger lies, as you may well imagine, in the former quality.'

He left the room, and soon returned, carrying in his hand a metal mirror of the same period as the lamps. The face was highly polished, with a reflecting surface wellnigh equal to that of glass; but the back and handle, with their strange carvings of Laocoön-like figures that writhed in a nameless, frozen agony, were black with the tarnish of elder centuries. It might well have been the very mirror that was employed by Perseus.

The old man placed it in my hands.

'Come,' he said, and turned to the open door through which I had seen the crowded statuary.

'Keep your eyes on the mirror,' he added, 'and do not look beyond it. You will be in grave peril as soon as you enter this door.'

He preceded me, averting his face from the portal, and gazing back across his shoulder with watchful orbs of malignant fire. My own eyes intent on the mirror, I followed.

The room was unexpectedly large; and was lit by many lamps that depended from chains of wrought silver. At first sight, when I had crossed the sill, I thought that it was entirely filled with stone statues, some of them standing erect in postures of a painful rigor, and others lying on the floor in agonized eternal contortions. Then, moving the mirror a little, I saw that there was a clear space through which one could walk, and a vaster vacant

space at the opposite end of the room, surrounding a sort of altar. I could not see the whole of this altar, because the old man was now in my line of mirrored vision. But the figures beside me, at which I now dared to peep without the mirror's intermediation, were enough to absorb my interest for the moment.

They were all life-size and they all offered a most singular medley of historical periods. Yet it would seem that all of them, by the sameness of their dark material, like a black marble, and the uniform realism and verisimilitude of their technique, might well have been sculptured by the same hand. There were boys and bearded men in the chitons of Greece, there were mediaeval monks, and knights in armor, there were soldiers and scholars and great ladies of the Renaissance, of the Restoration. there were people of the Eighteenth, the Nineteenth, the Twentieth centuries. And in every muscle, in every lineament of each, was stamped an incredible suffering, an unspeakable fear. And more and more. as I studied them, a ghastly and hideous conjecture was formulated in my mind.

The old man was at my elbow, leering and peering into my face with a demonic malice.

'You are admiring my collection of statuary,' he said. 'And I can see that you are impressed by its realism... But perhaps you have already guessed that the statues are identical with their models. These people are the unfortunates who were not content to see Medusa only in a mirror... I warned them ... even as I have warned you... But the temptation was too much for them.'

I could say nothing. My thoughts were full of terror, consternation, stupefaction. Had the old man told me the truth, did he really possess anything so impossible and mythical as the Gorgon's head? Those statues were too life-like, too veridical in all their features, in their poses that preserved a lethal fear, their faces marked with a deadly but undying torment. No human sculptor could have wrought them, could have reproduced the physiognomies and the costumes with a fidelity so consummate and so atrocious.

'Now,' said my host, 'having seen those who were over-powered by the beauty of Medusa, it is time for you to behold the Gorgon herself.' He stepped to one side, eyeing me intently; and I saw in the metal mirror the whole of that strange altar which his body had partially intercepted from my view. It was draped with some funereal black fabric; and lamps were burning on each side with their tall and frozen flames. In the center, on a broad paten of silver or electrum, there stood the veritable Head, even as the ancient myths have depicted it, with vipers crawling and lifting among its matted locks.

How can I delineate or even suggest that which is beyond the normal scope of human sensation or imagining? I saw in the mirror a face of unspeakably radiant pallor — a dead face from which there poured the luminous, blinding glory of celestial corruption, of superhuman bale and suffering. With lidless, intolerable eyes, with lips that were parted in an agonizing smile, she was lovely, she was dreadful, beyond any vision ever vouchsafed to a mystic or an artist, and the light that emanated from her features was the light of worlds that lie too deep or too high for mortal perception. Hers was the dread that turns the marrow into ice, and the anguish that slays like a bolt of lightning.

Long did I gaze in the mirror with the shuddering awe of one who beholds the veilless countenance of a final mystery. I was terrified, appalled — and fascinated to the core of my being; for that which I saw was the ultimate death, the ultimate beauty. I desired, yet I did not dare, to turn and lift my eyes to the reality whose mere reflection was a fatal splendor.

The old man had stepped closer; he was peering into the mirror and watching me with furtive glances, by turns.

'Is she not beautiful?' he whispered. 'Could you not gaze upon her forever?' And do you not long to behold her without the intermediation of the mirror, which hardly does her justice?'

I shivered at his words, and at something which I sensed behind them.

'No! no!' I cried, vehemently. 'I admit all that you say, But I will not gaze any longer; and I am not mad enough to let myself be turned into a stone image.'

I thrust the mirror into his hands as I spoke and turned to leave, impelled by an access of overmastering fright. I feared the allurements of Medusa: and I loathed that evil ancient with a loathing that was beyond limit or utterance.

The mirror clattered on the floor, as the old man dropped it and sprang upon me with a tigerish agility. He seized me with his knotted hands, and though I had sensed their sinewy vigor, I was not prepared for the demoniacal strength with which he whirled me about and thrust me toward the altar.

'Look! Look!' he shrieked, and his voice was that of a fiend who urges the damned to some further pit of perdition.

I had closed my eyes instinctively, but even through my lids I felt the searing radiance. I knew, I believed implicitly the fate which would be mine if I beheld Medusa face to face. I struggled madly but impotently against the grip that held me; and I concentrated all my will to keep my lids from lighting even by the breadth of an eyelash.

Suddenly my arms were freed, and I felt the diabolic fingers on my brow, groping swiftly to find my eyes. I knew their purpose, and knew also that the old man must have closed his own eyes to avoid the doom he had designed for me. I broke away, I turned, I grappled with him; and we fought insanely, frantically, as he strove to swing me about with one arm and tore at my shut eyelids with his other hand. Young as I am, and muscular, I was no match for him, and I swerved slowly toward the altar, with my head bent back till my neck was almost broken, in a vain effort to avoid the iron fumbling of his fingers. A moment more, and he would have conquered; but the space in which we fought was narrow, and he had now driven me back against a row of the stone figures, some of which were recumbent on the floor. He must have stumbled over one of these, for he fell suddenly with a wild, despairing cry, and released me as he went down. I heard him strike

the floor with a crash that was singularly heavy — a crash as of something harder and more massive and more ponderous than a human body.

Still standing with shut eyes, I waited; but there was no sound and no movement from the old man. Bending toward the floor, I ventured to look between half-open lids. He was lying at my feet, beside the figure on which he had tripped; and I needed no second glance to recognize in all his limbs, in all his lineaments, the same rigidity and the same horror which characterized the other statues. Like them, he had been smitten instantaneously into an image of dark stone. In falling, he had seen the very face of Medusa, even as his victims had seen it. And now he would be among them forever.

Somehow, with no backward glance, I fled from the room, I found my way from that horrible mansion, I sought to lose it from sight and memory in half-deserted, mysterious alleys that were no legitimate part of London. The chill of ancient death was upon me; it hung in the web of timeless twilight along those irrecognizable ways, around those innominable houses; and it followed me as I went. But at last, by what miracle I know not, I came to a familiar street, where people thronged in the lamplit dusk, and the air was no longer chill except with a falling fog.

THE GREAT GOD AWTO

(Class-room lecture given by the Most Honorable Erru Saggus, Professor of Hamurriquanean Archaeology at the World-University of Toshtush, on the 365th day of the year 5998.)

Males, females, androgynes and neuters of the class in archaeology, you have learned, from my previous lectures, all that is known or inferred concerning the crudely realistic art and literature of the ancient Hamurriquanes. With some difficulty, owing to the fragmentary nature of the extant remains, I have reconstructed for you their bizarre and hideous buildings, their rude mechanisms.

Also, you are now familiar with the unimaginably clumsy, corrupt and inefficient legal and economic systems that prevailed among them, together with the garblings of crass superstition and scant knowledge that bore the sacred names of the sciences. You have listened, not without amusement, to my account of their ridiculous amatory and social customs, and have heard with horror the unutterable tale of their addiction to all manner of violent Crimes.

Today I shall speak regarding a matter that throws into even grosser relief the low-grade barbarism, the downright savagery, of this bloody and besotted people.

Needless to say, my lecture will concern their well-nigh universal cult of human sacrifice and self-immolation to the god Awto:

a cult which many of my confreres have tried to associate with the worship of the Heendouan deity, Yokkurnot, or Jukkernot. In this cult, the wild religious fanaticism of the Hamurriquanes, together with the national blood-lust for which they were notorious, found its most congenial and spacious outlet.

If we grant the much-disputed relationship between Awto and Yokkurnudd, it seems plain that the latter god was an extremely wild and refined variation of Awto, worshipped by a gentler and more advanced people. The rites done to Yokkurnudd were localized and occasional while the sacrifices required by Awto took place at all hours on every street and highway.

However, in the face of certain respected authorities, I am indined to doubt if the two religions had much in common. Certainly nothing apart from the ritual usage of crushing wheels of ponderous earth-vehicles, such as you have seen in our museums among the exhumed relics of antiquity.

It is my fond hope that I shall eventually find evidence to confirm this doubt, and thus vindicate the Heendouans of the blackest charge that legend and archaeology have brought against them. I shall have made a worthy contribution to science if I can show that they were among the few ancient peoples who were never tainted by the diabolic cult of Awto originating in Hamurriqua.

Because of a religion so barbarous, it has sometimes been argued that the Hamurriquanean culture—if one can term it such-- must have flourished at an earlier period in man's development than the Heendouan. However, in dealing with a realm of research that borders upon prehistory, such relative chronology can be left to theorists.

Excepting, of course, in our own superior modern civilization, human progress has been slow and uncertain, with many intercalated Dark Ages, many reversions to partial or total savagery. I believe that the Hamurriquanean epoch, whether prior to that of the Heendouans or contemporary with it, can well be classified as one of these Dark Ages.

To return to my main theme, the cult of Awto. It is doubtless well known to you that in recent years certain irresponsible so-called archaeologists, misled by a desire to create sensation at the cost of truth, have fathered the fantastic thesis that there never was any such god as Awto. They believe, or profess to believe, that the immolatory vehicles of the ancients, and the

huge destruction of life and limb caused by their use, were quite without religious significance.

A premise so absurd could be maintained only by madmen or charlatans. I mention it merely that I may refute and dismiss it with all the contempt that it deserves.

Of course, I cannot deny the dubiousness of some of our archaeological deductions. Great difficulties have attended our researches in the continent-embracing deserts of Hamurriqua, where all food-supplies and water must be transported for thousands of miles.

The buildings and writings of the ancients, often made of the most ephemeral materials, lie deep in ever-drifting sands that no human foot has trod for millenniums. Therefore, it is small wonder that guesswork must sometimes fill the gaps of precise knowledge.

I can safely say, however, that few of our deductions are so completely proven, so solidly based, as those relating to the Awto cult. The evidence, though largely circumstantial, is over-whelming.

Like most religions, it would seem that this cult was obscure and shadowy in its origin. Legend and history have both lost the name of the first promulgator. The earliest cars of immolation were slow and clumsy, and the rite of sacrifice was perhaps rarely and furtively practised in the beginning. There is no doubt, too, that the intended victims often escaped. Awto, at first, can hardly have inspired the universal fear and reverence of later epochs.

Certain scraps of Hamurriquanean printing, miraculously preserved in airtight vaults and deciphered before they could crumble, have given us the names of two early prophets of Awto, Anriford and Dhodzh. These amassed fortunes from the credulity of their benighted followers. It was under the influence of these prophets that the dark and baleful religion spread by leaps and bounds, until no Hamurriquanean street or highway was safe from the thunderously rolling wheels of the sacrificial cars.

It is doubtful whether Awto, like most other savage and primordial deities, was ever represented by graven images. At least, no such images have been recovered in all our delvings. However, the rusty remains of the iron-built temples of Awto, called grahges, have been exhumed every-where in immense numbers.

Strange vessels and metal implements of mysterious hieratic use have been found in the grahges, together with traces of oils by which the sacred vehicles were anointed, and the vehicles lie buried in far-spread, colossal scrapheaps. All this, however, throws little light on the deity himself.

It is probable that Awto, sometimes known as Mhotawr, was simply an abstract principle of death and destruction and was believed to manifest himself through the homicidal speed and fury of the fatal machines. His demented devotees flung themselves before these vehicles as before the embodiment of the god.

The power and influence of Awto's priesthood, as well as its numbers, must have been well nigh beyond estimation. The priesthood, it would seem, was divided into at least three orders:

The mekniks, or keepers of the grahges. The shophurs, who drove the sacred vehicles. And an order—whose special name has been lost—that served as guardians of innumerable wayside shrines. It was at these shrines where a mineral liquid called ghas used in the fuelling of the vehicles, was dispensed from crude and curious pumping mechanisms.

Several well-preserved mummies of mekniks, in sacerdotal raiment blackened by the sacred oils, have been recovered from grahges in the central Hamurriquanean deserts, where they were apparently buried by sudden sandstorms.

Chemical analysis of the oiled garments has so far failed to confirm a certain legendary belief current among the degenerate bushmen who form the scant remnant of Hamurriqua's teeming myriads. I refer to a belief that the oils used in anointing those ancient cars were often mixed with unctuous matters obtained from the bodies of their victims.

However, a usage so barbarous would have conformed well enough with the principles of the hideous cult. Further research may establish the old legend as a truth.

From the evidence we have unearthed, it is plain that the cult assumed enormous power and wide-spread proportions within a few decades of its inception. The awful apex was reached in little more than a century. In my opinion, it is no coincidence that the whole period of the Awto cult corresponded very closely with Hamurriqua's decline and ultimate downfall.

Some will consider my statements too definite, and will ask for the evidence above mentioned. In answer, I need only point to the condition of those skeletons exhumed by thousands from tombs and vaults dated according to the Hamurriquanean chronology.

Throughout the time-period we have assigned to the Awto cult there is a steady, accelerative increase of bone-fractures, often of the most horribly complicated nature. Toward the end, when the fearful cult was at its height, we find few skeletons that do not show at least one or two minor, if not major, breakages.

The shattered condition of these skeletons, often decapitated or wholly disarticulated, is almost beyond belief.

The rusty remains of the ancient vehicles bear similar witness. Built with an eye to ever greater speed and deadliness, they fall into types that show the ghastly growth and progress of the cult. The later types, found in prodigious numbers, are always more or less dented, broken, crumpled—often they are mere heaps of indescribably tangled wreckage.

Toward the end, it would seem that virtually the whole population must have belonged to the blood-mad priesthood. Going forth daily in the rituals of Awto, they must have turned their cars upon each other, hurtling together with the violence of projectiles. A universal mania for speed went hand in hand with a mania for homicide and suicide.

Picture, if you can, the ever-mounting horror of it all. The nation-wide madness of immolation. The carnivals of bloody holidays. The highways lined from coast to coast with crushed and dismembered sacrifices!

Can you wonder that this ancient people, their numbers decimated, their mentality sapped and bestialized by dire superstition, should have declined so rapidly? Should have fallen almost without a struggle before the hordes of the Orient?

Let history and archaeology draw the curtain. The moral is plain. But luckily, in our present state of high enlightenment, we have little need to fear the rise of any savage error such as that which attended the worship of Awto.

Obituary item broadcast from Toshtush on the 1st day of the year 5999:

We are sorry to record the sudden death of Professor Erru Saggus, who had just delivered the last of his series of lectures on Hamurriquanean Archaeology at the University of Tosh-Tush.

Returning on the same afternoon to his home in the Himalayas Professor Saggus was the victim of a most unfortunate accident. His stratosphere ship, one of very newest and speediest models, collided within a few leagues of its destination with a ship driven by one Jar Ghoshtar, a chemistry student from the great College of Ustraleendia.

Both ships were annihilated by the impact, plunging earthward in a single flaming meteoric mass which ignited and destroyed an entire Himalayan village. Several hundred people are said to have burned to death in the resultant conflagration.

Such accidents are all too frequent nowadays, owing to the crowded condition of stratosphere traffic. We must deplore the recklessness of navigators who exceed the 950 mile speed limit. All who saw the recent accident bear witness that Erru Saggus and Jar Ghoshtar were both driving at a speed very much in excess of 1000 miles per hour.

While regretting this present-day mania for mere mileage, we cannot agree with certain ill-advised satirists who have tried to draw a parallel between the fatalities of modern traffic and the ancient rites of immolation to the god Awto.

Superstition is one thing, Science is another. Such archaeologists as Professor Saggus have proven to us that the worshippers of Awto were the victims of a dark and baleful error. It is unthinkable that such superstition will ever again prevail. With pride for our achievements, and full confidence in the future, we can number the most Honorable Professor Erru Saggus among the martyrs of science.

THE HAUNTED CHAMBER

Several years ago, I shall not give the exact date, I received an invitation from a second cousin of mine, one Charles Burleigh, to visit him at his home near London for a few weeks in the winter. As Charles and I are stout friends, and I had no business at the time to detain me, I made haste to answer the note in the affirmative.

Three days later found me at the railway station of my cousin's native town. The village, tho it can scarce be called one, of X. Some snow has already fallen, and when I stepped from the train I found the ground to be white with it. The weather was bitterly cold, so I found it expedient to don a heavy overcoat.

I stood for some time on the platform, gazing about for the man who, I had been informed, would be there to meet me. At last I perceived him an old servant of my cousin's, bronzed with the hue of a tropic clime. As I knew that he had served in the great mutiny, this was not perplexing to me. But I had cause, in the light of later events, to remember he fact.

Charles' house was on the very outskirts of the [village,] at distance of about a half a mile from the station. It was a stately old building, dating from the time of King James the First. The walls [were] ivy-grown in many places. There was an isin-garden, in which the house was buried, enclosed by a high stonewall.

The place had originally, before our family came into possessing it, belonged to a certain family, whose names are well-known to my readers, but which, I shall not, for certain reasons of my own, mention.

Charles I found anxiously awaiting me. He is a man about thirty-five years of age. His countenance is pleasant, but there is on it a tinge of sadness, as of a man who has known trouble.

His early days were soured by certain events; these, however, I cannot tell now, as they have little or no bearing on this story.

The greetings over, we went within. Dinner was served in a great hall, a few hours after my arrival. It was a lonely-looking apartment, lonely because of its vastness and a certain air about it, as of sadness. It affected me in much the same manner as the [tone?] of the house, that is, with a melancholy feeling, synonymous with that described by an American poet in the following manner:

—A feeling of sadness and longing,

That is not akin to pain,

And resembles sorrow only

As the mist resembles rain.

We sat after dinner for several hours, talking of various subjects. Most of them have escaped my memory, but there is one that will stick in my mind as long as I live. I shall never forget it.

We had reached the subject of ghosts and spirits, and were exchanging opinions and reminiscences. I pooh-poohed the idea of the supernatural from the very moment that we took it up.

"There is no such thing as a ghost," I said.

"How can you know that?" he said.

"Because men have always been able to explain satisfactorily to themselves and others how their only foundation is some optical illusion or else there is a human agency behind it all."

"I don't know anything about the 'human agency' in this case" said my cousin in reply, "but I know that I have seen and heard things in this house with my own eyes and ears that cannot be explained under such a heading."

"How long past have you seen them?" I asked, my curiosity leaping up within me on the moment.

"For three months", said Charles, "On every occasion that I have slept in a certain room in this house I have seen and heard strange things."

"For only three months?" I asked.

"Yes, before that there was nothing the matter with the chamber. It was as good and comfortable an apartment as any man might wish. I keep it open even now, except at night, there is nothing there that seems out of the ordinary. It is my private bed-chamber and I am loath to give it up on account of the things that take place there. Up to a few days ago I had used it but was, on account of what occurred unable to sleep. Last week I abandoned it and keep it locked."

"What have you seen", I asked.

"Stranger things than you think. I am loath to tell you of them."

"And why?" I asked, "Should you not impart the secret to me?"

He hesitated—"You are so incredulous," was his answer.

"I would like to occupy this haunted chamber for a few nights," said I.

"I am curious to see for myself the things that you have beheld. Therefore, you need not tell me now. I like to be surprised."

"I know your nature well, Robert," said he, "but I do not wish you to expose yourself to unnecessary danger. Strong as my nerves are, they have been shaken by the strange occurrences within that triply accursed room. I firmly believe that it is haunted by something."

I sternly pooh-poohed this idea, and after more persuading, wrung from my cousin a reluctant promise to allow me to occupy the haunted chamber for the night at least.

By now his fear had worked on me a little so I announced my intention of retiring for the night. I provided myself with a stout Irish shillelagh, picked up during my residence a few years ago in the Emerald Isle. As I was well skilled in its use, I held myself to be a match for any ghost or spirit that might choose to disturb me.

We ascended a long oaken staircase to the upper floor of the building. There are two stories to this house, and a large attic in the very top. It was on the upper floor that the haunted chamber was situated. We went thru two rooms, and found ourselves before a heavy oaken door. My cousin unlocked it and we entered. The apartment was little different from any other, save that it was furnished with rare and antique furniture. There was a large tapestried bedstead of the time of Charles the first, and a few heavy chairs of the same kind, with a large bureau, and various other articles.

There was but one window to the room—a lattice of the Queen Anne style.

The moonlight strained, dim shining made a streak of white light on the floor, and a slight breeze entering, cold and frosty, made the tapestries on the walls of the apartment waft slightly. I made haste to close the window, as it was very cold with the breeze coming in. My cousin then bade me farewell, after giving me some words of advice, and then went out, locking the door behind him as I had requested.

There was a strange, eerie feeling in the cold air, by no means pleasant. I presently found my teeth chattering and my eyes roving about in a nervous manner. I laughed at myself and made haste to disrobe. Once within the bed my feelings changed. I drew the curtains together, clutched my cudgel, and prepared myself for sleep.

But sleep would not come to me. I lay for a long time with my ears strained for the slightest sound. My eyes vainly trying to pierce the Stygian darkness. I finally cursed myself for a fool, turned about, shut my eyes and began to count the sheep leaping over the stone wall. But my sheep were singularly unusual. No sooner were they thru than they began again and

soon were so numerous I lost all count of them. I should have given up as the effort caused me to strain every sense and nerve.

The hours dragged by like aeons. There was apparently no end to them. Half-past ten, eleven, half past eleven—then came the deep strokes of twelve. I sat up, startled at the sound, but finding out what it was, was about to lay down again.

Suddenly, as I sat there, every muscle rigid, the curtains slowly parted, seemingly by no human agency. With sickly swiftness they swept back, letting in a broad band of moonlight across the bed. And in the very centre of that band, its hands upon the bed—shall I ever forget the horror of that sight!—a ghostly figure, the figure, apparently of a Hindu, clothed in white. It was very distinct, tho to my disordered mind it seemed to be misty in outline. It was a dark, scarce human face that peered down upon me with fanatic eyes, and wild, leering, demoniac expression. The figure was clothed in white, close-clinging trousers and Indian jacket, with a white turban on the head. The figure seemed to me at the moment, to be beyond nature. I sat frozen with horror for a few moments, possibly fascinated by the baleful eyes of the apparition. Then my skepticism on the question of the existence of ghosts stirred and I swung my cudgel at the unlucky apparition.

Whack! Whack! Whack! went the shillelagh, landing on something more substantial than air. The erstwhile spirit yelled and shrieked, and begged for mercy in a voice that I seemed sometime to have heard before.

I soon secured my prisoner, and tearing off his Oriental guise, disclosed the features of my cousin's old servant, the Indian soldier of whom I spoke in an earlier part of this story.

Hardly had I unmasked the captive when the door opened and my Charles rushed in with a lighted taper in his hand. He found me standing over the ghost with shillelagh in hand, delivering a lecture punctuated by sundry flourishes of the stick, on the subject of deceiving.

Burleigh's astonishment was beyond bounds when he saw his servant. He scarcely knew what to say. At last he managed to stammer out, addressing the ghost.

"What does this mean, Ruggles?"

He was silent, and though threatened, sat there refusing to answer, eyeing us sullenly. Neither would he afterwards explain, tho we pestered him with questions the remainder of the night.

"What do you think of it?" I asked my cousin.

"I am greatly puzzled," replied Charles. "What reason could the man possibly have for playing such a trick on me."

I could only shrug my shoulders.

In the morning the servant was gone. He had been confined by his master in one of the upper rooms of the house; a bruised and broken ivy vine testified to the manner of his escape.

On the table was found a badly written note, which, stripped of bad spelling and phrasing, was substantially as follows:

"Mr. Burleigh:

"I have cherished a grudge against you for many years, but showed no sign of it. Within the last few months I have endeavored to be revenged by trying to drive the people from this house by playing ghost at night in your bed-chamber. I have failed. You shall never see nor hear of me again.

"Sampson Ruggles"

THE HAUNTED GONG

Among the many queer shops in San Francisco's Chinatown is that of a Japanese dealer in antiques—Takamoto Satsuma. Satsuma himself is a puzzle, but his place of business is, above all others, one of the strangest collections of the odd, the weird, and the unexpected that I have ever run across. Satsuma is brown and wrinkled—an epitome of his native land—of all that is mysterious, incomprehensible and exclusively Japanese, and his shop is likewise. There you may see all the gods of the East, deities of Buddhist and Shinto theology, squat images that look at you with the accumulated wisdom of long years and of a land and people essentially foreign. There, too, are swords and weapons of which I do not know the names, painted fans, lacquer work, Japanese armor, and a thousand and one other articles all resplendent of Japan.

Satsuma, who is invariably smiling and polite, as condescending if you leave without making a purchase as if you had bought twenty dollars worth, showed me about, exhibiting his treasures and extolling them in English which appeared peculiarly his own.

"You buy Matsuma sword?" he said, "I assure you most exceedingly ancient, and razor-blade keen. Matsuma mighty sword maker—forge devilblades." The dealer was about to enlarge on the diabolical qualities of Matsuma when I espied a Japanese gong, decorated with figures of gods, halfhuman, half-animal, which lay on a counter between a miniature Kurannon and the "getting up little god" Daruma. "How much?" I inquired. I was informed that the price was two dollars, which, considering

the age of the gong, made out by Matsuma to be three hundred years, was not exorbitant. The money being produced, I soon departed, much delighted with my purchase, and followed by many thanks from the dealer in antiques.

The gong was hung near my writing desk, and added, I thought, greatly to ornamentation of the room. I am by nature a collector of the odd, the picturesque, and particularly the Oriental, and my apartments show unmistakable traces of this predilection. Few have fairer Turkish rugs than mine or a more extensive collection of miscellaneous Oriental articles

I was seated at my desk several weeks later, engaged, if I recollect rightly, in an article [on] the Chinese Immigration Question. Anyway, it was of a practical every-day nature. Just as I had got well-started, I was suddenly interrupted by the sound of the gong striking. The sound, I may remark, was strangely deep and mellow, and different in tone from the ordinary gong. Five strokes followed each other in rapid succession, and when, much startled, I turned about, the instrument was still vibrating. My first thought was that some friend, wishing to play a joke, had stolen into the room and struck the gong. Great was my surprise to find myself absolutely alone. To my knowledge, no one was in the house. The sound having ceased, it was followed by unbroken silence. broken only by the beating of my heart

Much puzzled and perturbed, I examined the instrument closely, wondering if there was any internal arrangement mechanism which could have been responsible. This being without result, I looked about for some external agency, such as the proximity of some other article My search was fruitless; I could find no agency which could have produced the sound.

The affair was so mysterious and perplexing that had it happened other than in broad daylight in the very heart of bustling, matter-of-fact San Francisco, I should surely have put it down to supernatural agency. But that was impossible. However, the more I thought of it, the greater more inexplicable the mystery grew. But everything has its solution. Determined to solve the mystery it, I went to Satsuma and told him the story. The dealer thereupon told a tale, which in plain English, runs thus:

Several centuries ago the feudal Lord Takamura Jiro ruled over a great portion of Kyoto. Jiro, had raised himself to that position beginning life as a common soldier under a former ruler, had, by a combination of circumstances, and his genuine abilities, raised himself to this high position,

and displaced his displacing supplanting his master. Juster and more humane than his predecessor, whose cruelty had been instrumental in displacing dethroning him, he was beloved of his people, and ruled over them ruled in peace and prosperity.

Over another and larger portion of Kyoto, the Prince Umetsu Hakone held sway. Between Jiro and Hakone there had been smothered enmity originating many years before in the sheltering by Jiro of certain fugitives of justice from his neighbor. Though not resenting it at the time, Hakone had long nursed this grudge against Jiro, patiently awaiting the time when some excuse should arise for paying it off.

Seven years passed, and during these years the prosperity wealth prosperity abode in all Kyoto, the crops seasons being propitious and the crops abundant. Then, when least expected, there came a drouth, and after it a famine. Seven years had nature lavished her gifts over-generously, and now, as if in the balance of things, she withheld those gifts them.

The famine fell heaviest in that part ruled by Jiro, visiting but lightly the realm of Hakone. And Hakone, more far sighted than his neighbor, foreseeing perceiving that these this time must arrive, had stored up an abundance of food grain in preparation. During the famine he sold this to his people at an enormous profit, being both humanitarian and financier!

Seven years passed before his opportunity came. Jiro, then becoming engaged in a war with a neighboring prince, Hakone took advantage of the absence of his army to advance at the head of his troops into Jiro's territory. Jiro, having been wounded, was at that time abiding in his castle surrounded by a few soldiers, while his army was perhaps fifty miles away engaged in carrying on the war.

Hakone, advancing by forced marches found himself at nightfall near Jiro's castle. So swiftly and stealthily had he come that Jiro was not unaware of his presence in the neighborhood.

Knowing this, and also that the castle was practically ungarrisoned, Hakone, in the dead of night, attacked, carrying the outer gates and meeting

with little resistance. Jiro's men, astonished and confused, were driven into the castle.

Jiro made preparations for a determined resistance. At first he thought that the prince whom he was fighting had stolen a march on him, but he soon became apprised aware that it was his old foe, Hakone.

With but twenty men he held the castle until dawn. Hakone's force, numbering many hundreds, strove vainly to effect an entrance. Each attack resulted in their retreating with great loss, only to advance once more. Jiro's soldiers, all samurai, fought with the courage of trapped rats, and when morning broke the men of Hakone advanced on an incline formed of dead bodies.

In spite of his wound, Jiro stood foremost to resist the enemy. He was a noble swordsman, and his blades, which rose and fell as regularly as triphammers, wrought terrific carnage.

But twenty men against many hundred could not hope for victory. At dawn but half that number remained to Jiro, and they were driven back, very slowly, into the castle. Every step, however, lost Hakone several lives.

In the great hall of the castle, Jiro, with two soldiers left, refused to retreat further. Here he would die gloriously, as befitted a samurai and the son of a samurai, and so, shouting the war-cry of his clan, he faced his enemies.

Close at hand was a gong. When Jiro fell, several minutes later, covered with wounds, and surrounded by a ring of dead, his sword struck it, and the sound, echoing strangely, seemed to those who heard it to toll the death of Jiro.

Hakone, having conquered his ancient enemy, now ruled over his realm. A year later, on the anniversary of Jiro's death, while standing near the spot where he fell, Hakone heard the gong strike five times though no agency was visible. And each year on that day, and at the hour when Jiro died, the phenomenon has occurred. Men say that it is the sword of Jiro striking the hour of his death.

Such was Satsuma's tale. Is it true, or is it a legend of old Japan, that land of many fictions and multitudinous folk-lore? But a year later, on the same anniversary of that day, the gong was struck, tho no one stood near, and no agency was visible. It is very strange and most incomprehensible. Was it the sword of Jiro striking the hour of his death? Who knows? Who knows?

THE HOLINESS OF AZÉDARAC

'By the Ram with a Thousand Ewes! By the Tail of Dagon and the Horns of Derceto!' said Azédarac, as he fingered the tiny, pot-bellied vial of vermilion liquid on the table before him. 'Something will have to be done with this pestilential Brother Ambrose. I have now learned that he was sent to Ximes by the Archbishop of Averoigne for no other purpose than to gather proof of my subterraneous connection with Azazel and the Old Ones. He has spied upon my evocations in the vaults, he has heard the hidden formulae, and beheld the veritable manifestation of Lilit, and even of Iog-Sotôt and Sodagui, those demons who are more ancient than the world; and this very morning, an hour ago, he has mounted his white ass for the return journey to Vyones. There are two ways — or, in a sense, there is one way — in which I can avoid the bother and inconvenience of a trial for sorcery: the contents of this vial must be administered to Ambrose before he has reached his journey's end — or, failing this, I myself shall be compelled to make use of a similar medicament.'

Jehan Mauvaissoir looked at the vial and then at Azédarac. He was not at all horrified, nor even surprised, by the non-episcopal oaths and the somewhat uncanonical statements which he had just heard from the Bishop of Ximes. He had known the Bishop too long and too intimately, and had rendered him too many services of an unconventional nature, to be surprised at anything. In fact, he had known Azédarac long before the sorcerer had ever dreamt of becoming a prelate, in a phase of his existence that was wholly unsuspected by the people of Ximes; and Azédarac had not troubled to keep many secrets from Jehan at any time.

'I understand,' said Jehan. 'You can depend upon it that the contents of the vial will be administered. Brother Ambrose will hardly travel post-haste on that ambling white ass; and he will not reach Vyones before tomorrow noon. There is abundant time to overtake him. Of course, he knows me — at least, he knows Jehan Mauvaissoir.... But that can be easily remedied.'

Azédarac smiled confidently. 'I leave the affair — and the vial — in your hands, Jehan. Of course, no matter what the eventuation, with all the

Satanic and pre-Satanic facilities at my disposal, I should be in no great danger from these addeplated bigots. However, I am very comfortably situated here in Ximes; and the lot of a Christian Bishop who lives in the odor of incense and piety, and maintains in a meanwhile a private understanding with the Adversary, is certainly preferable to the mischancy life of a hedgesorcerer. I do not care to be annoyed or disturbed, or ousted from my sinecure, if such can be avoided.

'May Moloch devour that sanctimonious little milksop of an Ambrose,' he went on. 'I must be growing old and dull, not to have suspected him before this. It was the horrorstricken and averted look he has been wearing lately that made me think he had peered through the keyhole on the subterranean rites. Then, when I heard he was leaving, I wisely thought to review my library; and I have found that the Book of Eibon, which contains the oldest incantations, and the secret, man-forgotten lore of Iog-Sotôt and Sodagui, is now missing. As you know, I had replaced the former binding of aboriginal, sub-human skin with the sheep-leather of a Christian missal, and had surrounded the volume with rows of legitimate prayer-books. Ambrose is carrying it away under his robe as proof conclusive that I am addicted to the Black Arts. No one in Averoine will be able to read the immemorial Hyperborean script; but the dragon's-blood illuminations and drawings will be enough to damn me.'

Master and servant regarded each other for an interval of significant silence. Jehan eyed with profound respect the haughty stature, the grimly lined lineaments, the grizzled tonsure, the odd, ruddy, crescent scar on the pallid brow of Azédarac, and the sultry points of orange-yellow fire that seemed to burn deep down in the chill and liquid ebon of his eyes. Azédarac, in his turn, considered with confidence the vulpine features and discreet, inexpressive air of Jehan, who might have been — and could be, if necessary — anything from a mercer to a cleric.

'It is regrettable,' resumed Azédarac, 'that any question of my holiness and devotional probity should have been raised among the clergy of Averoine. But I suppose it was inevitable sooner or later — even though the chief difference between myself and many other ecclesiastics is, that I serve the

Devil wittingly and of my own free will, while they do the same in sanctimonious blindness.... However, we must do what we can to delay the evil hour of public scandal, and eviction from our neatly feathered nest. Ambrose alone could prove anything to my detriment at present; and you, Jehan, will remove Ambrose to a realm wherein his monkish tattlings will be of small consequence. After that, I shall be doubly vigilant. The next emissary from Vyones, I assure you, will find nothing to report but saintliness and bead-telling.'

II

The thoughts of Brother Ambrose were sorely troubled, and at variance with the tranquil beauty of the sylvan scene, as he rode onward through the forest of Averoigne between Ximes and Vyones. Horror was nesting in his heart like a knot of malignant vipers; and the evil Book of Eibon, that primordial manual of sorcery, seemed to burn beneath his robe like a huge, hot, Satanic sigil pressed against his bosom. Not for the first time, there occurred to him the wish that Clément, the Archbishop, had delegated someone else to investigate the Erebean turpitude of Azédarac. Sojourning for a month in the Bishop's household, Ambrose had learned too much for the peace of mind of any pious cleric, and had seen things that were like a secret blot of shame and terror on the white page of his memory. To find that a Christian prelate could serve the powers of nethermost perdition, could entertain in privacy the foulnesses that are older than Asmodai, was abysmally disturbing to his devout soul; and ever since then he had seemed to smell corruption everywhere, and had felt on every side the serpentine encroachment of the dark Adversary.

As he rode on among the somber pines and verdant beeches, he wished also that he were mounted on something swifter than the gentle, milk-white ass appointed for his use by the Archbishop. He was dogged by the shadowy intimation of leering gargoyle faces, of invisible cloven feet, that followed him behind the thronging trees and along the umbrageous meanderings of the road. In the oblique rays, the elongated webs of shadow wrought by the

dying afternoon, the forest seemed to attend with bated breath the noisome and furtive passing of innominable things. Nevertheless, Ambrose had met no one for miles; and he had seen neither bird nor beast nor viper in the summer woods.

His thoughts returned with fearful insistence to Azédarac, who appeared to him as a tall, prodigious Antichrist, uprearing his sable vans and giant figure from out the flaming mire of Abaddon, Again he saw the vaults beneath the Bishop's mansion, wherein he had peered one night on a scene of infernal terror and loathliness, had beheld the Bishop swathed in the gorgeous, coiling fumes of unholy censers, that mingled in midair with the sulfurous and bituminous vapors of the Pit; and through the vapors had seen the lasciviously swaying limbs, the bellying and dissolving features of foul enormous entities.... Recalling them, again he trembled at the pre-Adamite lubriciousness of Lilit, again he shuddered at the trans-galactic horror of the demon Sodagui, and the ultra-dimensional hideousness of that being known as Iog-Sotôt to the sorcerers of Averoine.

How balefully potent and subversive, he thought, were these immemorial devils, who had placed their servant Azédarac in the very bosom of the Church, in a position of high and holy trust. For nine years the evil prelate had held an unchallenged and unsuspected tenure, had befouled the bishopric of Ximes with infidelities that were worse than those of the Paynims. Then, somehow, through anonymous channels, a rumour had reached Clément — a warning whisper that not even the Archbishop had dared to voice aloud; and Ambrose, a young Benedictine monk, the nephew of Clément, had been dispatched to examine privily the festering foulness that threatened the integrity of the Church. Only at that time did anyone recall how little was actually known regarding the antecedents of Azédarac; how tenuous were his claims to ecclesiastical preferment, or even to mere priesthood; how veiled and doubtful were the steps by which he had attained his office. It was then realized that a formidable wizardry had been at work.

Uneasily, Ambrose wondered if Azédarac had already discovered the removal of the Book of Eibon from among the missals contaminated by its blasphemous presence. Even more uneasily, he wondered what Azédarac

would do in that event, and how long it would take him to connect the absence of the volume with his visitor's departure.

At this point, the meditations of Ambrose were interrupted by the hard clatter of galloping hoofs that approached from behind. The emergence of a centaur from the oldest wood of paganism could scarcely have startled him to a keener panic; and he peered apprehensively over his shoulder at the nearing horseman. This person, mounted on a fine black steed with opulent trappings, was a bushy-bearded of obvious consequence; for his gay garments were those of a noble or a courtier. He overtook Ambrose and passed on with a polite nod, seeming to be wholly intent on his own affairs. The monk was immensely reassured, though vaguely troubled for some moments by a feeling that he had seen elsewhere, under circumstances which he was unable to recall, the narrow eyes and sharp profile that contrasted so oddly with the bluff beard of the horseman. However, he was comfortably sure that he had never seen the man in Ximes. The rider soon vanished beyond a leafy turn of the arboreal highway. Ambrose returned to the pious horror and apprehensiveness of his former soliloquy.

As he went on, it seemed to him that the sun had gone down with untimely and appalling swiftness. Though the heavens above were innocent of cloud, and the low-lying air was free from vapors, the woods were embrowned by an inexplicable gloom that gathered visibly on all sides. In this gloom, the trunks of the trees were strangely distorted, and the low masses of foliage assumed unnatural and disquieting forms. It appeared to Ambrose that the silence around him was a fragile film through which the raucous rumble and mutter of diabolic voices might break at any moment, even as the foul and sunken driftage that rises anon above the surface of a smoothly flowing river.

With much relief, he remembered that he was not far from a wayside tavern, known as the Inn of Bonne Jouissance. Here, since his journey to Vyones was little more than half completed, he resolved to tarry for the night.

A minute more, and he saw the lights of the inn. Before their benign and golden radiance, the equivocal forest shadows that attended him seemed to

halt and retire and he gained the haven of the tavern courtyard with the feeling of one who has barely escaped from an army of goblin perils.

Committing his mount to the care of a stable-servant, Ambrose entered the main room of the inn. Here he was greeted with the deference due to his cloth by the stout and unctuous taverner; and, being assured that the best accommodations of the place were at his disposal, he seated himself at one of several tables where other guests had already gathered to await the evening meal.

Among them, Ambrose recognized the bluff-bearded horseman who had overtaken him in the woods an hour ago. This person was sitting alone, and a little apart. The other guests, a couple of travelling mercers, a notary, and two soldiers, acknowledged the presence of the monk with all due civility; but the horseman arose from his table, and coming over to Ambrose, began immediately to make overtures that were more than those of common courtesy.

'Will you not dine with me, sir monk?' he invited, in a gruff but ingratiating voice that was perplexingly familiar to Ambrose, and yet, like the wolfish profile, was irrecognizable at the time.

'I am the Sieur des Émaux, from Touraine, at your service,' the man went on. 'It would seem that we are traveling the same road — possibly to the same destination. Mine is the cathedral city of Vyones. And yours?'

Though he was vaguely perturbed, and even a little suspicious, Ambrose found himself unable to decline the invitation. In reply to the last question, he admitted that he also was on his way to Vyones. He did not altogether like the Sieur des Émaux, whose slitted eyes gave back the candle-light of the inn with a covert glitter, and whose manner was somewhat effusive, not to say fulsome. But there seemed to be no ostensible reason for refusing a courtesy that was doubtless well-meant and genuine. He accompanied his host to their separate table.

'You belong to the Benedictine order, I observe,' said the Sieur des Émaux, eyeing the monk with an odd smile that was tinged with furtive irony. 'It is

an order that I have always admired greatly — a most noble and worthy brotherhood. May I not inquire your name?’

Ambrose gave the requested information with a curious reluctance.

‘Well, then, Brother Ambrose,’ said the Sieur des Émaux, ‘I suggest that we drink to your health and the prosperity of your order in the red wine of Averoine while we are waiting for supper to be served. Wine is always welcome following a long journey, and is no less beneficial before a good meal than after.’

Ambrose mumbled an unwilling assent. He could not have told why, but the personality of the man was more and more distasteful to him. He seemed to detect a sinister undertone in the purring voice, to surprise an evil meaning in the low-lidded glance. And all the while his brain was tantalized by intimations of a forgotten memory. Had he seen his interlocutor in Ximes? Was the self-styled Sieur des Émaux a henchman of Azédarac in disguise?

Wine was now ordered by his host, who left the table to confer with the innkeeper for this purpose, and even insisted on paying a visit to the cellar, that he might select a suitable viatage in person. Noting the obeisance paid to the man by the people of the tavern, who addressed him by name, Ambrose felt a certain measure of reassurance. When the taverner, followed by the Sieur des Émaux, returned with two earthen pitchers of wine, he had well-nigh succeeded in dismissing his vague doubts and vaguer fears. Two large goblets were now placed on the table, and the Sieur des Émaux filled them immediately from one of the pitchers. It seemed to Ambrose that the first of the goblets already contained a small amount of some sanguine fluid, before the wine was poured into it; but he could not have sworn to this in the dim light, and thought that he must have been mistaken.

‘Here are two matchless vintages,’ said the Sieur des Émaux, indicating the pitchers. ‘Both are so excellent that I was unable to choose between them; but you, Brother Ambrose, are perhaps capable of deciding their merits with a finer palate than mine.’

He pushed one of the filled goblets toward Ambrose. 'This is the wine of La Frenaie,' he said. 'Drink, it will verily transyort you from the world by virtue of the mighty fire that slumbers in its heart.'

Ambrose took the profEred goblet, and raised it to his lips. The Sieur des Émaux was bending forward above his own wine to inhale its bouquet; and something in his posture was terrifyingly familiar to Ambrose. In a chill flash of horror, his memory told him that the thin, pointed features behind the square beard were dubiously similar to those of Jehan Mauvaissoir, whom he had often seen in the household of Azédarac, and who, as he had reason to believe, was implicated in the Bishop's sorceries. He wondered why he had not placed the resemblance before, and what wizardry had drugged his powers of recollection. Even now he was not sure; but the mere suspicion terrified him as if some deadly serpent had reared its head across the table.

'Drink, Brother Ambrose,' urged the Sieur des Émaux, draining his own goblet. 'To your welfare and that of all good Benedictines.'

Ambrose hesitated. The cold, hypnotic eyes of his interlocutor were upon him, and he was powerless to refuse, in spite of all his apprehensions. Shuddering slightly, with the sense of some irresistible compulsion, and feeling that he might drop dead from the virulent working of a sudden poison, he emptied his goblet.

An instant more, and he felt that his worst fears had been justified. The wine burned like the liquid flames of Phlegeton in his throat and on his lips; it seemed to fill his veins with a hot, infernal quicksilver. Then, all at once, an unbearable cold had inundated his being; an icy whirlwind wrapped him round with coils of roaring air, the chair melted beneath him, and he was falling through endless glacial gulfs. The walls of the inn had flown like receding vapors; the lights went out like stars in the black mist of a marish; and the face of the Sieur des Émaux faded with them on the swirling shadows, even as a bubble that breaks on the milling of midnight waters.

III

It was with some difficulty that Ambrose assured himself that he was not dead. He had seemed to fall eternally, through a gray night that was peopled with ever-changing forms, with blurred unstable masses that dissolved to other masses before they could assume definitude. For a moment, he thought there were walls about him once more; and then he was plunging from terrace to terrace of a world of phantom trees. At whiles, he thought also that there were human faces; but all was doubtful and evanescent, all was drifting smoke and surging shadow.

Abruptly, with no sense of transition or impact, he found that he was no longer falling. The vague fantasmagoria around him had returned to an actual scene — but a scene in which there was no trace of the Inn of Bonne Jouissance, or the *Sieur des Émaux*.

Ambrose peered about with incredulous eyes on a situation that was truly unbelievable. He was sitting in broad daylight on a large square block of roughly hewn granite. Around him, at a little distance, beyond the open space of a grassy glade, were the lofty pines and spreading beeches of an elder forest, whose boughs were already touched by the gold of the declining sun. Immediately before him, several men were standing.

These men appeared to regard Ambrose with a profound and almost religious amazement. They were bearded and savage of aspect, with white robes of a fashion he had never before seen. Their hair was long and matted, like tangles of black snakes; and their eyes burned with a frenetic fire. Each of them bore in his right hand a rude knife of sharply chiselled stone.

Ambrose wondered if he had died after all, and if these beings were the strange devils of some unlisted hell. In the face of what had happened, and the light of Ambrose's own beliefs, it was a far from unreasonable conjecture. He peered with fearful trepidation at the supposed demons, and began to mumble a prayer to the God who had abandoned him so

inexplicably to his spiritual foes. Then he remembered the necromantic powers of Azédarac, and conceived another surmise — that he had been spirited bodily away from the Inn of Bonne Jouissance, and delivered into the hands of those pre-Sataaic entities that served the sorcerous Bishop. Becoming convinced of his own physical solidity and integrity, and reflecting that such was scarcely the appropriate condition of a disincarnate soul, and also that the sylvan scene about him was hardly characteristic of the infernal regions, he accepted this as the true explanation. He was still alive, and still on earth, though the circumstances of his situation were more than mysterious, and were fraught with dire, unknowable danger.

The strange beings had maintained an utter silence, as if they were too dumbfounded for speech. Hearing the prayerful murmurs of Ambrose, they seemed to recover from their surprise, and became not only articulate but vociferous. Ambrose could make nothing of their harsh vocables, in which sibilants and aspirates and gutturals were often combined in a manner difficult for the normal human tongue to imitate. However, he caught the word 'taranit', several times repeated, and wondered if it were the name of an especially malevolent demon.

The speech of the weird beings began to assume a sort of rude rhythm, like the intonations of some primordial chant. Two of them stepped forward and seized Ambrose, while the voices of their companions rose in a shrill, triumphant litany.

Scarcely knowing what had happened, and still less what was to follow, Ambrose was flung supine on the granite block, and was held down by one of his captors, while the other raised aloft the keen blade of chiselled flint which he carried. The blade was poised in the air above Ambrose's heart, and the monk realized in sudden terror that it would fall with dire velocity and pierce him through before the lapse of another moment.

Then, above the demoniac chanting, which had risen to a mad, malignant frenzy, he heard the sweet and imperious cry of a woman's voice. In the wild confusion of his terror, the words were strange and meaningless to him; but plainly they were understood by his captors, and were taken as an

undeniable command. The stone knife was lowered sullenly, and Ambrose was permitted to resume a sitting posture on the flat slab.

His rescuer was standing on the edge of the open glade, in the wide-flung umbrage of an ancient pine. She came forward now; and the white-garmented beings fell back with evident respect before her. She was very tall, with a fearless and regal demeanor, and was gowned in a dark shimmering blue, like the star-laden blue of nocturnal summer skies. Her hair was knotted in a long golden-brown braid, heavy as the glistening coils of some eastern serpent. Her eyes were a strange amber, her lips a vermilion touched with the coolness of woodland shadow, and her skin was of alabastrine fairness. Ambrose saw that she was beautiful; but she inspired him with the same awe that he would have felt before a queen, together with something of the fear and consternation which a virtuous young monk would conceive in the perilous presence of an alluring succubus.

'Come with me,' she said to Ambrose, in a tongue that his monastic studies enabled him to recognize as an obsolete variant of the French of Averoine — a tongue that no man had supposedly spoken for many hundred years. Obediently and in great wonder, he arose and followed her, with no hindrance from his glowering and reluctant captors.

The woman led him to a narrow path that wound sinuously away through the deep forest. In a few moments, the glade, the granite block, and the cluster of white-robed men were lost to sight behind the heavy foliage.

'Who are you?' asked the lady, turning to Ambrose. 'You look like one of those crazy missionaries who are beginning to enter Averoine nowadays. I believe that people call them Christians. The Druids have sacrificed so many of them to Taranit, that I marvel at your temerity in coming here.'

Ambrose found it difficult to comprehend the archaic phrasing; and the import of her words was so utterly strange and baffling that he felt sure he must have misunderstood her.

'I am Brother Ambrose,' he replied, expressing himself slowly and awkwardly in the long-disused dialect. 'Of course, I am a Christian; but I

confess that I fail to understand you. I have heard of the pagan Druids; but surely they were all driven from Averoine many centuries ago.'

The woman stared at Ambrose, with open amazement and pity. Her brownish-yellow eyes were bright and clear as a mellowed wine.

'Poor little one,' she said. 'I fear that your dreadful experiences have served to unsettle you. It was fortunate that I came along when I did, and decided to intervene. I seldom interfere with the Druids and their sacrifices; but I saw you sitting on their altar a little while ago, and was struck by your youth and comeliness.'

Ambrose felt more and more that he had been made the victim of a most peculiar sorcery; but, even yet, he was far from suspecting the true magnitude of this sorcery. Amid his bemusement and consternation, however, he realized that he owed his life to the singular and lovely woman beside him, and began to stammer out his gratitude.

'You need not thank me,' said the lady, with a dulcet smile. 'I am Moriamis, the enchantress, and the Druids fear my magic, which is more sovereign and more excellent than theirs, though I use it only for the welfare of men and not for their bale or bane.' The monk was dismayed to learn that his fair rescuer was a sorceress, even though her powers were professedly benignant. The knowledge added to his alarm; but he felt that it would be politic to conceal his emotions in this regard.

'Indeed, I am grateful to you,' he protested. 'And now, if you can tell me the way to the Inn of Bonne Jouissance, which I left not long ago, I shall owe you a further debt.' Moriamis knitted her light brows. 'I have never heard of the Inn of Bonne Jouissance. There is no such place in this region.'

'But this is the forest of Averoine, is it not?' inquired the puzzled Ambrose. 'And surely we are not far from the road that runs between the town of Ximes and the city of Vyones?'

'I have never heard of Ximes, or Vyones, either,' said Moriamis. 'Truly, the land is known as Averoine, and this forest is the great wood of Averoine,

which men have called by that name from primeval years. But there are no towns such as the ones whereof you speak, Brother Ambrose. I fear that you still wander a little in your mind.' Ambrose was aware of a maddening perplexity. 'I have been most damnably beguiled,' he said, half to himself. 'It is all the doing of that abominable sorcerer, Azédarac, I am sure.

The woman started as if she had been stung by a wild bee. There was something both eager and severe in the searching gaze that she turned upon Ambrose.

'Azédarac?' she queried. 'What do you know of Azédarac? I was once acquainted with someone by that name; and I wonder if it could be the same person. Is he tall and a little gray, with hot, dark eyes, and a proud, half-angry air, and a crescent scar on the brow?'

Greatly mystified, and more troubled than ever, Ambrose admitted the veracity of her description. Realizing that in some unknown way he had stumbled upon the hidden antecedents of the sorcerer, he confided the story of his adventures to Moriamis, hoping that she would reciprocate with further information concerning Azédarac.

The woman listened with the air of one who is much interested but not at all surprised.

'I understand now,' she observed, when he had finished. 'Anon I shall explain everything that mystifies and troubles you. I think I know this Jehan Mauvaissoir, also; he has long been the man-servant of Azédarac, though his name was Melchire in other days. These two have always been the underlings of evil, and have served the Old Ones in ways forgotten or never known by the Druids.'

'Indeed, I hope you can explain what has happened,' said Ambrose. 'It is a fearsome and strange and ungodly thing, to drink a draft of wine in a tavern at eventide, and then find one's self in the heart of the forest by afternoon daylight, among demons such as those from whom you succored me.'

'Yea,' countered Moriamis 'it is even stranger than you dream. Tell me, Brother Ambrose, what was the year in which you entered the Inn of Bonne Jouissance?'

'Why, it is the year of our Lord, 1175, of course. What other year could it be?'

'The Druids use a different chronology,' replied Moriamis, 'and their notation would mean nothing to you. But, according to that which the Christian missionaries would now introduce in Averoigne, the present year is A.D. 475. You have been sent back no less than seven hundred years into what the people of your era would regard as the past. The Druid altar an which I found you lying is probably located on the future site of the Inn of Bonne Jouissance.'

Ambrose was more than dumbfounded. His mind was unable to grasp the entire import of Moriamis' words.

'But how can such things be?'' he cried. 'How can a man go backward in time, among years and people that have long turned to dust?'

'That, mayhap, is a mystery for Azédarac to unriddle. However, the past and the future co-exist with what we call the present, and are merely the two segments of the circle of time. We see them and name them according to our own position in the circle.'

Ambrose felt that he had fallen among necromancies of a most unhallowed and unexampled sort, and had been made the victim of diableries unknown to the Christian catalogues.

Tongue-tied by a consciousness that all comment, all protest or even prayer would prove inadequate to the situation, he saw that a stone tower with small lozenge-shaped windows was now visible above the turrets of pine along the path which he and Moriamis were following.

'This is my home,' said Moriamis, as they came forth from beneath the thinning trees at the foot of a little knoll on which the tower was situated.

'Brother Ambrose, you must be my guest.'

Ambrose was unable to decline the proffered hospitality, in spite of his feeling that Moriamis was hardly the most suitable of chatelaines for a chaste and God-fearing monk. However, the pious misgivings with which she inspired him were not unmingled with fascination. Also, like a lost child, he clung to the only available protection in a land of fearful perils and astounding mysteries.

The interior of the tower was neat and clean and homelike, though with furniture of a ruder sort than that to which Ambrose was accustomed, and rich but roughly woven arrases. A serving-woman, tall as Moriamis herself, but darker, brought to him a huge bowl of milk and wheaten bread, and the monk was now able to assuage the hunger that had gone unsatisfied in the Inn of Bonne Jouissance.

As he seated himself before the simple fare, he realized that the Book of Eibon was still heavy in the bosom of his gown. He removed the volume, and gave it gingerly to Moriamis. Her eyes widened, but she made no comment until he had finished his meal. Then she said:

'This volume is indeed the property of Azédarac, who was formerly a neighbor of mine. I knew the scoundrel quite well — in fact, I knew him all too well.' Her bosom heaved with an obscure emotion as she paused for a moment. 'He was the wisest and the mightiest of sorcerers, and the most secret withal; for no one knew the time and the manner of his coming into Averoine, or the fashion in which he had procured the immemorial Book of Eibon, whose runic writings were beyond the lore of all other wizards. He was master of all enchantments and all demons, and likewise a compounder of mighty potions. Among these were certain philtres, blended with potent spells and possessed of unique virtue, that would send the drinker backward or forward in time. One of them, I believe, was administered to you by Melchire, or Jehan Mauvaissoir; and Azédarac himself, together with this man-servant, made use of another — perhaps not for the first time — when they went onward from the present age of the Druids into that age of Christian authority to which you belong. There was

a blood-red vial for the past, and a green for the future. Behold! I possess one of each — though Azédarac was unaware that I knew of their existence.'

She opened a little cupboard, in which were the various charms and medicaments, the sun-dried herbs and mooncompounded essences that a sorceress would employ. From among them she brought out the two vials, one of which contained a sanguine-colored liquid, and the other a fluid of emerald brightness.

'I stole them one day, out of womanly curiosity, from his hidden store of philtres and elixirs and nagistrals,' continued Moriamis. 'I could have followed the rascal when he disappeared into the future, if I had chosen to do so. But I am well enough content with my own age; and moreover, I am not the sort of woman who pursues a wearied and reluctant lover...'

'Then,' said Ambrose, more bewildered than ever, but hopeful, 'if I were to drink the contents of the green vial, I should return to my own epoch.'

'Precisely. And I am sure, from what you have told me, that your return would be a source of much annoyance to Azédarac. It is like the fellow, to have established himself in a fat prelacy. He was ever the master of circumstance, with an eye to his own accommodation and comfort. It would hardly please him, I am sure, if you were to reach the Archbishop.... I am not revengeful by nature ... but on the other hand — '

'It is hard to understand how anyone could have wearied of you,' said Ambrose, gallantly, as he began to comprehend the situation.

Moriamis smiled. 'That is prettily said. And you are really a charming youth, in spite of that dismal-looking robe. I am glad that I rescued you from the Druids, who would have torn your heart out and offered it to their demon, Taranit.'

'And now you will send me back?'

Moriamis frowned a little, and then assumed her most seductive air.

'Are you in such a hurry to leave your hostess? Now that you are living in another century than your own, a day, a week, or a month will make no difference in the date of your return. I have also retained the formulas of Azédarac; and I know how to graduate the potion, if necessary. The usual period of transportation in time is exactly seven hundred years; but the philtre can be strengthened or weakened a little.'

The sun had fallen beyond the pines, and a soft twilight was beginning to invade the tower. The maid-servant had left the room. Moriamis came over and seated herself beside Ambrose on the rough bench he was occupying. Still smiling, she fixed her amber eyes upon him, with a languid flame in their depths — a flame that seemed to brighten as the dusk grew stronger. Without speaking, she began slowly to unbraid her heavy hair, from which there emanated a perfume that was subtle and delicious as the perfume of grape-flowers.

Ambrose was embarrassed by this delightful proximity. 'I am not sure that it would be right for me to remain, after all. What would the Archbishop think?'

'My dear child, the Archbishop will not even be born for at least six hundred and fifty years. And it will be still longer before you are born. And when you return, anything that you have done during your stay with me will have happened no less than seven centuries ago ... which should be long enough to procure the remission of any sin, no matter how often repeated.'

Like a man who has been taken in the toils of some fantastic dream, and finds that the dream is not altogether disagreeable, Ambrose yielded to this feminine and irrefutable reasoning. He hardly knew what was to happen; but, under the exceptional circumstances indicated by Moriamis, the rigors of monastic discipline might well be relaxed to almost any conceivable degree, without entailing spiritual perdition or even a serious breach of vows.

IV

A month later, Moriamis and Ambrose were standing beside the Druid altar. It was late in the evening; and a slightly gibbous moon had risen upon the deserted glade and was fringing the tree-tops with wefted silver. The warm breath of the summer night was gentle as the sighing of a woman in slumber.

'Must you go, after all?' said Moriamis, in a pleading and regretful voice.

'It is my duty. I must return to Clément with the Book of Eibon and the other evidence I have collected against Azédarac.' The words sounded a little unreal to Ambrose as he uttered them; and he tried very hard, but vainly, to convince himself of the cogency and validity of his arguments. The idyll of his stay with Moriamis, to which he was oddly unable to attach any true conviction of sin, had given to all that preceded it a certain dismal insubstantiality. Free of all responsibility or restraint, in the sheer obliviousness of dreams, he had lived like a happy pagan; and now he must go back to the drear existence of a mediaeval monk, beneath the prompting of an obscure sense of duty.

'I shall not try to hold you,' Moriamis sighed. 'But I shall miss you, and remember you as a worthy lover and a pleasant playmate. Here is the philtre.' The green essence was cold and almost hueless in the moonlight, as Moriamis poured it into a little cup and gave it to Ambrose.

'Are you sure of its precise efficacy?' the monk inquired. 'Are you sure that I shall return to the Inn of Bonne Jouissance, at a time not far subsequent to that of my departure therefrom?'

'Yea,' said Moriamis, 'for the potion is infallible. But stay, I have also brought along the other vial — the vial of the past. Take it with you — for who knows, you may sometime wish to return and visit me again.'

Ambrose accepted the red vial and placed it in his robe beside the ancient manual of Hyperborean sorcery. Then, after an appropriate farewell to Moriamis, he drained with sudden resolution the contents of the cup.

The moonlit glade, the gray altar, and Moriamis, all vanished in a swirl of flame and shadow. It seemed to Ambrose that he was soaring endlessly through fantasmagoric gulfs, amid the ceaseless shifting and melting of unstable things, the transient forming and fading of irresoluble worlds. At the end, he found himself sitting once more in the Inn of Bonne Jouissance. at what he assumed to be the very same table before which he had sat with the Sieur des Émaux. It was daylight, and the room was full of people, among whom he looked in vain for the rubicund face of the innkeeper, or the servants and fellow-guests he had previously seen. All were unfamiliar to him; and the furniture was strangely worn, and was grimier than he remembered it.

Perceiving the presence of Ambrose, the people began to eye him with open curiosity and wonderment. A tall man with dolorous eyes and lantern jaws came hastily forward and bowed before him with an air that was half servile but full of a prying impertinence.

'What do you wish?' he asked.

'Is this the Inn of Bonne Jouissance?'

The innkeeper stared at Ambrose. 'Nay, it is the Inn of Haute Esperance, of which I have been the taverner these thirty years. Could you not read the sign? It was called the Inn of Bonne Jouissance in my father's time, but the name was changed after his death.'

Ambrose was filled with consternation. 'But the inn was differently named, and was kept by another man when I visited it not long ago,' he cried in bewilderment. 'The owner was a stout, jovial man, not in the least like you.'

'That would answer the description of my father,' said the taverner, eyeing Ambrose more dubiously than ever. 'He has been dead for the full thirty

years of which I speak; and surely you were not even born at the time of his decease.'

Ambrose began to realize what had happened. The emerald potion, by some error or excess of potency, had taken him many years beyond his own time into the future!

'I must resume my journey to Vyones,' he said in a bewildered voice, without fully comprehending the implications of his situation. 'I have a message for the Archbishop Clément — and must not delay longer in delivering it.'

'But Clément has been dead even longer than my father,' exclaimed the inn-keeper. 'From whence do you come, that you are ignorant of this?' It was plain from his manner that he had begun to doubt the sanity of Ambrose. Others, overhearing the strange discussion, had begun to crowd about, and were plying the monk with jocular and sometimes ribald questions.

'And what of Azédarac, the Bishop of Ximes? Is he dead, too?' inquired Ambrose, desperately. 'You mean St. Azédarac, no doubt. He outlived Clément, but nevertheless he has been dead and duly canonized for thirty-two years. Some say that he did not die, but was transported to heaven alive, and that his body was never buried in the great mausoleum reared for him at Ximes. But that is probably a mere legend.'

Ambrose was overwhelmed with unspeakable desolation and confusion. In the meanwhile, the crowd about him had increased, and in spite of his robe, he was being made the subject of rude remarks and jeers.

'The good Brother has lost his wits,' cried some. 'The wines of Averoine are too strong for him,' said others. 'What year is this?' demanded Ambrose, in his desperation.

'The year of our Lord, 1230,' replied the taverner, breaking into a derisive laugh. 'And what year did you think it was?'

'It was the year 1175 when I last visited the Inn of Bonne Jouissance,' admitted Ambrose.

His declaration was greeted with fresh jeers and laughter. 'Hola, young sir, you were not even conceived at that time,' the taverner said. Then, seeming to remember something, he went on in a more thoughtful tone: 'When I was a child, my father told me of a young monk, about your age, who came to the Inn of Bonne Jouissance one evening in the summer of 1175, and vanished inexplicably after drinking a draft of red wine. I believe his name was Ambrose. Perhaps you are Ambrose, and have only just returned from a visit to nowhere.' He gave a derisory wink, and the new jest was taken up and bandied from mouth to mouth among the frequenters of the tavern.

Ambrose was trying to realize the full import of his predicament. His mission was now useless, through the death or disappearance of Azédarac; and no one would remain in all Averoigne to recognize him or believe his story. He felt the hopelessness of his alienation among unknown years and people.

Suddenly he remembered the red vial given him at parting by Moriamis. The potion, like the green philtre, might prove uncertain in its effect; but he was seized by an all-consuming desire to escape from the weird embarrassment and wilderment of his present position. Also, he longed for Moriamis like a lost child for its mother; and the charm of his sojourn in the past was upon him with an irresistible spell. Ignoring the ribald faces and voices about him, he drew the vial from his bosom, uncorked it, and swallowed the contents....

V

He was back in the forest glade, by the gigantic altar. Moriamis was beside him again, lovely and warm and breathing; and the moon was still rising above the pinetops. It seemed that no more than a few moments could have

elapsed since he had said farewell to the beloved enchantress. 'I thought you might return,' said Moriamis. 'And I waited a little while.'

Ambrose told her of the singular mishap that had attended his journey in time.

Moriamis nodded gravely. 'The green philtre was more potent than I had supposed,' she remarked. 'It is fortunate, though, that the red philtre was equivalently strong, and could bring you back to me through all those added years. You will have to remain with me now, for I possessed only the two vials. I hope you are not sorry.'

Ambrose proceeded to prove, in a somewhat unmonastic manner, that her hope was fully justified.

Neither then nor at any other time did Moriamis tell him that she herself had strengthened slightly and equally the two philtres by means of the private formula which she had also stolen from Azédarac.

THE HUNTERS FROM BEYOND

I have seldom been able to resist the allurements of a bookstore, particularly one that is well supplied with rare and exotic items. Therefore I turned in at Toleman's to browse around for a few minutes. I had come to San Francisco for one of my brief, biannual visits, and had started early that idle forenoon to an appointment with Cyprian Sincaul, the sculptor, a second or third cousin of mine, whom I had not seen for several years.

The studio was only a block from Toleman's, and there seemed to be no especial object in reaching it ahead of time. Cyprian had offered to show me his collection of recent sculptures; but, remembering the smooth mediocrity of his former work, amid which were a few banal efforts to achieve horror and grotesquerie, I did not anticipate anything more than an hour or two of dismal boredom.

The little shop was empty of customers. Knowing my proclivities, the owner and his one assistant became tacitly non-attentive after a word of recognition, and left me to rummage at will among the curiously laden shelves. Wedged in between other but less alluring titles, I found a deluxe edition of Goya's 'Proverbs.' I began to turn the heavy pages, and was soon engrossed in the diabolic art of these nightmare-nurtured drawings.

It has always been incomprehensible to me that I did not shriek aloud with mindless, overmastering terror, when I happened to look up from the volume, and saw the thing that was crouching in a corner of the bookshelves before me. I could not have been more hideously startled if some hellish conception of Goya had suddenly come to life and emerged from one of the pictures in the folio.

What I saw was a forward-slouching, vermin-gray figure, wholly devoid of hair or down or bristles, but marked with faint, etiolated rings like those of a serpent that has lived in darkness. It possessed the head and brow of an anthropoid ape, a semi-canine mouth and jaw, and arms ending in twisted

hands whose black hyena talons nearly scraped the floor. The thing was infinitely bestial, and, at the same time, macabre; for its parchment skin was shriveled, corpselike, mummified, in a manner impossible to convey; and from eye sockets well-nigh deep as those of a skull, there glimmered evil slits of yellowish phosphorescence, like burning sulphur. Fangs that were stained as if with poison or gangrene, issued from the slaving, half-open mouth; and the whole attitude of the creature was that of some maleficent monster in readiness to spring.

Though I had been for years a professional writer of stories that often dealt with occult phenomena, with the weird and the spectral, I was not at this time possessed of any clear and settled belief regarding such phenomena. I had never before seen anything that I could identify as a phantom, nor even an hallucination; and I should hardly have said offhand that a bookstore on a busy street, in full summer daylight, was the likeliest of places in which to see one. But the thing before me was assuredly nothing that could ever exist among the permissible forms of a sane world. It was too horrific, too atrocious, to be anything but a creation of unreality.

Even as I stared across the Goya, sick with a halfincredulous fear, the apparition moved toward me. I say that it moved, but its change of position was so instantaneous, so utterly without effort or visible transition, that the verb is hopelessly inadequate. The foul specter had seemed five or six feet away. But now it was stooping directly above the volume that I still held in my hands, with its loathsomely lambent eyes peering upward at my face, and a graygreen slime drooling from its mouth on the broad pages. At the same time I breathed an insupportable feter, like a mingling of rancid serpent-stench with the moldiness of antique charnels and the fearsome reek of newly decaying carrion.

In a frozen timelessness that was perhaps no more than a second or two, my heart appeared to suspend its beating, while I beheld the ghastly face. Gasping, I let the Goya drop with a resonant bang on the floor, and even as it fell, I saw that the vision had vanished.

Toleman, a tonsured gnome with shell-rimmed goggles, rushed forward to retrieve the fallen volume, exclaiming: 'What is wrong, Mr. Hastane? Are you ill?' From the meticulousness with which he examined the binding in search of possible damage, I knew that his chief solicitude was concerning the Goya. It was plain that neither he nor his clerk had seen the phantom; nor could I detect aught in their demeanor to indicate that they had noticed the mephitic odor that still lingered in the air like an exhalation from broken graves. And, as far as I could tell, they did not even perceive the grayish slime that still polluted the open folio.

I do not remember how I managed to make my exit from the shop. My mind had become a seething blur of muddled horror, of crawling, sick revulsion from the supernatural vileness I had beheld, together with the direst apprehension for my own sanity and safety. I recall only that I found myself on the street above Toleman's, walking with feverish rapidity toward my cousin's studio, with a neat parcel containing the Goya volume under my arm. Evidently, in an effort to atone for my clumsiness, I must have bought and paid for the book by a sort of automatic impulse, without any real awareness of what I was doing.

I came to the building in which was my destination, but went on around the block several times before entering. All the while I fought desperately to regain my self-control and equipoise. I remember how difficult it was even to moderate the pace at which I was walking, or refrain from breaking into a run; for it seemed to me that I was fleeing all the time from an invisible pursuer. I tried to argue with myself, to convince the rational part of my mind that the apparition had been the product of some evanescent trick of light and shade, or a temporary dimming of eyesight. But such sophistries were useless; for I had seen the gargoylish terror all too distinctly, in an unforgettable fullness of grisly detail.

What could the thing mean? I had never used narcotic drugs or abused alcohol. My nerves, as far as I knew, were in sound condition. But either I had suffered a visual hallucination that might mark the beginning of some obscure cerebral disorder, or had been visited by a spectral phenomenon, by

something from realms and dimensions that are past the normal scope of human perception. It was a problem either for the alienist or the occultist.

Though I was still damnably upset, I contrived to regain a nominal composure of my faculties. Also, it occurred to me that the unimaginative portrait busts and tamely symbolic figure-groups of Cyprian Sincaul might serve admirably to sooth my shaken nerves. Even his grotesques would seem sane and ordinary by comparison with the blasphemous gargoyle that had drooled before me in the bookshop.

I entered the studio building, and climbed a worn stairway to the second floor, where Cyprian had established himself in a somewhat capacious suite of rooms. As I went up the stairs, I had the peculiar feeling that somebody was climbing them just ahead of me; but I could neither see nor hear anyone, and the hall above was no less silent, and empty than the stairs.

Cyprian was in his atelier when I knocked. After an interval which seemed unduly long, I heard him call out, telling me to enter. I found him wiping his hands on an old cloth, and surmised that he had been modeling. A sheet of light burlap had been thrown over what was plainly an ambitious but unfinished group of figures, which occupied the center of the long room. All around were other sculptures, in clay, bronze, marble, and even the terra cotta and steatite which he sometimes employed for his less conventional conceptions. At one end of the room there stood a heavy Chinese screen.

At a single glance I realized that a great change had occurred, both in Cyprian Sincaul and his work. I remembered him as an amiable, somewhat flabby-looking youth, always dapperly dressed, with no trace of the dreamer or visionary. It was hard to recognize him now, for he had become lean, harsh, vehement. with an air of pride and penetration that was almost Luciferian. His unkempt mane of hair was already shot with white, and his eyes were electrically brilliant with a strange knowledge, and yet somehow were vaguely furtive, as if there dwelt behind them a morbid and macabre fear.

The change in his sculpture was no less striking. The respectable tameness and polished mediocrity were gone, and in their place, incredibly, was something little short of genius. More unbelievable still, in view of the laboriously ordinary grotesques of his earlier phase, was the trend that his art had now taken. All around me were frenetic, murdcrous demons, satyrs mad with nympholepsy, ghouls that seemed to sniff the odors of the charnel, lamias voluptuously coiled about their victims, and less namable things that belonged to the outland realms of evil myth and malign superstition.

Sin, horror, blasphemy, diablerie — the lust and malice of pandemonium — all had been caught with impeccable art; The potent nightmarishness of these creations was not calculated to reassure my trembling nerves; and all at once I felt an imperative desire to escape from the studio, to flee from the baleful throng of frozen cacodemons and chiseled chimeras.

My expression must have betrayed my feelings to some extent.

'Pretty strong work, aren't they?' said Cyprian, in a loud, vibrant voice, with a note of harsh pride and triumph. 'I can see that you are surprised — you didn't look for anything of the sort, I dare say.'

'No, candidly, I didn't,' I admitted. 'Good Lord, man, you will become the Michelangelo of diabolism if you go on at this rate; Where on Earth do you get such stuff?'

'Yes, I've gone pretty far,' said Cyprian, seeming to disregard my question. 'Further even than you think, probably. If you could know, what I know, could see what I have seen, you might make something really worth-while out of your weird fiction, Philip. You are very clever and imaginative, of course. But you've never had any experience.'

I was startled and puzzled. 'Experience? What do you mean?'

'Precisely that. You try to depict the occult and the supernatural without even the most rudimentary first-hand knowledge of them. I tried to do something of the same sort in sculpture, years ago, without knowledge; and

doubtless you recall the mediocre mess that I made of it, But I've learned a thing or two since then.'

'Sounds as if you had made the traditional bond with the devil, or something of the sort,' I observed, with a feeble and perfunctory levity.

Cyprian's eyes narrowed slightly, with a strange, secret look.

'I know what I know. Never mind how or why. The world in which we live isn't the only world; and some of the others lie closer at hand than you think. The boundaries of the seen and the unseen are sometimes interchangeable.'

Recalling the malevolent phantom, I felt a peculiar disquietude as I listened to his words. An hour before, his statement would have impressed me as mere theorizing, but now it assumed an ominous and terrifying significance.

'What makes you think I have had no experience of the occult?' I asked.

'Your stories hardly show anything of the kind — anything factual or personal. They are all palpably made up. When you've argued with a ghost, or watched the ghouls at meal-time, or fought with an incubus, or suckled a vampire, you may achieve some genuine characterization and color along such lines.'

For reasons that should be fairly obvious, I had not intended to tell anyone of the unbelievable thing at Toleman's. Now, with a singular mixture of emotions, of compulsive, eery terrors and desire to refute the animadversions of Cyprian, I found myself describing the phantom.

He listened with an inexpressive look, as if his thoughts were occupied with other matters than my story. Then, when I had finished:

'You are becoming more psychic than I imagined. Was your apparition anything like one of these?'

With the last words, he lifted the sheet of burlap from the muffled group of figures beside which he had been standing.

I cried out involuntarily with the shock of that appalling revelation, and almost tottered as I stepped back.

Before me, in a monstrous semicircle, were seven creatures who might all have been modeled from the gargoyle that had confronted me across the folio of Goya drawings. Even in several that were still amorphous or incomplete, Cyprian had conveyed with a damnable art the peculiar mingling of primal bestiality and nortuary putrescence that had signaled the phantom. The seven monsters had closed in on a cowering, naked girl, and were all clutching foully toward her with their hyena claws. The stark, frantic, insane terror on the face of the girl, and the slavering hunger of her assailants, were alike unbearable. The group was a masterpiece, in its consummate power of technique — but a masterpiece that inspired loathing rather than admiration. And following my recent experience, the sight of it affected me with indescribable alarm. It seemed to me that I had gone astray from the normal, familiar world into a land of detestable mystery, of prodigious and unnatural menace.

Held by an abhorrent fascination, it was hard for me to wrench my eyes away from the figure-piece. At last I turned from it to Cyprian himself. He was regarding me with a cryptic air, beneath which I suspected a covert gloating.

'How do you like my little pets?' he inquired. 'I am going to call the composition "The Hunters from Beyond." '

Before I could answer, a woman suddenly appeared from behind the Chinese screen. I saw that she was the model for the girl in the unfinished group. Evidently she had been dressing, and she was now ready to leave, for she wore a tailored suit and a smart toque. She was beautiful, in a dark, semi-Latin fashion; but her mouth was sullen and reluctant, and her wide, liquid eyes were wells of strange terror as she gazed at Cyprian, myself, and the uncovered statue-piece.

Cyprian did not introduce me. He and the girl talked together in low tones for a minute or two, and I was unable to overhear more than half of what they said. I gathered, however, that an appointment was being made for the next sitting. There was a pleading, frightened note in the girl's voice, together with an almost maternal concern; and Cyprian seemed to be arguing with her or trying to reassure her about something. At last she went out, with a queer, supplicative glance at me — a glance whose meaning I could only surmise and could not wholly fathom.

'That was Marta,' said Cyprian. 'She is half Irish, half Italian. A good model; but my new sculptures seem to be making her a little nervous.' He laughed abruptly, with a mirthless, jarring note that was like the cachinnation of a sorcerer.

'In God's name, what are you trying to do here?' I burst out. 'What does it all mean? Do such abominations really exist, on earth or in any hell?'

He laughed again, with an evil subtlety, and became evasive all at once. 'Anything may exist, in a boundless universe with multiple dimensions. Anything may be real — or unreal. Who knows? It is not for me to say. Figure it out for yourself, if you can — there's a vast field for speculation -- and perhaps for more than speculation.'

With this, he began immediately to talk of other topics. Baffled, mystified, with a sorely troubled mind and nerves that were more unstrung than ever by the black enigma of it all, I ceased to question him. Simultaneously, my desire to leave the studio became almost overwhelming — a mindless, whirlwind panic that prompted me to run pell-mell from the room and down the stairs into the wholesome normality of the common, Twentieth Century streets. It seemed to me that the rays which fell through the skylight were not those of the sun, but of some darker orb; that the room was touched with unclean webs of shadow where shadow should not have been; that the stone Satans, the bronze lamias, the terracotta satyrs, and the clay gargoyles had somehow increased in number and might spring to malignant life at any instant.

Hardly knowing what I said, I continued to converse for a while with Cyprian. Then, excusing myself on the score of a nonexistent luncheon appointment, and promising vaguely to return for another visit before my departure from the city, I took my leave.

I was surprised to find my cousin's model in the lower hall, at the foot of the stairway. From her manner, and her first words, it was plain that she had been waiting.

'You are Mr. Philip Hastane, aren't you?' she said, in an eager, agitated voice. 'I am Marta Fitzgerald. Cyprian has often mentioned you, and I believe that he admires you a lot.

'Maybe you'll think me crazy,' she went on, 'but I had to speak to you. I can't stand the way that things are going here, and I'd refuse to come to the place any more, if it wasn't that I — like Cyprian so much.

'I don't know what he has done — but he is altogether different from what he used to be. His new work is so horrible — you can't imagine how it frightens me. The sculptures he does are more hideous, more hellish all the time. Ugh! those drooling, dead-gray monsters in that new group of his — I can hardly bear to be in the studio with them. It isn't right for anyone to depict such things. Don't you think they are awful, Mr. Hastane? They look as if they had broken loose from hell — and make you think that hell can't be very far away. It is wrong and wicked for anyone to — even imagine them; and I wish that Cyprian would stop. I am afraid that something will happen to him — to his mind — if he goes on. And I'll go mad, too, if I have to see those monsters many more times. My God! No one could keep sane in that studio.'

She paused, and appeared to hesitate. Then:

'Can't you do something, Mr. Hastane! Can't you talk to him, and tell him how wrong it is, and how dangerous to his mental health? You must have a lot of influence with Cyprian — you are his cousin, aren't you? And he thinks you are very clever, too. I wouldn't ask you, if I hadn't been forced to notice so many things that aren't as they should be.

'I wouldn't bother you, either, if I knew anyone else to ask. He has shut himself up in that awful studio for the past year, and he hardly ever sees anybody. You are the first person that he has invited to see his new sculptures. He wants them to be a complete surprise for the critics and the public, when he holds his next exhibition.

'But you'll speak to Cyprian, won't you, Mr. Hastane? I can't do anything to stop him — he seems to exult in the mad horrors he creates. And he merely laughs at me when I try to tell him the danger. However, I think that those things are making him a little nervous sometimes — that he is growing afraid of his own morbid imagination. Perhaps he will listen to you.'

If I had needed anything more to unnerve me, the desperate pleading of the girl and her dark, obscurely baleful hintings would have been enough. I could see that she loved Cyprian, that she was frantically anxious concerning him, and hysterically afraid; otherwise, she would not have approached an utter stranger in this fashion.

'But I haven't any influence with Cyprian,' I protested, feeling a queer embarrassment. 'And what am I to say to mine. His new sculptures are magnificent — I have never seen anything more powerful of the kind. And how could I advise him to stop doing them? There would be no legitimate reason; he would simply laugh me out of the studio. An artist has the right to choose his own subject-matter, even if he takes it from the nether pits of Limbo and Erebus.'

The girl must have pleaded and argued with me for many minutes in that deserted hall. Listening to her, and trying to convince her of my inability to fulfil her request, was like a dialog in some futile and tedious nightmare. During the course of it, she told me a few details that I am unwilling to record in this narrative; details that were too morbid and too shocking for belief. regarding the mental alteration of Cyprian, and his new subject-matter and method of work, There were direct and oblique hints of a growing perversion; but somehow it seemed that much more was being held back; that even in her most horrifying disclosures she was not wholly frank

with me. At last, with some sort of hazy promise that I would speak to Cyprian, would remonstrate with him, I succeeded in getting away from her, and returned to my hotel.

The afternoon and evening that followed were tinged as by the tyrannous adumbration of an ill dream. I felt that I had stepped from the solid earth into a gulf of seething, menacing, madness-haunted shadow, and was lost henceforward to all rightful sense of location or direction. It was all too hideous — and too doubtful and unreal. The change in Cyprian himself was no less bewildering, and hardly less horrifying, than the vile phantom of the bookshop, and the demon sculptures that displayed a magisterial art. It was as if the man had become possessed by some satanic energy or entity.

Everywhere that I went, I was powerless to shake off the feeling of an intangible pursuit, of a frightful, unseen vigilance. It seemed to me that the worm-gray face and sulphurous eyes would reappear at any moment; that the semicanine mouth with its gangrene-dripping fangs might come to slaver above the restaurant table at which I ate, or upon the pillow of my bed. I did not dare to reopen the purchased Goya volume, for fear of finding that certain pages were still defiled with a spectral slime.

I went out and spent the evening in cafés, in theaters, wherever people thronged and lights were bright. It was after midnight when I finally ventured to brave the solitude of my hotel bedroom. Then there were endless hours of nerve-wrung insomnia, of shivering, sweating apprehension beneath the electric bulb that I had left burning. Finally, a little before dawn, by no conscious transition and with no premonitory drowsiness, I fell asleep.

I remember no dreams — only the vast, incubus-like oppression that persisted even in the depth of slumber, as if to drag me down with its formless, ever-clinging weight into gulfs beyond the reach of created flight or the fathoming of organized entity.

It was almost noon when I awoke, and found myself staring into the verminous, apish, mummy-dead face and hell-illuminated eyes of the

gargoyle that had crouched before me in the corner at Toleman's. The thing was standing at the foot of my bed; and behind it as I stared, the wall of the room, which was covered with a floral paper, dissolved in an infinite vista of grayness, teeming with ghoulish forms that emerged like monstrous, misshapen bubbles from plains of undulant ooze and skies of serpentine vapor. It was another world, and my very sense of equilibrium was disturbed by an evil vertigo as I gazed. It seemed to me that my bed was heaving dizzily, was turning slowly, deliriously toward the gulf; that the feculent vista and the vile apparition were swimming beneath me; that I would fall toward them in another moment and be precipitated forever into that world of abysmal monstrosity and obscenity.

In a start of profound alarm, I fought my vertigo, fought the sense that another will than mine was drawing me, that the unclean gargoyle was luring me by some unspeakable mesmeric spell, as a serpent is said to lure its prey. I seemed to read a nameless purpose in its yellow-slitted eyes, in the soundless moving of its oozy lips; and my very soul recoiled with nausea and revulsion as I breathed its pestilential fetor.

Apparently, the mere effort of mental resistance was enough. The vista and the face receded; they went out in a swirl of daylight. I saw the design of tea roses on the wallpaper beyond; and the bed beneath me was sanely horizontal once more. I lay sweating with my terror, all adrift on a sea of nightmare surmise of unearthly threat and whirlpool madness, till the ringing of the telephone bell recalled me automatically to the known world.

I sprang to answer the call. It was Cyprian, though I should hardly have recognized the dead, hopeless tones of his voice, from which the mad pride and self-assurance of the previous day had wholly vanished.

'I must see you at once,' he said. 'Can you come to the studio?'

I was about to refuse, to tell him that I had been called home suddenly, that there was no time, that I must catch the noon train — anything to avert the ordeal of another visit to that place of mephitic evil — when I heard his voice again.

'You simply must come, Philip. I can't tell you about it over the phone, but a dreadful thing has happened: Marta had disappeared.'

I consented, telling him that I would start for the studio as soon as I had dressed. The whole nightmare had closed in, had deepened immeasurably with his last words; but remembering the haunted face of the girl, her hysteric fears, her frantic plea and my vague promise, I could not very well decline to go.

I dressed and went out with my mind in a turmoil of abominable conjecture. of ghastly doubt, and apprehension all the more hideous because I was unsure of its object I tried to imagine what had happened, tried to piece together the frightful, evasive, half-admitted hints of unknown terror into a tangible coherent fabric, but found myself involved in a chaos of shadowy menace.

I could not have eaten any breakfast, even if I had taken the necessary time. I went at once to the studio, and found Cyprian standing aimlessly amid his baleful statuary. His look was that of a man who has been stunned by the blow of some crushing weapon, or has gazed on the very face of Medusa. He greeted me in a vacant manner, with dull, toneless words. Then, like a charged machine, as if his body rather than his mind were speaking, he began at once to pour forth the atrocious narrative.

'They took her,' he said, simply. 'Maybe you didn't know it, or weren't sure of it; but I have been doing all my new sculptures from life — even that last group. Marta was posing for me this forenoon — only an hour ago — or less. I had hoped to finish her part of the modeling today; and she wouldn't have had to come again for this particular piece. I hadn't called the Things this time, since I knew she was ginning to fear them more and more. I think she feared them on my account more than her own — and they were making me a little uneasy too, by the boldness with which they sometimes lingered when I had ordered them to leave, and the way they would sometimes appear when I didn't want them.'

'I was busy with some of the final touches on the girlfigure, and wasn't even looking at Marta, when suddenly I knew that the Things were there. The smell told me. if nothing else — I guess you know what the smell is like. I looked up, and found that the studio was full of them — they had never before appeared in such numbers. They were surrounding Marta, were crowding and jostling each other, were all reaching toward her with their filthy talons; but even then, I didn't think that they could harm her. They aren't material beings, in the sense that we are, and they really have no physical power outside their own plane. All that they do have is a sort of snaky mesmerism, and they'll always try to drag you down to their own dimension by means of it. God help anyone who yields to them; but you don't have to go, unless you are weak, or willing. I've never had any doubt of my power to resist them, and I didn't really dream they could do anything to Marta.

'It startled me, though, when I saw the whole crowding hell-pack, and I ordered them to go pretty sharply. I was angry — and somewhat alarmed, too. But they merely grimaced and slavered, with that slow, twisting movement of their lips that is like a voiceless gibbering, and then they closed in on Marta, just as I represented them doing in that accursed group of sculpture. Only there were scores of them now, instead of merely seven.

'I can't describe how it happened, but all at once their foul talons had reached the girl; they were pawing her, were pulling at her hands, her arms, her body. She screamed and I hope I'll never hear another scream so full of black agony and soul-unhinging fright. Then I knew that she had yielded to them - either from choice, or from excess of terror — and knew that they were taking her away.

'For a moment, the studio wasn't there at all — only a long, gray, oozing plain, beneath skies where the fumes of hell were writhing like a million ghostly and distorted dragons. Marta was sinking into that ooze, and the Things were all about her, gathering in fresh hundreds from every side, fighting each other for place, sinking with her like bloated, misshaped fen-creatures into their native slime. Then everything vanished — and I was standing here in the studio, all alone with these damned sculptures.'

He paused for a little, and stared with dreary, desolate eyes at the floor. Then:

'It was awful, Philp, and I'll never forgive myself for having anything to do with those monsters. I must have been a little mad, but I've always had a strong ambition to create some real stuff in the field of the grotesque and visionary and macabre. I don't suppose you ever suspected, back in my stodgy phase, that I had a veritable appetite for such things. I wanted to do in sculpture what Poe and Lovecraft and Baudelaire have done in literature, what Rops and Goya did in pictorial art.

'That was what led me into the occult, when I realized my limitations. I knew that I had to see the dwellers of the invisible worlds before I could depict them. I wanted to do it. I longed for this power of vision and representation more than anything else. And then, all at once, I found that I had the power of summoning the unseen....

'There was no magic involved, in the usual sense of the word — no spells and circles, no pentacles and burning gums from old sorcery books. At bottom, it was just will power, I guess — a will to divine the satanic, to summon the innumerable malignities and grotesqueries that people other planes than ours, or mingled unperceived with humanity.

'You've no idea what I have beheld, Philip. These statues of mine — these devils, vampires, lamias, satyrs — were all done from life, or, at least from recent memory. The originals are what the occultists would call elementals, I suppose. There are endless worlds, contiguous to our own, or coexisting with it, that such beings inhabit. All the creations of myth and fantasy, all the familiar spirits that sorcerers have evoked, are resident in these worlds.

'I made myself their master, I levied upon them at will. Then, from a dimension that must be a little lower than all others, a little nearer the ultimate nadir of hell, I called the innominate beings who posed for this new figure-piece.

'I don't know what they are,' but I have surmised a good deal. They are hateful as the worms of the Pit, they are malevolent as harpies, they drool with a poisonous hunger not to be named or imagined. But I believed that they were powerless to do anything outside their own sphere, and I've always laughed at them when they tried to entice me — even though that snakish mental pull of theirs was rather creepy at times. It was as if soft, invisible, gelatinous arms were trying to drag you down from the firm shore into a bottomless bog.

'They are hunters — I am sure of that — the hunters from Beyond. God knows what they will do to Marta now that they have her at their mercy. That vast, viscid, miasmahaunted place to which they took her is awful beyond the imagining of a Satan. Perhaps — even there — they couldn't harm her body. But bodies aren't what they want — it isn't for human flesh that they grope with those ghoulish claws, and gape and slaver with those gangrenous mouths. The brain itself — and the soul, too — is their food: they are the creatures who prey on the minds of madmen and madwomen, who devour the disembodied spirits that have fallen from the cycles of incarnation, have gone down beyond the possibility of rebirth.

'To think of Marta in their power — it is worse than hell or madness. Marta loved me, and I loved her, too, though I didn't have the sense to realize it, wrapped as I was in my dark, baleful ambition and impious egotism. She was afraid for me, and I believe she surrendered voluntarily to the Things. She must have thought that they would leave me alone if they secured another victim in my place.'

He ceased, and began to pace idly and feverishly about, I saw that his hollow eyes were alight with torment, as if the mechanical telling of his horrible story had in some manner served to requicken his crushed mind. Utterly and starkly appalled by his hideous revelations, I could say nothing, but could only stand and watch his torture-twisted face.

Incredibly, his expression changed, with a wild, startled look that was instantly transfigured into joy. Turning to follow his gaze, I saw that Marta was standing in the center of the room. She was nude, except for a Spanish

shawl that she must have worn while posing. Her face was bloodless as the marble of a tomb, and her eyes were wide and blank, as if she had been drained of all life, of all thought or emotion or memory, as if even the knowledge of horror had been taken away from her. It was the face of the living dead, and the soulless mask of ultimate idiocy; and the joy faded from Cyyrian's eyes as he stepped toward her.

He took her in his arms, he spoke to her with a desperate, loving tenderness, with cajoling and caressing words. She made no answer, however, no movement of recognition or awareness, but stared beyond him with her blank eyes, to which the daylight and the darkness, the void air and her lover's face, would henceforward be the same. He and I both knew, in that instant, that she would never again respond to any human voice, or to human love or terror; that she was like an empty casket, retaining the outward form of that which the worms have eaten in their mausolean darkness. Of the noisome pits wherein she had been, of that boundless realm and its pullulating phantoms, she could tell us nothing: her agony had ended with the terrible mercy of complete forgetfulness.

Like one who confronts the Gorgon. I was frozen by her wide and sightless gaze. Then, behind her, where stood an array of carved Satans and lamias, the room seemed to recede, the walls and floors dissolved in a seething, unfathomable gulf, amid whose pestilential vapors the statues were mingled in momentary and loathsome ambiguity with the ravaging faces, the hunger-contorted forms that swirled toward us from their ultra-dimensional limbo like a devil-laden hurricane from Malebolge. Outlined against that boiling, measureless cauldron of malignant storm, Marta stood like an image of glacial death and silence in the arms of Cyprian. Then, once more, after a little, the abhorrent vision faded, leaving only the diabolic statuary.

I think that I alone had beheld it; that Cyprian had seen nothing but the dead face of Marta. He drew her close, he repeated his hopeless words of tenderness and cajolery. Then, suddenly, he released her with a vehement sob of despair. Turning away, while she stood and still looked on with unseeing eyes, he snatched a heavy sculptor's mallet from the table on which it was lying, and proceeded to smash with furious blows the newly-

modeled group of gargoyles, till nothing was left but the figure of the terrormaddened girl, crouching above a mass of cloddish fragments and formless, half-dried clay.

THE ICE-DEMON

Quanga the huntsman, with Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, two of the most enterprising jewelers of Iqqua, had crossed the borders of a region into which men went but seldom — and wherefrom they returned even more rarely. Travelling north from Iqqua, they had passed into desolate Mhu Thulan, where the great glacier of Polarion had rolled like a frozen sea upon wealthy and far-famed cities, covering the broad isthmus from shore to shore beneath fathoms of perpetual ice.

The shell-shaped domes of Cerngoth, it was fabled, could still be seen deep down in the glaciation; and the high, keen spires of Oggon-Zhai were embedded therein, together with fern-palm and mammoth and the square black temples of the god Tsathoggua. All this had occurred many centuries ago; and still the ice, a mighty, glittering rampart, was moving south upon deserted lands.

Now, in the path of the embattled glacier, Quanga led his companions on a bold quest. Their object was nothing less than the retrieval of the rubies of King Haalor, who, with the wizard Ommum-Vog and many full-caparisoned soldiers, had gone out five decades before to make war upon the polar ice. From this fantastic expedition, neither Haalor nor OmmumVog had come back; and the sorry, ragged remnant of their men-at-arms, returning to Iqqua, after two moons, had told a dire tale.

The army, they said, had made its encampment on a sort of knoll, carefully chosen by Ommum-Vog, in full sight of the vanward ice. Then the mighty sorcerer, standing with Haalor amid a ring of braziers that fumed incessantly with golden smoke, and reciting runes that were older than the world, had conjured up a fiery orb, vaster and redder than the southwardcircling sun of heaven. And the orb, with blazing beams that smote from the zenith, torrid and effulgent, had caused the sun to seem no more than a daylight moon, and the soldiers had almost swooned from its heat in their heavy panoply. But beneath its beams the verges of the glacier

melted and ran in swift rills and rivers, so that Haalor for a time was hopeful of reconquering the realm of Mhu Thulan over which his forefathers had ruled in bygone ages.

The rushing waters had deepened, flowing past the knoll on which the army waited. Then, as if by a hostile magic, the rivers began to give forth a pale and stifling mist, that blinded the conjured sun of Ommum-Vog, so that its sultry beams grew faint and chill and had power no longer on the ice.

Vainly the wizard had put forth other spells, trying to dissipate the deep and gelid fog. But the vapor drew down, evil and clammy, coiling and wreathing like knots of phantom serpents, and filling men's marrows as if with the cold of death. It covered all the camp, a tangible thing, ever colder and thicker, numbing the limbs of those who groped blindly and could not see the faces of their fellows at arm's-length. A few of the common soldiers, somehow, reached its outer confines and crept fearfully away beneath the wan sun, seeing no longer in the skies the wizard globe that had been called up by Ommum-Vog. And looking back presently, as they fled in strange terror, they beheld, instead of the low-lying mist they had thought to see, a newly frozen sheet of ice that covered the mound on which the king and the sorcerer had made their encampment. The ice rose higher above the ground than a tall man's head; and dimly, in its glittering depth, the fleeing soldiers saw the imprisoned forms of their leaders and companions.

Deeming that this thing was no natural occurrence, but a sorcery that had been exerted by the great glacier, and that the glacier itself was a live, malignant entity with powers of unknown bale, they did not slacken their flight. And the ice had suffered them to depart in peace, as if to give warning of the fate of those who dared to assail it.

Some there were who believed the tale, and some who doubted. But the kings that ruled in Iqqua after Haalor went not forth to do battle with the ice; and no wizard rose to make war upon it with conjured suns. Men fled before the everadvancing glaciations; and strange legends were told of how people had been overtaken or cut off in lonely valleys by sudden, diabolic shiftings of the ice, as if it had stretched out a living hand. And legends

there were, of awful crevasses that yawned abruptly and closed like monstrous mouths upon them that dared the frozen waste; of winds like the breath of boreal demons, that blasted men's flesh with instant, utter cold and turned them into statues hard as granite. In time the whole region, for many miles before the glacier, was generally shunned; and only the hardiest hunters would follow their quarry into the winter-blighted land.

Now it happened that the fearless huntsman Iluac, the elder brother of Quanga, had gone into Mhu Thulan, and had pursued an enormous black fox that led him afar on the mighty fields of the ice-sheet. For many leagues he trailed it, coming never within bowshot of the beast; and at length he came to a great mound on the plain, that seemed to mark the position of a buried hill. And Iluac thought that the fox entered a cavern in the mound; so, with lifted bow and a poised arrow at the string, he went after it into the cavern.

The place was like a chamber of boreal kings or gods. All about him, in a dim green light, were huge, glimmering pillars; and giant icicles hung from the roof in the form of stalactites. The floor sloped downward; and Iluac came to the cave's end without finding any trace of the fox. But in the transparent depth of the further wall, at the bottom, he saw the standing shapes of many men, deep-frozen and sealed up as in a tomb, with undecaying bodies and fair, unshrunk features. The men were armed with tall spears, and most of them wore the panoply of soldiers. But among them, in the van, there stood a haughty figure attired in the sea-blue robes of a king; and beside him was a bowed ancient who wore the night-black garb of a sorcerer. The robes of the regal figure were heavily sewn with gems that burned like colored stars through the ice; and great rubies red as gout of newly congealing blood were arranged in the lines of a triangle on the bosom, forming the royal sign of the kings of Iqqua. So Iluac knew, by these tokens, that he had found the tomb of Haalor and OmmumVog and the soldiers with whom they had gone up against the ice in former days.

Overawed by the strangeness of it all, and remembering now the old legends, Iluac lost his courage for the first time, and quitted the chamber without delay. Nowhere could he find the black fox; and abandoning the

chase, he returned southward, reaching the lands below the glacier without mishap. But he swore later that the ice had changed in a weird manner while he was following the fox, so that he was unsure of his direction for a while after leaving the cavern. There were steep ridges and hummocks where none had been before, making his return a toilsome journey; and the glaciation seemed to extend itself for many miles beyond its former limits. And because of these things, which he could not explain or understand, a curious eery fear was born in the heart of Iluac.

Never again did he go back upon the glacier; but he told his brother Quanga of that which he had found, and described the location of the cavern-chamber in which King Haalor and Ommum-Vog and their men-at-arms were entombed. And soon after this, Iluac was killed by a white bear on which he had used all his arrows in vain.

Quanga was no less brave than Iluac; and he did not fear the glacier, since he had been upon it many times and had noticed nothing untoward. His was a heart that lusted after gain, and often he thought of the rubies of Haalor, locked with the king in eternal ice; and it seemed to him that a bold man might recover the rubies.

So, one summer, while trading in Iqqua with his furs, he went to the jewelers Bibur Tsanth and Hoom Feethos, taking with him a few garnets that he had found in a northern valley. While the jewelers were appraising the garnets, he spoke idly of the rubies of Haalor, and inquired craftily as to their value. Then, hearing the great worth of the gems, and noting the greedy interest that was shown by Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, he told them the tale he had heard from his brother Iluac, and offered, if they would promise him half the value of the rubies, to guide them to the hidden cave.

The jewelers agreed to this proposition, in spite of the hardships of the proposed journey, and the difficulty they might afterward encounter in disposing surreptitiously of gems that belonged to the royal family of Iqqua and would be claimed by the present king, Ralour, if their discovery were learned. The fabulous worth of the rubies had fired their avarice. Quanga, on his part, desired the complicity and connivance of the dealers, knowing

that it would be hard for him to sell the jewels otherwise. He did not trust Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, and it was for this reason that he required them to go with him to the cavern and pay over to him the agreed sum of money as soon as they were in possession of the treasure.

The strange trio had set forth in mid-summer. Now, after two weeks of journeying through a wild, sub-arctic region, they were approaching the confines of the eternal ice. They travelled on foot, and their supplies were carried by three horses little larger than musk-oxen. Quanga, an unerring marksman, hunted for their daily food the hares and waterfowl of the country.

Behind them, in a cloudless turquoise heaven, there burned the low sun that was said to have described a loftier ecliptic in former ages. Drifts of unmelting snow were heaped in the shadows of the higher hills; and in steep valleys they came upon the vanward glaciers of the ice-sheet. The trees and shrubs were already sparse and stunted, in a land where rich forests had flourished in olden time beneath a milder climate. But poppies flamed in the meadows and along the slopes, spreading their frail beauty like a scarlet rug before the feet of perennial winter; and the quiet pools and stagnant-flowing streams were lined with white water-lilies.

A little to the east, they saw the fuming of volcanic peaks that still resisted the inroads of the glaciers. On the west were high, gaunt mountains whose sheer cliffs and pinnacles were topped with snow, and around those nether slopes the ice had climbed like an inundating sea. Before them was the looming, crenelated wall of the realm-wide glaciation, moving equally on plain and hill, uprooting the trees, and pressing the soil forward in vast folds and ridges. Its progress had been stayed a little by the northern summer. Quanga and the jewelers, as they went on, came to turbid rills, made by a temporary melting, that issued from beneath the glittering blue-green ramparts.

They left their pack-horses in a grassy valley, tethered by long cords of elf-thong to the dwarfish willows. Then, carrying such provisions and other equipment as they might require for a two days' journey, they climbed the

ice-slope at a point selected by Quanga as being most readily accessible, and started in the direction of the cave that had been found by Iluac. Quanga took his bearings from the position of the volcanic mountains, and also from two isolated peaks that rose on the sheeted plain to the north like the breasts of a giantess beneath her shining armor.

The three were well equipped for all the exigencies of their search. Quanga carried a curious pick-ax of finely tempered bronze, to be used in disintombing the body of King Haalor; and he was armed with a short, leaf-shaped sword, in addition to his bow and quiver of arrows. His garments were made from the fur of a giant bear, brown-black in color.

Hoom Feethos and Eibur Tsanth, in raiment heavily quilted with eider-down against the cold, followed him complainingly but with avaricious eagerness. They had not enjoyed the long marches through a desolate, bleakening land, nor the rough fare and exposure to the northern elements. Moreover, they had taken a dislike to Quanga, whom they considered rude and overbearing. Their grievances were aggravated by the fact that he was now compelling them to carry most of the supplies in addition to the two heavy bags of gold which they were to exchange later for the gems. Nothing less valuable than the rubies of Haalor would have induced them to come so far, or to set foot on the formidable wastes of the ice-sheet.

The scene before them was like some frozen world of the outer void. Vast, unbroken, save for a few scattered mounds and ridges, the plain extended to the white horizon and its armored peaks. Nothing seemed to live or move on the awful, glistening vistas, whose nearer levels were swept clean of snow. The sun appeared to grow pale and chill, and to recede behind the adventurers; and a wind blew upon them from the ice, like a breath from abysses beyond the pole. Apart from the boreal desolation and dreariness, however, there was nothing to dismay Quanga or his companions. None of them was superstitious, and they deemed that the old tales were idle myths, were no more than fear-born delusions. Quanga smiled commiseratively at the thought of his brother Iluac, who had been so oddly frightened and had fancied such extraordinary things after the finding of Haalor. It was a singular weakness in Iluac, the rash and almost foolhardy hunter who had

feared neither man nor beast. As to the trapping of Haalor and Ommum-Vog and their army in the glacier, it was plain that they had allowed themselves to be overtaken by the winter storms; and the few survivors, mentally unhinged by their hardships, had told a wild story. Ice — even though it had conquered half of a continent — was merely ice, and its workings conformed invariably to certain natural laws. Iluac had said that the ice-sheet was a great demon, cruel, greedy, and loth to give up that which it had taken. But such beliefs were crude and primitive superstitions, not to be entertained by enlightened minds of the Pieistocene age.

They had climbed the rampart at an early hour of morning. Quanga assured the jewelers that they would reach the cavern by noon at the latest, even if there should be a certain amount of difficulty and delay in locating it.

The plain before them was remarkably free of crevasses, and there was little to obstruct their advance. Steering their way with the two breast-shaped mountains for landmarks before them, they come after three hours to a hill-like elevation that corresponded to the mound of Iluac's story. With little trouble, they found the opening of the deep chamber.

It seemed that the place had changed little if at all since the visit of Iluac, for the interior, with its columns and pendant icicles, conformed closely to his description. The entrance was like a fanged maw. Within, the floor sloped downward at a slippery angle for more than a hundred feet. The chamber swam with a cold and glaucous translucency that filtered through the dome-like roof. At the lower end, in the striated wall, Quanga and the jewelers saw the embedded shapes of a number of men, among which they distinguished easily the tall, blue-clad corpse of King Haalor and the dark, bowed mummy of Ommum-Vog. Behind these, the shapes of others, lifting their serried spears eternally, and receding downward in stiff ranks through unfathomable depths, were faintly discernible.

Haalor stood regal and erect, with wide-open eyes that stared haughtily as in life. Upon his bosom the triangle of hot and blood-bright rubies smouldered unquenchably in the glacial gloom; and the colder eyes of topazes, of beryls, of diamonds, of chrysolites, gleamed and twinkled from

his azure raiment. It seemed that the fabulous gems were separated by no more than a foot or two of ice from the greedy fingers of the hunter and his companions.

Without speaking, they stared raptly at the far-sought treasure. Apart from the great rubies, the jewelers were also estimating the value of the other gems worn by Haalor. These alone, they thought complacently, would have made it worth while to endure the fatigue of the journey and the insolence of Quanga.

The hunter, on his part, was wishing that he had driven an even steeper bargain. The two bags of gold, however, would make him a wealthy man. He could drink to his full content the costly wines, redder than the rubies, that came from far Uzuldaroum in the south. The tawny, slant-eyed girls of Iqqua would dance at his bidding; and he could gamble for high stakes.

All three were unmindful of the eeriness of their situation, alone in that boreal solitude with the frozen dead; and they were oblivious likewise to the ghoulish nature of the robbery they were about to commit. Without waiting to be urged by his companions, Quanga raised the keen and highly tempered pick of bronze, and began to assail the translucent wall with mighty blows.

The ice rang shrilly beneath the pick, and dropped away in crystal splinters and diamond lumps. In a few minutes, he had made a large cavity; and only a thin shell, cracked and shattering, remained before the body of Haalor. This shell Quanga proceeded to pry off with great care; and soon the triangle of monstrous rubies, more or less encrusted still with clinging ice, lay bare to his fingers. While the proud, bleak eyes of Haalor stared immovably upon him from behind their glassy mask, the hunter dropped the pick, and drawing his sharp, leaf-shaped sword from its scabbard, he began to sever the fine silver wires by which the rubies were attached cunningly to the king's raiment. In his haste he ripped away portions of the sea-blue fabric, baring the frozen and dead-white flesh beneath. One by one, as he removed the rubies, he gave them to Hoom Feethos, standing close behind him; and the dealer, bright-eyed with avarice, drooling a little with ecstasy,

stored them carefully in a huge pouch of mottled lizard-skin that he had brought along for the purpose.

The last ruby had been secured, and Quanga was about to turn his attention to the lesser jewels that adorned the king's garments in curious patterns and signs of astrological or hieratic significance. Then, amid their preoccupation, he and Hoom Feethos were startled by a loud and splintering crash that ended with myriad tinklings as of broken glass. Turning, they saw that a huge icicle had fallen from the cavern-dome; and its point, as if aimed unerringly, had cloven the skull of Eibur Tsanth, who lay amid the debris of shattered ice with the sharp end of the fragment deeply embedded in his oozing brain. He had died, instantly, without knowledge of his doom.

The accident, it seemed, was a perfectly natural one, such as might occur in summer from a slight melting of the immense pendant; but, amid their consternation, Quanga and Hoom Feethos were compelled to take note of certain circumstances that were far from normal or explicable. During the removal of the rubies, on which their attention had been centered so exclusively, the chamber had narrowed to half of its former width, and had also closed down from above, till the hanging icicles were almost upon them, like the champing teeth of some tremendous mouth. The place had darkened, and the light was such as might filter into arctic seas beneath heavy floes. The incline of the cave had grown steeper, as if it were pitching into bottomless depths. Far up -- incredibly far -- the two men beheld the tiny entrance, which seemed no bigger than the mouth of a fox's hole.

For an instant, they were stupefied. The changes of the cavern could admit of no natural explanation; and the Hyperboreans felt the clammy surge of all the superstitious terrors that they had formerly disclaimed. No longer could they deny the conscious, animate malevolence, the diabolic powers of bale imputed to the ice in old legends.

Realizing their peril, and spurred by a wild panic, they started to climb the incline. Hoom Feethos retained the bulging pouch of rubies, as well as the heavy bag of gold coins that hung from his girdle; and Quanga had enough presence of mind to keep his sword and pick-ax. In their terror-driven haste,

however, both forgot the second bag of gold, which lay beside Eibur Tsanth, under the debris of the shattered pendant.

The supernatural narrowing of the cave, the dreadful and sinister closing-down of its roof, had apparently ceased. At any rate, the Hyperboreans could detect no visible continuation of the process as they climbed frantically and precariously toward the opening. They were forced to stoop in many places to avoid the mighty fangs that threatened to descend upon them; and even with the rough tigerskin buskins that they wore, it was hard to keep their footing on the terrible slope. Sometimes they pulled themselves up by means of the slippery, pillar-like formations; and often Quanga, who led the way, was compelled to hew hasty steps in the incline with his pick.

Hoom Feethos was too terrified for even the most rudimentary reflection. But Quanga, as he climbed, was considering the monstrous alterations of the cave, which he could not aline with his wide and various experience of the phenomena of nature. He tried to convince himself that he had made a singular error in estimating the chamber's dimensions and the inclination of its floor. The effort was useless: he still found himself confronted by a thing that outraged his reason; a thing that distorted the known face of the world with unearthly, hideous madness, and mingled a malign chaos with its ordered workings.

After an ascent that was frightfully prolonged, like the effort to escape from some delirious, tedious nightmare predicament, they neared the cavern-mouth. There was barely room now for a man to creep on his belly beneath the sharp and ponderous teeth. Quanga, feeling that the fangs might close upon him like those of some great monster, hurled himself forward and started to wriggle through the opening with a most unheroic celerity. Something held him back, and he thought, for one moment of stark horror, that his worst apprehensions were being realized. Then he found that his bow and quiver of arrows, which he had forgotten to remove from his shoulders, were caught against the pendant ice. While Hoom Feethos gibbered in a frenzy of fear and impatience, he crawled back and relieved himself of the impeding weapons, which he thrust before him together with

his pick in a second and more successful attempt to pass through the strait opening.

Rising to his feet on the open glacier, he heard a wild cry from Hoom Feethos, who, trying to follow Quanga, had become tightly wedged in the entrance through his greater girth. His right hand, clutching the pouch of rubies, was thrust forward beyond the threshold of the cave. He howled incessantly, with half-coherent protestations that the cruel ice-teeth were crunching him to death.

In spite of the eery terrors that had unmanned him, the hunter still retained enough courage to go back and try to assist Hoom Feethos. He was about to assail the huge icicles with his pick, when he heard an agonizing scream from the jeweler, followed by a harsh and indescribable grating. There had been no visible movement of the fangs — and yet Quanga now saw that they had reached the cavern-floor! The body of Hoom Feethos, pierced through and through by one of the icicles, and ground down by the blunter teeth, was spurting blood on the glacier, like the red mist from a wine-press.

Quanga doubted the very testimony of his senses. The thing before him was patently impossible — there was no mark of cleavage in the mound above the cavern-mouth, to explain the descent of those awful fangs. Before his very eyes, but too swiftly for direct cognition, this unthinkable enormity had occurred.

Hoom Feethos was beyond all earthly help, and Quanga, now wholly the slave of a hideous panic, would hardly have stayed longer to assist him in any case. But seeing the pouch that had fallen forward from the dead jeweler's fingers, the hunter snatched it up through an impulse of terror-mingled greed; and then, with no backward glance, he fled on the glacier, toward the low-circling sun.

For a few moments, as he ran, Quanga failed to perceive the sinister and ill-boding alterations, comparable to those of the cave, which had somehow occurred in the sheeted plain itself. With a terrific shock, which became an actual vertigo, he saw that he was climbing a long, insanely tilted slope

above whose remote extreme the sun had receded strangely, and was now small and chill as if seen from an outer planet. The very sky was different: though still perfectly cloudless, it had taken on a curious deathly pallor. A brooding sense of inimical volition, a vast and freezing malignity, seemed to pervade the air and to settle upon Quanga like an incubus. But more terrifying than all else, in its proof of a conscious and malign derangement of natural law, was the giddy poleward inclination that had been assumed by the level plateau.

Quanga felt that creation itself had gone mad, and had left him at the mercy of demoniacal forces from the godless outer gulfs. Keeping a perilous foothold, weaving and staggering laboriously upward, he feared momentarily that he would slip and fall and slide back for ever into arctic depths unfathomable. And yet, when he dared to pause at last, and turned shudderingly to peer down at the supposed descent, he saw behind him an acclivity similar in all respects to the one he was climbing: a mad; oblique wall of ice, that rose interminably to a second remote sun.

In the confusion of that strange bouleversement, he seemed to lose the last remnant of equilibrium; and the glacier reeled and pitched about him like an overturning world as he strove to recover the sense of direction that had never before deserted him. Everywhere, it appeared, there were small and wan parhelia that mocked him above unending glacial scarps. He resumed his hopeless climb through a topsy-turvy world of illusion: whether north, south, east or west, he could not tell.

A sudden wind swept downward on the glacier; it shrieked in Quanga's ears like the myriad voices of taunting devils; it moaned and laughed and ululated with shrill notes as of crackling ice. It seemed to pluck at Quanga with live malicious fingers, to suck the breath for which he had fought agonizingly. In spite of his heavy raiment, and the speed of his toilsome ascent, he felt its bitter, mordant teeth, searching and biting even to the marrow.

Dimly, as he continued to climb upward, he saw that the ice was no longer smooth, but had risen into pillars and pyramids around him, or was fretted

obscenely into wilder shapes. Immense, malignant profiles leered in blue-green crystal; the malformed heads of bestial devils frowned; and rearing dragons writhed immovably along the scarp, or sank frozen into deep crevasses.

Apart from these imaginary forms that were assumed by the ice itself, Quanga saw, or believed that he saw, human bodies and faces embedded in the glacier. Pale hands appeared to reach dimly and imploringly toward him from the depths; and he felt upon him the frost-bound eyes of men who had been lost in former years; and beheld their sunken limbs, grown rigid in strange attitudes of torture.

Quanga was no longer capable of thought. Deaf, blind, primordial terrors, older than reason, had filled his mind with their atavistic darkness. They drove him on implacably, as a beast is driven, and would not let him pause or flag on the mocking, nightmare slope. Reflection would have told him only that his ultimate escape was impossible; that the ice, a live and conscious and maleficent thing, was merely playing a cruel and fantastic game which it had somehow devised in its incredible animism. So, perhaps, it was well that he had lost the power of reflection.

Beyond hope and without warning, he came to the end of the glaciation. It was like the sudden shift of a dream, which takes the dreamer unaware; and he stared uncomprehendingly for some moments at the familiar Hyperborean valleys below the rampart, to the south, and the volcanoes that fumed darkly beyond the southeastern hills.

His flight from the cavern had consumed almost the whole of the long, subpolar afternoon, and the sun was now swinging close above the horizon. The parhelia had vanished, and the ice-sheet, as if by some prodigious legerdemain, had resumed its normal horizontality. If he had been able to compare his impressions, Quanga would have realized that at no time had he surprised the glacier in the accomplishment of its bewildering supernatural changes.

Doubtfully, as if it were a mirage that might fade at any moment, he surveyed the landscape below the battlements. To all appearances, he had returned to the very place from which he and the jewelers had begun their disastrous journey on the ice. Before him an easy declivity, fretted and runneled, ran down toward the grassy meadows. Fearing that it was all deceitful and unreal — a fair, beguiling trap, a new treachery of the element that he had grown to regard as a cruel and almighty demon — Quanga descended the slope with hasty leaps and bounds. Even when he stood ankle-deep in the great club-mosses, with leafy willows and sedgy grasses about him, he could not quite believe in the verity of his escape.

The mindless prompting of a panic fear still drove him on; and a primal instinct, equally mindless, drew him toward the volcanic peaks. The instinct told him that he would find refuge from the bitter boreal cold amid their purlieus; and there, if anywhere, he would be safe from the diabolical machinations of the glacier. Boiling springs were said to flow perpetually from the nether slopes of these mountains; great geysers, roaring and hissing like infernal cauldrons, filled the higher gullies with scalding cataracts. The long snows that swept upon Hyperborea were turned to mild rains in the vicinity of the volcanoes; and there a rich and sultry-colored flora, formerly native to the whole region, but now exotic, flourished throughout the seasons.

Quanga could not find the little shaggy horses that he and his companions had left tethered to the dwarf willows in the valley-meadow. Perhaps, after all, it was not the same valley. At any rate, he did not stay his flight to search for them. Without delay or lingering, after one fearful backward look at the menacing mass of the glaciation, he started off in a direct line for the smoke-plumed mountains.

The sun sank lower, skirting endlessly the southwestern horizon, and flooding the battlemented ice and the rolling landscape with a light of pale amethyst. Quanga, with iron thews inured to protracted marches, pressed on in his unremitting terror, and was overtaken gradually by a long, ethereal-tinted twilight of northern summer.

Somehow, through all the stages of his flight, he had retained the pick-ax, as well as his bow and arrows. Automatically, hours before, he had placed the heavy pouch of rubies in the bosom of his raiment for safekeeping. He had forgotten them, and he did not even notice the trickle of water from the melting of crusted ice about the jewels, that seeped upon his flesh from the lizard-skin pouch.

Crossing one of the innumerable valleys, he stumbled against a protruding willow-root, and the pick was hurled from his fingers as he fell. Rising to his feet, he ran on without stopping to retrieve it.

A ruddy glow from the volcanoes was now visible on the darkening sky. It brightened as Quanga went on; and he felt that he was nearing the far-sought, inviolable sanctuary. Though still thoroughly shaken and demoralized by his preterhuman ordeals, he began to think that he might escape from the ice-demon after all.

Suddenly he became aware of a consuming thirst, to which he had been oblivious heretofore. Daring to pause in one of the shallow valleys, he drank from a blossom-bordered stream. Then, beneath the crushing load of an unconsciously accumulated fatigue, he flung himself down to rest for a little while among the blood-red poppies that were purple with twilight.

Sleep fell like a soft and overwhelming snow upon his eyelids, but was soon broken by evil dreams in which he still fled vainly from the mocking and inexorable glacier. He awoke in a cold horror, sweating and shivering, and found himself staring at the northern sky, where a delicate flush was dying slowly. It seemed to him that a great shadow, malign and massive and somehow solid, was moving upon the horizon and striding over the low hills toward the valley in which he lay. It came with inexpressible speed, and the last light appeared to fall from the heavens, chill as a reflection caught in ice.

He started to his feet with the stiffness of prolonged exhaustion in all his body, and the nightmare stupefaction of slumber still mingling with his half-awakened fears. In this state, with a mad, momentary defiance, he

unslung his bow and discharged arrow after arrow, emptying his quiver at the huge and bleak and formless shadow that seemed to impend before him on the sky. Having done this, he resumed his headlong flight.

Even as he ran, he shivered uncontrollably with the sudden and intense cold that had filled the valley. Vaguely, with an access of fear, he felt that there was something unwholesome and unnatural about the cold — something that did not belong to the place or the season. The glowing volcanoes were quite near, and soon he would reach their outlying hills. The air about him should be temperate, even if not actually warm.

All at once, the air darkened before him, with a sourceless, blue-green glimmering in its depths. For a moment, he saw the featureless Shadow that rose gigantically upon his path and obscured the very stars and the glare of the volcanoes. Then, with the swirling of a tempest-driven vapor, it closed about him, gelid and relentless. It was like phantom ice — a thing that blinded his eyes and stifled his breath, as if he were buried in some glacial tomb. It was cold with a transarctic rigor, such as he had never known, that ached unbearably in all his flesh, and was followed by a swiftly spreading numbness.

Dimly he heard a sound as of clashing icicles, a grinding as of heavy floes, in the blue-green gloom that tightened and thickened around him. It was as if the soul of the glacier, malign and implacable, had overtaken him in his flight. At times he struggled numbly, in half-drowsy terror. With some obscure impulse, as if to propitiate a vengeful deity, he took the pouch of rubies from his bosom with prolonged and painful effort, and tried to hurl it away. The thongs that tied the pouch were loosened by its fall, and Quanga heard faintly, as if from a great distance, the tinkle of the rubies as they rolled and scattered on some hard surface. Then oblivion deepened about him, and he fell forward stiffly, without knowing that he had fallen.

Morning found him beside a little stream, stark-frozen, and lying on his face in a circle of poppies that had been blackened as if by the footprint of some gigantic demon of frost. A nearby pool, formed by the leisurely rill, was covered with thin ice; and on the ice, like gouts of frozen blood, there

lay the scattered rubies of Haalor. In its own time, the great glacier, moving slowly and irresistibly southward, would reclaim them.

THE IMMEASURABLE HORROR

I do not mean to boast when I say that cowardice has never been among my failings. It would be needless to boast, in view of my honorable record as an ether-ace in six interplanetary expeditions. But I tell you that I would not return to Venus for any consideration --- not for all the platinum and radium in its mountainsides, nor all the medicinal saps and pollens and vegetable ambergris of its forests. There will always be men to imperil their lives and their sanity in the Venusian trading-posts, and fools who will still try to circumnavigate a world of unearthly dangers. But I have done my share, and I know that Venus was not designed for human nerves or human brains. The loathsome multiform fecundity of its overheated jungles ought to be enough for any one — not to mention the way in which so many posts have been wholly blotted out between the departure of one space-freighter and the arrival of the next. No, Venus was not meant for man. If you still doubt me, listen to my story.

I was with the first Venusian expedition, under the leadership of Admiral Carfax, in 1977. We were able to make no more than a mere landing, and were then compelled to return earthward because of our shortage of oxygen, due to a serious miscalculation regarding our needs. It was unsafe, we found, to breathe the thick, vapor-laden air of Venus for more than short intervals; and we couldn't afford to make an overdraft on our tanks. In 1979 we went back, more fully equipped for all contingencies this time, and landed on a high plateau near the equator. This plateau, being comparatively free from the noxious flora and fauna of the abysmal steaming jungles, was to form the base of our explorations.

I felt signally honored when Admiral Carfax put me in charge of the planetary coaster whose various parts had been brought forth from the bowels of the huge ether-ship and fitted together for local use. I, Richard Harmon, was only an engineer, a third assistant pilot of the space-vessel, with no claim whatever to scientific renown; and the four men entrusted to my guidance were all experts of international fame. They were John Ashley,

botanist, Aristide Rocher, geologist, Robert Manville, biologist and zoologist, and Hugo Markheim, head of the Interplanetary Survey. Carfax and the remaining sixteen of our party were to stay with the ether-ship till we returned and made our report. We were to follow the equator, landing often for close observations, and make, if feasible, a complete circuit of the planet. In our absence, a second coaster was to be fitted together, in preparation for a longitudinal voyage around the poles.

The coaster was of that type which is now commonly used for flying at all levels within the terrestrial atmosphere. It was made of neonin-tempered aluminum, it was roomy and comfortable, with ports of synthetic crystal tougher than steel, and could be hermetically closed. There were the usual engines run by explosive atomic power, and a supplementary set of the old electro-solar turbines in case of emergency. The vessel was fitted with heating and refrigerating systems, and was armed with electronic machine-guns having a forty-mile range; and we carried for hand-weapons a plentiful supply of infra-red grenades, of heat-tubes and zero tubes, not knowing what hostile forms of life we might encounter. These weapons were the deadliest ever devised by man; and a child could have wiped out whole armies with them. But I could smile now at their inadequacy. . . .

The plateau on which we had landed was far up in a range which we named the Purple Mountains because they were covered from base to summit with enormous two-foot lichens of a rich Tyrian hue. There were similarly covered areas in the plateau, where the soil was too thin for the sustenance of more elaborate plant-forms. Here, among the multitudinous geysers, and the horned, fantastic peaks that were intermittently visible through a steam-charged atmosphere, we had established ourselves in a lichen-field. Even here we had to wear our refrigerating suits and carry oxygen whenever we stepped out of the ether-ship; for otherwise the heat would have parboiled us in a few minutes, and the ultra-terrestrial gases in the air would have speedily overpowered us. It was a weird business, putting the coaster together under such circumstances. With our huge inflated suits and masks of green vitrolium, we must have looked like a crew of demons toiling in the fumes of Gehenna.

I shall never forget the hour when the five of us who had been chosen for that first voyage said good-bye to Admiral Carfax and the others and stepped into the coaster. Somehow, there was a greater thrill about it than that which attended the beginning of our trip through sidereal space. The 23,000 miles of our proposed circuit would of course be a mere bagatelle: but what marvels and prodigies of unimagined life we might not find! If we had only known the truth! ... but indeed it was fortunate that we could not know....

Flying very slowly, as near to the ground as was practicable, we left the plateau and descended through a long jungle-invaded pass to the equatorial plains. Sometimes, even when we almost grazed the jungle-tops, we were caught in voluminous rolling masses of cloud; and sometimes there were spaces where we could see dimly ahead for a few miles, or could even discern the white-hot glaring of the dropsical sun that hung perpetually at zenith.

We could get only a vague idea of the vegetation beneath us. It was a blurred mass of bluish and whitish greens, of etiolated mauves and saffrons tinged with jade. But we could see that many of them had the character of calamites and giant grasses rather than trees. For a long while we sought vainly an open space in which to alight and begin our investigations.

After we had flown on for an hour or two above the serried jungle, we crossed a great river that couldn't have been so very far below the boiling-point, to judge from the columns of steam that coiled upward from it. Here we could measure the height of the jungle, for the shores were lined with titanic reeds marked off in ten yard segments, that rose for a hundred yards in air, and were overshadowed by the palm-ferns behind them. But even here there was no place for us to descend. We crossed other rivers, some of which would have made the Amazon look like a summer creek; and we must have gone on for another hour above that fuming, everlasting forest ere we came to a clear spot of land.

We wondered about that clearing, even at first sight. It was a winding mile-wide swath in the jungle, whose end and beginning were both lost in the

vapors. The purplish soil seemed to have been freshly cleared, and was clean and smooth as if a whole legion of steam-rollers had gone over it. We were immensely excited, thinking that it must be the work of intelligent beings — of whom, so far, we had found no slightest trace.

I brought the coaster gently down in the clearing, close to the jungle's edge; and donning our refrigerating suits and arming ourselves with heat-tubes, we unscrewed the seven inch crystal of the manhole and emerged.

The curiosity we felt concerning that clearing was drowned in our wonder before the bordering forest. I doubt if I can give you any real idea of what it was like. The most exuberant tropic jungle on earth would have been a corn-patch in comparison. The sheer fertility of it was stupendous, terrifying, horrifying — everything was overgrown, overcrowded with a fulsome rankness that pushed and swelled and mounted even as you watched it. Life was everywhere, seething, bursting, pullulating, rotting. I tell you, we could actually see it grow and decay, like a slow moving picture. And the variety of it was a botanist's nightmare. Ashley cursed like a longshoreman when he tried to classify some of the things we found. And Manville had his problems too, for all sorts of novel insects and animals were flopping, crawling, crashing and flying through the monstrous woods.

I'm almost afraid to describe some of those plants. The overlooming palm ferns with their poddy fronds of unwholesome mauve were bad enough. But the smaller things that grew beneath them, or sprouted from their boles and joints! Half of them were unspeakably parasitic; and many were plainly sarcophagous. There were bell-shaped flowers the size of wine barrels that dripped a paralyzing fluid on anything that passed beneath them; and the carcasses of flying lizards and strange legless mammals were rotting in a circle about each of them, with the tips of new flowers starting from the putrefaction in which they had been seeded. There were vegetable webs in which squirming things had been caught — webs that were like a tangle of green, hairy ropes. There were broad, low-lying masses of fungoid white and yellow, that yielded like a bog to suck in the unwary creatures that had trodden upon them. And there were orchids of madly grotesque types that

rooted themselves only in the bodies of living animals; so that many of the fauna we saw were adorned with floral parasites.

Even though we were all armed with heat-tubes, we didn't care to go very far in those woods. New plants were shooting up all around us; and nearly everything, both animal and vegetable, seemed to have alimentary designs upon us. We had to turn our heat-tubes on the various tendrils and branches that coiled about us; and our suits were heavily dusted with the white pollen of carnivorous flowers — a pollen that was anaesthetic to the helpless monsters on which it fell. Once a veritable behemoth with a dinosaur-like head and forelegs, loomed above us suddenly from the ferns it had trampled down, but fled with screams of deafening thunder when we leveled our heat-rays upon it until its armored hide began to sizzle. Long-legged serpents larger than anacondas were stalking about; and they were so vicious, and came in such increasing numbers, that we found it hard to discourage them. So we retreated to the coaster.

When we came again to the clearing, where the soil had been perfectly bare a few minutes before, we saw that the tips of new trees and plants were already beginning to cover it. At their rate of growth, the coaster would have been lost to sight among them in an hour or two. We had almost forgotten the enigma of that clearing; but now the problem presented itself with renewed force.

"Harmon, that swath must have been made within the last hour!" exclaimed Manville to me as we climbed back into the vessel behind the others.

"If we follow it," I rejoined, "we'll soon find who, or what, is making it. Are you fellows game for a little side-trip?" I had closed the manhole and was now addressing all four of my companions.

There was no demur from any one, though the following of the swath would mean a diagonal divagation from our set course. All of us were tense with excitement and curiosity. No one could venture a surmise that seemed at all credible, concerning the agency that had left a mile-wide trail. And also we were undecided as to the direction of its progress.

I set the engines running, and with that familiar roar of disintegrating carbon atoms in the cylinders beneath us, we soared to the level of the fern-tops and I steered the coaster in the direction towards which its nose happened to be pointing. However, we soon found that we were on the wrong track; for the new growth below us became disproportionately taller and thicker, as the mighty jungle sought to refill the gap that had been cloven through its center. So I turned the coaster, and we went back in the opposite direction.

I don't believe we uttered half a dozen words among us as we followed the swath, and saw the dwindling of the plant-tops below till that bare purplish soil reappeared. We had no idea what we would find; and we were now too excited even for conjecture. I will readily admit that I, for one, felt a little nervous; the things we had already seen in the forest, together with that formidable recent clearing which no earthly machinery would have made, were enough to unsettle the equilibrium of the human system. As I have said before, I am no coward; and I have faced a variety of ultra-terrene perils without flinching. But already I began to suspect that we were among things which no earth-being was ever meant to face or even imagine. The hideous fertility of that jungle had almost sickened me. What, then, could be the agency that had cleared that jungle away more cleanly than a harvester running through a grain-field?

I watched the vapor-laden scene ahead in the reflector beside me; and the others all had their faces glued to the crystalline ports. Nothing untoward could be seen as yet; but I began to notice a slight, unaccountable increase of our speed. I had not increased the power — we had been running slowly, at no more than one hundred fifty miles per hour; and now we were gaining, as if we were borne in the sweep of some tremendous air-current or the pull of a magnetic force.

The vapors had closed in before us; now they eddied to each side, leaving the landscape visible for many miles. I think we all saw the Thing simultaneously; but no one spoke for a full thirty seconds. Then Manville muttered, very softly: "My God!"

In front, no more than a half-mile distant, the swath was filled from side to side with a moving mass of livid angleworm pink that rose above the jungle-tops. It was like a sheer cliff before us as we flew toward it. We could see that it was moving away from us, was creeping onward through the forest. The mass gave the impression of a jelly-fish consistency. It rose and fell, expanding and contracting in a slow rhythmic manner, with a noticeable deepening of color at each contraction.

"Life!" murmured Manville, "Life, in an unknown form on a scale that would not be possible in our world."

The coaster was now rushing toward the worm-coloured mass at more than two hundred miles an hour. A moment more, and we would have plunged into that palpitating wall. I turned the wheel sharply, and we veered to the left and rose with an odd sluggishness above the jungle, where we could look down. That sluggishness worried me, after our former headlong speed. It was as if we were fighting some new gravitational force of unexpected potency.

We all had a feeling of actual nausea as we gazed down. There were leagues and leagues of that living substance; and the farther end was lost in the fuming vapors. It was moving faster than a man could run, with that horribly regular expansion and contraction, as if it were breathing. There were no visible limbs or appendages, no organs of any distinguishable kind; but we knew that the thing was alive and aware.

"Fly closer," whispered Manville. Horror and scientific fascination contended in his voice.

I steered diagonally downward and felt an increase of the strange pull against which we were fighting. I had to reverse the gears and turn on more power to prevent the vessel from plunging headlong. We hung above the pink mass at a hundred-yard elevation and watched it. It flowed beneath us like an unnatural river, in a flat, glistening tide.

"Voyez!" cried Rocher, who preferred to speak in his native tongue, though he knew English as well as any of us.

Two flying monsters, large as pterodactyls, were now circling above the mass not far below us. It seemed as if they, like the vessel, were struggling against a powerful downward attraction. Through the air-tight sound-valves we could hear the thunderous beating of their immense wings as they strove to rise and were drawn gradually toward the pink surface. As they neared it, the mass rose up in a mighty wave, and in the deep mouth-like hollow that formed at the wave's bottom a colorless fluid began to exude and collect in a pool. Then the wave curved over, caught the struggling monsters, and lapsed again to a level, slowly palpitating surface above its prey.

We waited a little; and I realized that the onward flowing of the mass had ceased. Except for that queer throbbing, it was now entirely quiescent. But somehow there was a deadly menace in its tranquillity, as if the thing were watching or meditating. Apparently it had no eyes, no ears, no sense-organs of any sort; but I began to get the idea that in some unknowable manner, through senses beyond our apprehension, it was aware of our presence and was considering us attentively.

Now, all at once, I saw that the mass was no longer quiescent. It had begun to rise toward us, very stealthily and gradually, in a pyramidal ridge; and at the ridge's foot, even as before, a clear, transparent pool was gathering.

The coaster wavered and threatened to fall. The magnetic pull, whatever it was, had grown stronger than ever. I turned on fresh power; we rose with a painful, dragging slowness, and the ridge below shot abruptly into a pillar that loomed beside us and toppled over toward the vessel.

Before it could reach us, Manville had seized the switch that operated one of the machine-guns, had aimed it at the pillar and released a stream of disintegrative bolts that caused the overhanging menace to vanish like a melting arm of cloud. Below us the pyramidal base of the truncated pillar writhed and shuddered convulsively, and sank back once more into a level surface. The coaster soared dizzily, as if freed from a retarding weight; and reaching what I thought would be a safe elevation, we flew along the rim of

the mass in an effort to determine its extent. And as we flew, the thing began to glide along beneath us at its former rate of progress.

I don't know how many miles of it there were, winding on through the monstrous jungle like a glacier of angleworm flesh. I tell you, the thing made me feel as if my solar plexus had gone wrong. There was neither head nor tail to that damnable mass, and nothing anywhere that we could identify as special organs; it was a weltering sea of protoplasmic cells organized on a scale that staggered all preconceptions of biology. Manville was nearly out of his senses with excitement; and the rest of us were so profoundly shocked and overwhelmed that we began to wonder if the thing were real, or were merely an hallucination of nerves disordered by novel and terrific planetary forces.

Well, we came to the end of it at last, where the pink wave was eating its way through the jungle. Everything in its path was being crushed down and absorbed — the four-hundred-foot ferns, the giant grasses, the grotesque carnivorous plants and their victims, the flying, waddling, creeping and striding monsters of all types. And the thing made so little sound — there was a low murmur like that of gently moving water, and the snap or swish of trees as they went down, but nothing more.

"I guess we might as well go on," observed Manville regretfully. "I'd like to analyze a section of that stuff; but we've seen what it can do; and I can't ask you to take any chances with the coaster."

"No," I agreed, "there's nothing to be done about it. So, if you gentlemen are all willing, we might as well resume our course."

I set the vessel back toward the equator, at a goodly speed.

"Christ! that stuff is following us!" cried Manville a minute later. He had been watching from a rear port.

Intent on steering forthrightly, it had not occurred to me to keep an eye on the thing. Now I looked into the rear reflector. The pink mass had changed

its course, and was crawling along behind us, evidently at an increased rate of progression, for otherwise we would have been out of sight by now.

We all felt pretty creepy, I assure you. But it seemed ridiculous to imagine that the thing could overtake us. Even at our moderate speed, we were gaining upon it momentarily; and, if need be, we could treble our rate or soar to higher atmospheric levels. But even at that the whole business made a very disagreeable impression.

Before long we plunged into a belt of thick vapors and lost sight of our pursuer. We seemed to be traversing a sort of swamp, for we caught glimpses of titan reeds and mammoth aquatic plants amid winding stretches of voluminosly steaming water. We heard the bellow of unknown leviathans, and saw the dim craning of their hideous heads on interminable necks as we passed. And once the coaster was covered with boiling spray from a marsh-geyser or volcano, and we flew blindly till we were out of it again. Then we crossed a lake of burning oil or mineral pitch, with flames that were half a mile in height; and the temperature rose uncomfortably in spite of our refrigerating system. Then there were more marshes, involved in rolling steam. And after an hour or two we emerged from the vapors, and another zone of prodigiously luxuriant jungle began to reveal its fronded tops below us.

Flying over that jungle was like moving in a hashish eternity. There was no end to it and no change — it simply went on and on through a world without limits or horizons. And the white vaporous glare of the swollen sun, even at zenith, became a corroding torture to nerves and brain. We all felt a terrific fatigue, more from the nervous tax than anything else. Manville and Rocher went to sleep, Markheim nodded at his post, and I began to watch for a place where I could bring the coaster safely down and take a nap myself. The vessel would have kept its own course, if I had set the gears; but I didn't want to miss anything, or take any chance of collision with a high mountain-range.

Well, it seemed there was no place to land in that interminable bristling wilderness of cyclopean growths. We flew on, and I grew sleepier and

sleepier. Then, through the swirling mists ahead, I saw the vague looming of low mountains. There were bare, needle-sharp peaks and long gentle scaurs of a blackish stone, almost entirely covered with red and yellow lichens taller than heather. It all looked very peaceful and desolate. I brought the coaster down on a level shelf of one of the scaurs, and fell asleep almost before the heavy thudding of the engines had died.

I don't know what it was that awakened me. But I sat up with a start, with a preternaturally distinct awareness that something was wrong. I glanced around at my companions, who were all slumbering quietly. And then I peered into the reflectors where the entire landscape about us was depicted.

I was unable to believe it for a moment — that worm-colored glacier that had crawled up the scarp beneath us, and was now hanging over the vessel like a sheer, immeasurable, flowing precipice. It had reached out in mighty arms on either side, as if to surround us. It seemed to blot out the misty heavens as it hung there, pulsing and darkening and all a-slaver with rills of a hueless liquid from the mouths that had formed in its front. I lost a few precious seconds ere I could start the atomic engines; and as the vessel rose, the top of that loathsome cliff lengthened out and fell over like the crest of a breaking billow. It caught us with a buffeting shock, it enveloped us, we went down tossing and pitching as into a sea-trough; and our interior grew dark and blind till I switched on the lights. The vessel was now lurching nose downward, as that unbelievable wave sucked it in. My companions were awake, and I shouted half-incoherent orders to them as I turned on the full power of our cylinders and also set the electro-solar turbines going. The sides and ceiling of the coaster seemed to bend inward with the pressure as we sought to wrench ourselves free. My companions had flown to the machine-guns, they pumped them incessantly, and bolts of electronic force tore like a broadside of lightning into the mass that had engulfed us. We tried literally to blast ourselves out, with each gun revolving at the widest possible radius. I don't know how it was ever done; but at last the pressure above us began to give, there was a glimmering of light through our rear ports, and pitching dizzily, we broke loose. But even as the light returned, something dripped on my bare arms from the ceiling — a thin rill of water-clear fluid that seared like vitriol and almost laid me out with the sheer

agony as it ate into my flesh. I heard someone scream and fall, and turning my head, saw Manville writhing on the floor beneath a steady drip of the same fluid. The roof and walls of the coaster were rent in several places, and some of the rifts were widening momentarily. That execrable liquid, which doubtless served as both saliva and digestive juice, had been eating the adamantine-tempered metal like acid, and we had not escaped any too soon.

The next few minutes were worse than a whole herd of nightmares. Even with our double engine-power, even with the machine-guns still tearing at the mass beside us, it was a struggle to get away, to combat the malign extra-gravitational magnetism of that hellish life-substance. And all the while, Venusian air was pouring in through the rents and our atmosphere was becoming unbreathable. Also the refrigerating system was half useless now, and we sweltered in a steaming inferno, till each of us donned his airtight insulative suit in turn, while the others held to the guns and the steering. Manville had ceased to writhe, and we saw that he was dead. We would not have dared to look at him overlong, even if there had been time; for half his face and body were eaten away by the corroding liquid. We soared gradually, till we could look down on the horror that had so nearly devoured us. There it was, mile on mile of it stretching up the mountain-side, with the farther end somewhere in the jungle below. It seemed impossible, in view of the distance we had traversed, that the thing was the same life-mass we had met earlier in the day. But whatever it was, it must have smelt us out somehow; and seemingly it didn't mind scaling a mountain to get us. Or perhaps it was in the habit of climbing mountains. Anyway, it was hard to discourage, for our gun-fire seemed to make mere pin-holes in it that closed up again when the gunner's aim shifted. And when we started to drop grenades upon it from our hard-won elevation, it merely throbbed and heaved a little more vehemently, and darkened to a cancerous red as if it were getting angry. And when we flew off on the way we had come, toward the jungle and the swamp beyond, the damnable thing started to flow backward beneath us along the lichen-mantled slope. Evidently it was determined to have us.

I reeled in the seat with the pain of my seared arms as I held our course. We were in no condition to continue the circuit of Venus; and there was nothing for it but a return to the Purple Mountains.

We flew at top speed, but that flowing mass of life — protoplasm, organism, or whatever it was — fairly raced us. At last we got ahead of it, where it slithered in mile-wide devastation through the jungle — but not very far ahead at that. It hung on interminably, and we all grew sick with watching it.

Suddenly we saw that the thing had ceased to follow us, and was veering off at a sharp angle.

"What do you make of that?" cried Markheim. We were all so amazed by the cessation of pursuit, that I halted the vessel and we hung in mid-air, wondering what had happened.

Then we saw. Another endless mass, of a vermin-like gray, was crawling through the jungle to meet the pink mass. The two seemed to rise up in sheer columns, like warring serpents, as they neared each other. Then they came together; and we could see that they were battling, were devouring each other, were gaining and losing alternately as they flowed back and forth in a huge area from which all vegetation was speedily blotted. At length the pink mass appeared to have won a decisive victory; it poured on and on, without cease, ingesting the other, driving it back. And we watched no longer, but resumed our flight toward the Purple Mountains.

I have no very distinct recollection of that flight: it is all a blur of incandescent vapors, of boundless, fuming forests, of blazing bitumen lakes and volcano-spouting marshes. I lived in a reeling eternity of pain, sickness, vertigo; and, toward the last, a raging delirium in which I was no longer aware of my surroundings; except by fits and starts. I don't know how I held on, how I kept course: my subliminal mind must have done it, I suppose. The others were all pretty sick, too, and could not have helped me. I seemed to be fighting an immeasurable, formless monster in that delirium; and after a dozen eons of inconclusive combat, I came out of it long enough to see

that the Purple Mountains were jutting their horns from the vapors just ahead. Dimly I steered along the jungle-taken pass and across the plateau; and the glaring heavens turned to a sea of blackness, a sea that fell and bore me down to oblivion as I landed the coaster beside the glimmering bulk of the ether-ship.

Somehow, very tortuously and vaguely, I floated out of that sea of blackness. I seemed to take hours in regaining full awareness; and the process was painful and confusing, as if my brain were unwilling to function. When I finally came to myself, I was lying in my bunk on the ether ship, and Admiral Carfax and the two doctors of the expedition were beside me, together with Markheim and Rocher. They told me I had been unconscious for fifty hours. My collapse, they thought, had been partly due to unnatural nerve-strain and shock. But my arms were both in a terrible state from the ravages of the vitriolic animal fluid that had dripped upon them. It had been necessary to amputate my left arm at the elbow; and only the most skillful care had saved the other from a like fate. My companions, though ill to the point of nausea had retained consciousness, and had told the story of our unbelievable adventures.

"I don't see how you drove the coaster," said Carfax. This, from our reticent and praise-sparing chief, was an actual brevet.

My right arm was a long time in healing — indeed, it never became quite normal again, never regained the muscular strength and nervous quickness required for aviation or space-flying. And I wasn't so sorry, either: my nerves were badly shaken; and I was content to let others do their share, when the holes in the acid-eaten coaster had been caulked with metal melted by our heat-tubes, and another exploring party was sent out along the equator.

We waited for a hundred hours on the plateau in the Purple Mountains; but the coaster didn't return. Radio communications with it had ceased after the first nine hours. The second coaster was put together, and went out with Admiral Carfax himself in charge. Markheim and Rocher also insisted on going along. We kept in touch with the vessel till it began to approach the

enormous tundras in which the sunlit hemisphere of Venus terminates, and beyond which are the frozen realms of perpetual twilight and darkness. The radio reports were full of incredible things, and I won't tell you how many of those moving life-masses were sighted, eating their way through the hideously fertile jungles or crawling out of the steam-enveloped Venusian seas that gave them birth. Nothing, however, was found of the first coaster. Then the reports ceased; and a black horror settled upon us who had remained in the ether-ship.

The huge space-vessel was ill-adapted to horizontal flight within atmospheric levels. But we set out anyway, and tried to find the coasters, though we all knew there could no longer be anything to find. I won't detail our trip: we all saw enough to turn our stomachs permanently; and those horrors of immeasurable life were sweet and charming in comparison with some of the things that our searchlights revealed on the dark side of the planet. . . . Anyhow, we gave it up at last, and came back to earth. And I, for one, have been well satisfied to remain on Terra Firma. Others can do the exploring and work the Venusian mines and plantations. I know too well the fate of those lost parties and their vessels. And I know what has happened to the warehouses of neo-manganese steel that have utterly disappeared and have been replaced by a half-grown jungle.

THE IMMORTALS OF MERCURY

I

Cliff Howard's first sensation, as he came back to consciousness, was one of well-nigh insufferable heat. It seemed to beat upon him from all sides in a furnace-like blast and to lie upon his face, limbs and body with the heaviness of molten metal. Then, before he had opened his eyes, he became aware of the furious light that smote upon his lids, turning them to a flamed-red curtain. His eye-balls ached with the muffled radiation; every nerve of his being cringed from the pouring sea of incalcescence; and there was a dull throbbing in his scalp, which might have been either headache induced by the heat, or the pain of a somewhat recent blow.

He recalled, very dimly, that there had been an expedition-- somewhere—in which he had taken part; but his efforts to remember the details were momentarily distracted by new and inexplicable sensations. He felt now that he was moving swiftly, borne on something that pitched and bounded against a high wind that seared his face like the breath of hell.

He opened his eyes, and was almost blinded when he found himself staring at a whitish heaven where blown columns of steam went by like spectral genii. Just below the rim of his vision, there was something vast and incandescent, toward which, instinctively, he feared to turn. Suddenly he knew what it was, and began to realize his Situation. Memory came to him in a tumbling torment of images; and with it, a growing wonder and alarm.

He recalled the ramble he had taken, alone, amid the weird and scrubby jungles of the twilight zone of 'Mercury—that narrow belt, warm and vaporous, lying beneath the broiling deserts on which an enormous sun glares perpetually, and the heaped and mountainous glaciers of the planet's nightward side.

He had not gone far from the rocket-ship— a mile at most, toward the sulphurous, fuming afterglow of the sun, now wholly hidden by the planet's libration. Johnson, the head of that first scientific expedition to Mercury, had warned him against these solitary excursions; but Howard, a professional botanist, had been eager to hasten his investigations of the unknown world, in which they had now sojourned for a week of terrestrial time.

Contrary to expectation, they had found a low, thin, breathable atmosphere, fed by the melting of ice in the variable twilight belt— an air that was drawn continually in high winds toward the sun; and the wearing of special equipment was unnecessary. Howard had not anticipated any danger; for the shy, animal-like natives had shown no hostility and had fled from the earth-men whenever approached. The other life-forms, as far as had been determined, were of low, insensitive types, often semi-vegetative, and easily avoided when poisonous or carnivorous.

Even the huge, ugly, salamander-like reptiles who seemed to roam at will from the twilight zone to the scalding deserts beneath an eternal day, were seemingly quite inoffensive.

Howard had been examining a queer, unfamiliar growth resembling a large truffle, which he had found in an open space, among the pale, poddy, wind-bowed shrubs. The growth, when he touched it, had displayed signs of sluggish animation and had started to conceal itself, burrowing into the boggy soil. He was prodding the thing with the sponge-light branch of a dead shrub, and was wondering how to classify it, when, looking up, he had found himself surrounded by the Mercutian savages. They had stolen upon him noiselessly from the semi-fungoid thickets; but he was not alarmed at first, thinking merely that they had begun to overcome their shyness and show their barbaric curiosity.

They were gnarled and dwarfish creatures, who walked partially erect at most times; but ran upon all fours when frightened. The earth-men had named them the Dlukus, because of the clucking sounds resembling this word which they often made. Their skins were heavily scaled, like those of

reptiles; and their small, protruding eyes appeared to be covered at all times with a sort of thin film. Anything ghastlier or more repulsive than these beings could hardly have been found on the inner planets. But when they closed in upon Howard, walking with a forward crouch and clucking incessantly, he had taken their approach for a sort of overture and had neglected to draw his tonanite pistol. He saw that they were carrying rough pieces of some blackish mineral, and had surmised, from the way in which their webbed hands were held toward him, that they were bringing him a gift or peace-offering.

Their savage faces were inscrutable; and they had drawn very close before he was disillusioned as to their intent. Then, without warning, in a cool, orderly manner, they had begun to assail him with the fragments of mineral they carried. He had fought them; but his resistance had been cut short by a violent blow from behind, which had sent him reeling into oblivion.

All this he remembered clearly enough; but there must have been an indefinite blank, following his lapse into insensibility. What, he wondered, had happened during this interim, and where was he going? Was he a captive among the Dlukus? The glaring light and scorching heat could mean only one thing—that he had been carried into the sunward lands of Mercury. That incandescent thing toward which he dared not look was the sun itself, looming in a vast arc above the horizon.

He tried to sit up, but succeeded merely in raising his head a little. He saw that there were leathery thongs about his chest, arms and legs, binding him tightly to some mobile surface that seemed to heave and pant beneath him. Slewng his head to one side, he found that this surface was horny, rounding and reticulated. It was like something he had seen.

Then, with a start of horror, he recognized it. He was bound, Mazeppa-like, to the back of one of those salamandrine monsters to which the earth-scientists had given the name of "heat-lizards." These creatures were large crocodiles, but possessed longer legs than any terrestrial saurian. Their thick hides were apparently, to an amazing extent, non-conductors of heat,

and served to insulate them against temperatures that would have parboiled any other known form of life.

The exact range of their habitat had not yet been learned; but they had been seen from the rocket-ship, during a brief sunward dash, in deserts where water was perpetually at the boiling point; where rills and rivers, flowing from the twilight zone, wasted themselves in heavy vapors from terrible cauldrons of naked rock.

Howard's consternation, as he realized his plight and his probable fate, was mingled with a passing surprise. He felt sure that the Dlukus had bound him to the monster's back, and wondered that beings so low in the evolutionary scale should have been intelligent enough to know the use of thongs. Their act showed a certain power of calculation, as well as a devilish cruelty. It was obvious that they had abandoned him deliberately to an awful doom.

However, he had little time for reflection. The heat-lizard, with an indescribable darting and running motion, went swiftly onward into the dreadful hell of writhing steam and heated rock. The great ball of insupportable whiteness seemed to rise higher momentarily and to pour its beams upon Howard like the flood of an opened furnace. The horny mail of the monster was like a hot gridiron beneath him, scorching through his clothes; and his wrists and neck and ankles were seared by the tough leather cords as he struggled madly and uselessly against them.

Turning his head from side to side, he saw dimly the horned rocks that leaned toward him from curtains of hellish mist. His head swam deliriously, and the very blood appeared to simmer in his veins. He lapsed at intervals into deadly faintness: a black shroud seemed to fall upon him, but his vague senses were still oppressed by the crushing, searing radiation. He seemed to descend into bottomless gulfs, pursued by unpitying cataracts of fire and seas of molten heat. The darkness of his swoon was turned to immitigable light.

At times, Howard came back to full consciousness, and was forced to grit his teeth to avoid screaming with agony. His eyelids seemed to scorch his

eyes, as he blinked in the blinding refraction; and he saw his surroundings in broken glimpses, through turning wheels of fire and blots of torrid color, like scenes from a mad kaleidoscope.

The heat-lizard was following a tortuous stream that ran in hissing rapids, among twisted crags and chasm-riven scarps. Rising in sheets and columns, the steam of the angry water was blown at intervals toward the earth-man, scalding his bare face and hands. The thongs cut into his flesh intolerably, when the monster leapt across mighty fissures that had been made by the cracking of the super-heated stone.

Howard's brain seemed to broil in his head, and his blood was a fiery torrent in his roasted body. He fought for breath—and if thr breath seared his lungs. The vapors eddied about him in deepening swirls, and he heard a muffled roaring whose cause he could not determine. He became aware that the heat-lizard had paused; and moving his head a little, saw that it was standing on the rocky verge of a great gulf, into which the waters fell to an unknown depth, amid curtains of steam.

His heart and his senses failed him, as he struggled like a dying man to draw breath from the suffocating air. The precipice and the monster seemed to pitch and reel beneath him, the vapors swayed vertiginously, and he thought that he was plunging with his weird steed into the unfathomably shrouded gulf.

Then, from the burning mist, the hooded forms of white and shining devils appeared to rise up and seize him, as if to receive him into their unknown hell. He saw their strange, unhuman faces; he felt the touch of their fingers, with a queer and preternatural coolness, on his seared flesh; and then all was darkness. . .

II

Howard awoke under circumstances that were novel and inexplicable. Instantly, with great clearness, he remembered all that had occurred prior to his final lapse, but could find no clue to his present situation.

He was lying on his back in a green radiance—a soft and soothing light that reminded him of the verdant green and emerald seawater of the far-off Earth. The light was all about him, it seemed to flow beneath and above him, laying his body with cool ripples that left a sense of supreme well-being.

He saw that he was quite naked; and he had the feeling of immense buoyancy, as if he had been rendered weightless. Wondering, he saw that his skin was entirely free of burns, and realized that he felt no pain, no ill-effects of any kind, such as would have seemed inevitable after his dread ordeal in the Mercutian desert.

For awhile, he did not associate the green luminosity with any idea of limitation; for he seemed to be floating in a vast abyss. Then, suddenly, he perceived his error. Putting out his hands, he touched on either side the wall of a narrow vault, and saw that its roof was only a few feet above him. The floor lay at an equal distance beneath; and he himself, without visible support, was reclining in mid-air. The green light, streaming mysteriously from all the sides of the vault, had given him the illusion of unbounded space.

Abruptly, at his feet, the end of the vault seemed to disappear in a white glory like pure sunlight. Long, sinuous, six-fingered hands reached out from the glory, grasped him about the ankles, and drew him gently from the green-lit space in which he floated. Weight seemed to return to him as his limbs and body entered the dazzling whiteness; and a moment later, he found himself standing erect in a large chamber, lined with some sort of pale, shimmering metal. Beside him, a strange, unearthly being was dosing the panel-like door through which he had been drawn from the emerald-litten vault; and beyond this being, there were two others of the same type, one of whom was holding Howard's garments in his arms.

In growing astonishment, Howard gazed at these incredible entities. Each of them was about the height of a tall man, and the physical conformation was vaguely similar to that of mankind, but was marked by an almost god-like beauty and grace of contour, such as could hardly have been found in the most perfect of antique marbles.

Nostrils, ears, lips, hands, and all other features and members, were carved with well-nigh fantastic delicacy; and the skin of these beings, none of whom wore any sore or raiment, was white and translucent, and seemed to shine with an internal radiance. In place of hair, the full, intellectual heads were crowned with a mass of heavy flesh-like filaments, hued with changing iridescence, and tossing and curling with a weird, restless life, like the serpent locks of Medusa. The feet were like those of men, except for long, horny spurs that protruded from the heels.

The three entities returned the earth-man's gaze with unreadable eyes, brilliant as diamonds and cold as far-off stars. Then, to complete his amazement, the being who had just closed the door of the vault began to address him in high, flute-sweet tones, which baffled his ears at first, but after a little, became recognizable as flawless English.

"We trust," said the being, "that you have recovered wholly from your late experience. It was fortunate that we were watching you through our televisions when you were seized by the savages and were bound to the back of the groko—that creature known to you as the 'heat-lizard.' These beasts are often tamed by the savages, who, being ignorant of the use of artificial heat, make a strange use of the groko s' proclivities for ranging the terrible sunward deserts. Captives caught from rival tribes—and sometimes even their own kin—are tied to the monsters, who carry them through oven-like temperatures till the victims are thoroughly roasted—or, as you would say, done to a turn. Then the grokos return to their masters—who proceed to feast on cooked meat.

"Luckily we were able to rescue you in time; for the groko, in its wanderings, approached one of our cavern-exits in the great desert. Your body was covered with enormous burns when we found you; and you

would assuredly have died from the effects, if we had not exposed you to the healing ray in the green vault. This ray, like many others, is unknown to your scientists; and it has, among other things, the peculiar power of nullifying gravity. Hence your sensation of weightlessness under its influence."

"Where am I? And who are you?" cried Howard.

"You are in the interior of Mercury," said the being. "I am Agvur, a savant, and a high noble of the ruling race of this world." He went on in a tone of half-disdainful explanation, as if lecturing to a child: "We call ourselves the Oumnis; and we are an old people, wise and erudite in all the secrets of nature. To protect ourselves from the intense radiations of the sun, which of course are more powerful on Mercury than on the further planets, we dwell in caverns lined with a metallic substance of our own composition. This substance, even in thin sheets, excludes all the harmful rays, some of which can pierce all other forms of matter to any depth. When we emerge to the outer world, we wear suits of this metal, whose name in our language is mouffa.

"Being thus insulated at all times, we are practically immortal, as well as exempt from disease; for all death and decay, in the course of nature, are caused by certain solar rays whose frequency is beyond detection of your instruments. The metal does not exclude the radiations that are beneficial and necessary to life; and by means of an apparatus similar in its principle to radio, our under-world is illumined with transmitted sunlight."

Howard began to express his thanks to Agvur. His brain was giddy with wonder, and his thoughts whirled in a maze of astounding speculations.

Agvur, with a swift and graceful gesture, seemed to wave aside his expression of gratitude. The being who bore Howard's garments came forward, and helped him, in a deft, valet-like fashion, to put them on.

Howard wanted to ask a hundred questions; for the very existence of intelligent, highly evolved beings such as the Oumnis on Mercury had been unsuspected by earth-scientists. Above all, he was curious regarding the

mastery of human language displayed by Agvur. His question, as if divined by a sort of telepathy, was forestalled by the Mercutian.

"We are possessed of many delicate instruments," said Agvur, "which enable us to see and hear—and even to pick up other sense-impressions—at immense distances. We have long studied the nearer planets, Venus, Earth and Mars, and have often amused ourselves by listening to human conversations. Our brain-development, which is vastly superior to yours, has made it a simple matter for us to learn your speech; and of course the science, history and sociology of your world is an open book to us. We watched the approach of your ether-ship from space; and all the movements of your party since landing have been observed by us."

"How far am I from the rocket-ship?" asked Howard. "I trust you can help me to get back."

"You are now a full mile beneath the surface of Mercury," said Agvur, "and the part of the twilight zone in which your vessel lies is about five miles away and could readily be reached by an incline leading upward to a small exit in a natural cavern within sight of the ship. Doubtless some of the members of your party have seen the cavern and have assumed that it was a mere animal-den. When your vessel landed, we took care to block the exit with a few loose boulders and fragments of detritus, easily removable."

"As to rejoining your comrades,—well, I fear that it will scarcely be practicable. You must be our guest—perhaps indefinitely." There was a kind of brusqueness in his tone as he concluded:

"We do not want our existence known to terrestrial explorers. From what we have seen of your world, and your dealings with the peoples of Mars and Venus, whose territories you have begun to arrogate, we think it would be unwise to expose ourselves to human curiosity and rapacity. We are few in number, and we prefer to remain in peace—undisturbed."

Before Howard could frame any sort of protest, there came a singular interruption. Loud and imperious, with clarion-like notes, a voice rang out in the empty air between Agvur and the earth-man. Howard was

ungovernably startled; and the three Mercurians all seemed to stiffen with rapt attention. The voice went on for nearly a minute, speaking rapidly, with accents of arrogant command. Howard could make nothing of the words, whose very phonetic elements were strange and unfamiliar. But a chill ran through him at something which he sensed in the formidable voice—a something that told of relentless, implacable power.

The voice ended on a high, harsh note, and the listening Mercurians made a queer gesture with their heads and hands, as if to indicate submission to a superior will

"Our temporal ruler and chief scientist, Ounavodo," said Agvur, "has just spoken from his hall in the lower levels. After hours of deliberation, he has reached a decision regarding your fate. In a sense, I regret the decision, which seems a trifle harsh to me; but the mandates of the Shol, as we call our ancient ruler, are to be obeyed without question. I must ask you to follow me, and I shall explain as we go along. The order must be executed without delay."

In perplexity not unmingled with consternation, Howard was led by Agvur to a sort of inclined hall or tunnel, on which the chamber opened. The tunnel was seemingly interminable, and was lit by brilliant sourceless light—the transmitted sun-rays of which the Mercurian had spoken. Like the chamber, it was lined with a pale metallic substance.

An odd machine, shaped like a small open boat, and mounted on little wheels or castors, stood before the door, on the easy monotonous grade. Agvur stationed himself in its hollow prow, motioning Howard to follow. When the other Oumnis had placed themselves behind Howard, Agvur pulled a sort of curving lever, and the machine began to glide rapidly, in perfect silence, down the interminable hell.

"This tunnel," said Agvur, "runs upward to the exit near your vessel; and it leads down to the heart of our underworld realms. If the worst happens—as I fear it may—you will see only the antechambers of our labyrinth of caverns, in which we have dwelt, immune to disease and old age, for so

many centuries. I am sorry; for I had hoped to take you to my own laboratories, in the nether levels. There you might have served me . . . in certain biologic tests.

"Ounavodo," he went on, in calm explanatory tones, "has ordered the fusing and casting of a certain quantity of the mouffa- alloy, to be used in the making of new garments. This alloy, invented aeons ago by our metallurgists, is a compound of no less than six elements, and is made in two grades, one for the lining of our caverns, and the other exclusively for raiment.

"Both, for their perfection, require a seventh ingredient—a small admixture of living, protoplasmic matter, added to the molten metal in the furnace. Only thus—for a reason that is still mysterious to our savants—can the mouffa acquire its full power of insulation against the deadly solar rays.

"The mouffa used in comparatively heavy sheets for cavern- lining needs only the substance of inferior life-forms, such as the grokos, the half-animal savages of the twilight zone, and various creatures which we catch or breed in our underworld tunnels. But the higher grade of mouffa, employed in light, flexible sheets for suiting, requires the protoplasm of superior life.

"Regretfully, at long intervals, we have been compelled to sacrifice one of our own scanty number in the making of new metal to replace that which has become outworn. Whenever possible, we select those who in some manner have offended against our laws; but such infringements are rare, and commonly the victim has been chosen by a sort of divination

"After studying you closely in his televisic mirror, Ounavodo has decided that you are sufficiently high in the evolutionary scale to provide the protoplasmic element in the next lot of mouffa. At least, he thinks that the test is worth trying, in the interests of science."

"However, in order that you should not feel that you are being discriminated against or treated unjustly, you will merely take your chance of being chosen from among many others. The method of selection will be revealed to you in due time."

While Agvur was speaking, the vehicle had sped swiftly down the endless incline, passing several other barge-shaped cars driven by the white, naked Immortals, whose serpentine locks flowed behind them on the air. Occasionally there were openings in the tunnel wall, leading no doubt to side-caverns; and after a mile or two, they came to a triple branching, where caverns ran upward at reverse angles from the main passage. Horrified and shaken as he was by Agvur's disclosure, Howard took careful note of the route they were following.

He made no reply to the Mercurian. He felt his helplessness in the hands of an alien, extra-human race, equipped, it would seem, with scientific knowledge and power to which humanity had not yet attained. Thinking with desperate quickness, he decided that it would be better to pretend resignation to the will of his captors. His hand stole instinctively to the pocket in which he had carried the little tonanite pistol with its twelve charges of deadly heat-producing explosive; and he was dismayed, though hardly surprised, to find that the weapon was gone.

His movement was noted by Agvur; and a strange sardonic smile flickered across the unhumanly intellectual face of the savant. In his desperation, Howard thought of leaping from the car; but to do this would have meant death or serious injury at the high speed of their descent.

He became aware that the incline had ended in a large level cavern with numerous side-openings where multitudes of Oumnis were passing in and out. Here they left the boat-like vehicle; and Howard was led by Agvur through one of the side-exits, into another vast chamber, where perhaps fifty of the white people were standing in silent, semi-circular rows.

These beings were all fronting toward the opposite wall; but many of them turned to watch the earth-man with expressions of unreadable curiosity or disdain, as Agvur drew him forward to the first of the waiting ranks and motioned him to take his place at the end

Now, for the first time, Howard saw the singular object which the Oumnis were facing. Apparently it was some sort of rootless plant-growth, with a

swollen, yellowish bole or body like that of barrel-cactus. From this body, tall as a man, leafless branches of vivid arsenic green, fringed with a white hispidity, trailed in limp, sinuous masses on the cavern-floor.

Agyur spoke in a piercing whisper: "The plant is called the Roccalim, and we employ it to choose, from a given quota, the person who shall be cast into the furnace of molten mouffa. You will perceive that, including yourself, there are about fifty candidates for this honor—all of whom, for one reason or another, in varying degrees, have incurred the displeasure of Ounavodo, our have given rise to doubt regarding their social usefulness. One by one, you are to walk about the Roccalim in a complete circle, approaching well within reach of the sensitive, mobile branches; and the plant will indicate the destined victim by touching him with the tips of these branches."

Howard felt, as Agyur spoke, the chill of a sinister menace; but in the weirdness of the ceremony that followed, he almost lost his apprehension of personal peril.

One by one, from the further end of the row in which he was standing, the silent Oumnis went forward and circled the strange plant, walking slowly within a few feet of the inert branches of poisonous green that resembled sleepy, half-coiled serpents. The Roccalim preserved a torpid stillness, without the least sign of animation, as Oumni after Oumni finished his perilous circuit and retired to the further side of the room, there to stand and watch the perambulations of the others.

About twenty of the white Immortals had undergone this ordeal, when Howard's turn came. Resolutely, with a sense of unreality and grotesquery rather than actual danger, he stepped forward and began his circuit of the living plant. The Oumnis looked on like alabaster Statues; and all was utterly still and silent, except for a muffled, mysterious throbbing. as of underworld machinery at a distance.

Howard moved on in an arc, watching the green branches with a growing tenseness. He had gone half the required distance when he felt, rather than

saw, a flash of swift, intense light that appeared to stab downward from the cavern roof and strike the lumpish yellow bole of the Roccalim. The light faded in the merest fraction of time, leaving Howard in doubt as to whether he had really seen it.

Then, as he went on, he perceived with startled horror that the trailing tentacular boughs had begun to twitch and quiver, and were lifting slowly from the floor and waving toward him. On and on they came, rising and straightening, like a mass of ropy kelp that flows in an ocean-stream. They reached him, they slithered with reptilian ease about his body, and touched his face with their venomous-looking tips, clammy and inquisitive.

Howard drew back, wrenching himself away from the waving mass, and found Agvur at his elbow. The face of the Mercutian was touched with an unearthly gloating; and his iridescent locks floated upward, quivering with weird restlessness, like the Roccalim branches.

At that moment, it came to Howard that his fate had been predetermined from the beginning; that the swift, evanescent flash of light, proceeding from an unknown source, had perhaps served in some manner to irritate the living plant and provoke the action of its tentacular limbs.

Swift anger flared in the earth-man, but he repressed it. He must be cautious, must watch for an opportunity—even the slimmest—of escape. By giving the impression that he was resigned, he might throw his captors off their guard.

He saw that a number of new Mercutians, equipped with long glittering tubes like blow-pipes, had entered the cavern and were surrounding him. The companions of his late ordeal had begun to disperse in various directions.

"I am sorry," said Agvur, "that the choice should have fallen upon you. But your death will be swift—and the time is near at hand. The fusing must be completed, and the metal must be poured off and cast in thin, malleable sheets, before the next term of darkness and slumber, which will occur in little more than an hour. During this term—three hours out of every thirty-

six—the transmitted sunlight is excluded from all our chambers and passages; and most of our machinery, which derives its power from light, is rendered inactive."

III

In mingled horror and dumbfoundment, Howard was taken through an opposite entrance of the Roccalim's cavern and along a sort of hall which appeared to run parallel with the one in which the incline had ended. Agvur walked at his side; and the Oumni guards were grouped before and behind him. He surmised that the glittering, hollow tubes they carried were weapons of some novel type.

As they went on, the mysterious throbbing noise drew steadily nearer Howard saw that the far end of the corridor was illumed with a fiery red light. The air was touched with queer metallic odors; and the temperature, which had heretofore been one of unobstrusive warmth, seemed to rise slightly.

At one side, through an open door in the passage wall, as they neared the source of the red light, Howard saw a large room whose further end was filled with lofty banks of shining cylinder-shaped mechanisms. In front of these mechanisms, a solitary Mercutian stood watching an immense pivot-mounted ball which appeared to be filled nearly to the top with liquid blackness, leaving a crescent of bright crystal. Near the ball, there was a sort of inclined switch-board, from which arose many rods and levers, made of some transparent material.

"The lighting-apparatus of all our caverns is controlled from that room," said Agvur, with a sort of casual boastfulness. "When the ball has turned entirely black, the sunlight will be turned off for the three-hour period, which gives us all the sleep and rest we require."

A moment more, and the party reached the end of the passage. Howard stood blinking and breathless with wonder when he saw the source of the dazzling red light.

He was on the threshold of a cavern so enormous that its roof was lost in luminosity and gave the effect of a natural sky. Titanic machines of multiform types, some squat and ungainly and others like prodigious bulbs or huge inverted funnels, crowded the cavern-floor; and in the center, towering above the rest was a double, terrace-like platform of sable stone, thirty feet in height, with many pipes of dark metal that ramified from its two tiers to the floor, like the legs of some colossal spider. From the middle of the summit, the ruddy light arose in a great pillar. Gleaming strangely against the fiery glow, the forms of Oumnis moved like midges.

Just within the entrance of the Cyclopean room, there stood a sort of rack, from which hung a dozen suits of the mouffa-metal. Their construction was very simple, and they closed and opened at the breast, with odd dove-tailings. The head was a loose, roomy hood; and the metal had somehow been rendered transparent in a crescent-like strip across the eyes.

The suits were donned by Agvur and the guards; and Howard noticed that they were extremely light and flexible. He himself, at the same time, was ordered to disrobe.

"The mouffa mixture, during the process of fusing, gives off some dangerous radiations," said Agvur. "These will hardly matter in your case; and the suits of finished metal will protect my companions and me against them, even as against the deadly solar rays."

Howard had now removed all his clothes, which he left lying near the rack. Still pretending his resignation, but thinking desperately all the while and observing closely the details of his situation, he was led along the crowded floor, amid the sinister throbbing and muttering of the strange engines. Steep, winding stairs gave access to the terraced mass of dark stone. The earth-man saw as he went upward, that the lower tier was fitted with broad,

shallow moulds, in which doubtless the metal would run off from the furnace to cool in sheets.

Howard felt an almost overpowering heat when he stood on the upper platform; and the red glare blinded him. The furnace itself, he now saw, was a circular crater, fifteen feet across, in the black stone. It was filled nearly to the rim with the molten metal, which eddied with a slow maelstrom-like movement, agitated by some unknown means, and glowing unbearably. The black stone must have been a non-conductor of heat, for it was cool beneath Howard's bare soles.

On the broad space about the furnace, a dozen Oumnis, all sheathed in the glittering mouffa, were standing. One of them was turning a small, complicated-looking wheel, mounted obliquely on a miniature pillar; and as if he were regulating the temperature of the furnace, the metal glowed more brightly and eddied with new swiftness in its black crater.

Apart from this wheel, and several rods that protruded from long, notched grooves in the stone, there was no visible machinery on the platform. The stone itself was seemingly all one block, except for a slab, ten feet long and two feet wide, which ran to the crater's verge. Howard was directed to stand on this slab, at the end opposite to the furnace,

"In another minute," said Agvur, "the slab will begin to move, will tilt, and precipitate you into the molten mouffa. If you wish, we can administer to you a powerful narcotic, so that your death will be wholly free of fear or pain."

Overcome by an unreal horror, Howard nodded his head in mechanical assent, snatching hopelessly at the momentary reprieve. Perhaps . . . even yet . . . there might be a chance; though he could have laughed at himself for the impossible notion.

Peering again toward the awful furnace, he was startled to see an inexplicable thing. Foot by foot, from the solid stone of the crater's further lip, there rose the figure of a Mercurian, till it stood with haughty features, very tall and pale and wholly naked upon the platform. Then, as Howard

gasped with incredulous awe, the figure seemed to step in a stately manner from the verge, and hang suspended in air above the glowing cauldron,

"It is the Shol, Ounavodo," said Agvur in reverent tones, "though he is now many miles away in the nether caverns, he has projected his televisual image to attend the ceremony."

One of the Mercutian guards had come forward, bearing in his hands a heavy, shallow bowl of some bronze-like substance, filled with a hueless liquid. This he proffered to the earth-man.

"The narcotic acts, immediately," said Agvur, as if in reassurance.

Giving a quick, unobtrusive glance about him, Howard accepted the bowl and raised it to his lips. The narcotic was odorless as well as colorless, and had the consistency of a thick, sluggish oil.

"Be quick," admonished Agvur. "The slab responds to a timing mechanism; and already it starts to move."

Howard saw that the slab was gliding slowly, bearing him as on a great protruding tongue toward the furnace. It began to tilt a little beneath his feet,

Tensing all his muscles, he leapt from the slab and hurled the heavy bowl in the face of Agvur, who stood close by. The Mercutian staggered, and before he could regain his balance, Howard sprang upon him, and lifting him bodily, flung him across the rising, sliding slab, which bore Agvur along in its accelerated movement. Stunned by the fall, and unable to recover himself, he rolled from the tilting stone into the white-hot maelstrom and disappeared with a splash. The liquid seethed and eddied with a swifter motion than before.

For a moment, the assembled Oumnis stood like metal statues; and the televisual image of the Shol, standing inscrutable and watchful above the furnace, had not stirred. Leaping at the foremost guards, Howard flung them aside as they started to lift their tubular weapons. He gained the

platform's railless verge, but saw that several Oumnis had run to intercept him before he could reach the stairs. It was a twelve-foot drop to the second platform, and he feared to leap with bare feet. The strange curving pipes which ran from the upper platform to the main cavern-floor, offered his only possible means of escape.

These pipes were of darkish metal, perfectly smooth and joint-less, and were about ten inches thick. Straddling the nearest one, where it entered the black stone just below the verge, Howard began to slide as quickly as he could toward the floor.

His captors had followed him to the platform-edge; and facing them as he slid, the earth-man saw two of the Immortals aim their weapons at him. From the hollow tubes, there issued glowing balls of yellow fire which came flying toward Howard. One of them fell short, striking the side of the great pipe, and causing it to melt away like so much solder. He saw the dripping of the molten metal as he ducked to avoid the second ball.

Others of the Oumnis were levelling their weapons; and a rain of the terrible fire-globes fell about Howard as he slid along the pipe's lower portion, where it curved sharply toward the floor. One of the balls brushed his right arm and left an agonizing burn.

He reached the floor, and saw that a dozen Immortals were descending the platform-stairs in great bounds. The main cavern, fortunately, was deserted. The earth-man leapt for the shelter of a huge rhomboidal machine, and heard the hiss and drip of liquid metal as the fire-balls struck behind him.

Threading his way among the looming mechanisms, and interposing their bulks as much as possible between himself and his pursuers, Howard made for the entrance through which he had been conducted to the furnace by Agvur. There were other exits from the immense cavern; but these would have led him deeper into the unknown labyrinth. He had no clearly formulated plan, and his ultimate escape was more than problematical; but his instincts bade him to go on as long as he could before being recaptured.

He heard the mysterious pounding of the untended mechanisms all about him; but there was no sound from his pursuers, who came on in grim silence, with incredible leaps, gaining visibly upon him. Then, startlingly, as he rounded one of the machines, he found himself confronted by the televisual phantom of the Shol, standing in an attitude of menace, and waving him back with imperious gestures. He felt the awful burning gaze of eyes that were hypnotic with age-old wisdom and immemorial power; and he seemed to hurl himself against an unseen barrier, as he sprang at the formidable image. He felt a slight electric shock that jarred his entire body; but apparently the phantom was capable of little more than visual manifestation. It seemed to melt away; and then it was hovering above and a little before him, pointing out his line of flight to the pursuing Oumnis. Passing a huge squat cylinder, he came to the rack on which the suits of mouffa had hung. Two of them still remained. Disregarding his own garments, which lay in a heap nearby, he snatched one of the metal suits from its place and rolled the thin, marvellously flexible stuff into a bundle as he continued his flight. Perhaps, somewhere, he would have a chance to put it on; and thus disguised, might hope to prolong his freedom—or even to find his way from this tremendous underworld.

There was a broad open space between the rack and the cavern exit. Howard's pursuers emerged from the medley of towering mechanisms before he could reach the doorway, and he was forced to dodge another fusillade of the fire-balls, which splattered in white-hot fury all around him. Before him, the menacing phantom of the Shol still hovered.

Now he had gained the corridor beyond the exit. He meant to retrace the route by which he had come with Agvur, if possible. But as he neared the door through which he had seen the watcher of the darkening globe, and the light-controlling mechanisms, he perceived that a number of Mercutians, armed with fire-tubes, were coming to intercept his flight in the corridor. Doubtless they had been summoned through some sort of telaudition by the furnace-tenders.

Looking back, he saw that his former guards were dosing upon him. In a few moments, he would be surrounded and trapped. With no conscious

idea, other than the impulse to flee, he darted through the open door of the cavern of light-machines.

The solitary watcher still stood beside the massive ball with his back toward the earth-man. The crystal crescent on the dark globe had narrowed to a thin horn, like the bow of a dying moon.

A mad, audacious inspiration came to Howard, as he recalled what Agyur had told him about the control of the lighting-system. Quickly and silently he stole toward the watcher of the ball.

Again the vengeful image of the Shol stood before him, as if to drive him back; and as he neared the unsuspecting watcher, it rose in air and poised above the ball, warning the Oumni with a loud, harsh cry. The watcher turned, snatching up a heavy metal rod that lay on the floor, and leapt to meet Howard, raising his weapon for a ferocious blow.

Before the rod could descend, the earth-man's fist had caught the Mercutian full in the face, driving him back upon the slanting dial of regulative levers beside the pivot-mounted ball. There was a shivering crash as he fell among the curving crystalline rods; and at the same instant, utter overwhelming darkness rushed upon the room and blotted out the banks of gleaming mechanism, the fallen Oumni, and the phantom of Shol.

IV

Standing uncertain and bewildered, the earth-man heard a low moaning from the injured Mercutian, and a loud wail of consternation from the corridor without, where the two groups of his pursurers had found themselves overtaken by darkness. The wailing ceased abruptly; and except for the moaning near at hand, which still went on, there was absolute silence. Howard realized that he no longer heard the mutter of the strange engines in the furnace-room. Doubtless their operation had in some manner been connected with the lighting-system, and had ceased with darkness.

Howard still retained the suit of mouffa. Groping about, he found the metal rod that had dropped from the hand of the watcher. It would make a highly serviceable weapon. Grasping it firmly, he started in what he surmised to be the direction of the door. He went slowly and cautiously, knowing that his pursuers would have gathered to await him, or might even be creeping toward him.

Listening intently, he heard a faint metallic rustle. Some of the Oumnis, clothed in mouffa, were coming to seek him in the darkness. His own bare feet were soundless; and stepping to one side, he heard the rustling pass. With redoubled caution, he stole on toward the door, stretching one hand before him.

Suddenly his fingers touched a smooth surface, which he knew to be the wall. He had missed the door in his groping. Listening again, he seemed to hear a faint sound on the left, as if he were being followed; and moving in the opposite direction, along the wall, he encountered empty space and saw a dim glimmer of seemingly sourceless light.

His eyes were growing accustomed to the darkness, and he made out a mass of dubious shadows against the glimmering. He had found the door, which was lined with waiting Oumnis.

Lifting his bar, he rushed upon the shadows, striking blow after blow, and stumbling over the bodies that fell before his onslaught. There were shrill cries about him, and he broke from chill, mouffa-sheathed fingers that sought to clutch him in the gloom. Then, somehow, he had broken through, and was in the corridor.

The glimmering, he saw, came from the cavern of machines, where the hidden furnace still burned. Into the dying glow that lit the entrance, there came hurrying figures, each of which appeared to have an enormous Cyclopean eye of icy green. Howard realized that more Mercutians, bearing artificial lights, were coming to join the pursuit.

Keeping close to the corridor wall, he ran as fast as he dared in the solid blackness, toward the cavern of the Roccalim. He heard a stealthy metallic rustling, as the foremost Oumnis followed; and glancing back, saw them dimly outlined against the remote glnw They came on in a cautious, lagging manner, as if they were waiting for the new contingent with the green lights. After a little, he saw that the two parties had united and were following him steadily.

Fingering the wall at intervals as he ran, Howard reached the entrance of the large chamber in whose center stood the Roccalim. The lights were gaining upon him rapidly. Calculating in his mind, as well as he could, the direction of the opposite doorway, giving on the main tunnel that led to the incline, he started toward it. As he went on, he veered a little, thinking to avoid the monstrous plant-growth. It was like plunging into a blind abyss; and he seemed to wander for an immense distance, feeling sure that he would reach the opposite wall at any moment.

Suddenly his feet tripped on an unknown obstruction, and he fell at full length, landing on what seemed to be a tangle of great hairy ropes that pricked his bare skin in a thousand places. Instantly, he knew that he had collided with the Roccalim.

The mass of python-like branches lay inert beneath him, without a quiver of animation. Doubtless, in the absense of light, the queer, semi-animal growth was torpid.

Pulling himself from the spiny couch on which he had fallen, Howard looked back and perceived the thronging of green lights, cold and malignant as the eyes of boreal dragons. His pursuers were entering the cavern, and would overtake him in a few instants.

Still clutching the mouffa garments and the metal bar, he groped across the tangle of branches, pricking his feet painfully at every step. Suddenly he plunged through to the floor, and found that he was standing in an open space where the heavy arcapers, descending from the hole, had parted on either side. Crouching down, as the lights approached him, he found a low,

hollow place into which he could crawl beneath the branches, close to the cactus-like stem.

The creepers were thick enough to conceal him from cranial scrutiny. Lying there, with their prickly weight upon him, he saw through narrow rifts the passing of the green lights toward the outer cavern. Apparently none of the Mercutians had thought of pausing to examine the mass of Roccalim branches.

Emerging from his fantastic hiding-place, after all the Oumnis had gone past, Howard followed them boldly. He saw the vanishing of their icy lamps as they entered the outside tunnel. Moving again in utter darkness, he found the exit. There he recovered the running pencils of light, cast by the hurrying lamps as their bearers went toward the incline.

Following, Howard stumbled against an unseen object, which was either the vehicle used by Agvur, or another of the same type. Probably, in the shutting-off of power, these vehicles were now useless: otherwise, some of them might have been employed by the earth-man's pursuers. Hunters and hunted were on an equal footing; and realizing this, Howard felt for the first time an actual thrill of hope.

Going on, with the lights moving steadily before him, he started up the interminable incline which led—perhaps—to freedom. The tunnel was deserted, except for the hunters and their human quarry; and it seemed as if the multitude of Oumnis seen by Howard on his arrival with Agvur had all retired with the falling of darkness. Perhaps they had to for the usual three-hour term of night and repose.

The light-bearers appeared to disregard all the side passages that ran from the main tunnel. It occurred to Howard that they were hastening toward the surface exits, with the idea of cutting off his possible escape. Afterwards they would hunt him down at leisure.

The incline ran straight ahead; and there was little danger of losing sight of the lights. Howard paused an instant to slip on the suit of mouffa, hoping that it might serve to deceive or baffle his hunters later on. The raiment was

easily donned, and fitted him quite loosely; but the unfamiliar intricate method of fastening eluded his untaught fingers. He could not remember quite how it had been done; so he went on with the strange garment open at the breast. The queer elongated heels, made to accommodate the spurs of the Immortals, flapped behind him.

He kept as much as possible the same relative distance between himself and the Oumnis. Glancing back, after awhile, he was horrified to see, far down, the tiny green eyes of another group of lights following him. Evidently others had rallied to the pursuit.

It was a long, interminably tedious climb—mile after mile of that monotonous tunnel whose gloom was relieved only by the sinister points of green light. The Mercutians went on at a tireless pace, unhuman and implacable; and only by ceaseless exertion, half walking, half running, could the earthman maintain his position midway between the companies of lamps.

He panted heavily, and a faintness came upon him at times, in which the lights seemed to blur. A great weariness clogged his limbs and his brain. How long it was since he had eaten, he could not know. He was not aware of hunger or thirst; but he seemed to fight an ever-growing weakness. The corridor became a black eternity, haunted by the green eyes of cosmic demons.

Hour after hour he went on, through a cycle of sunless night. He lost the sense of time, and his movements became a sort of automation. His limbs were numb and dead, and it was only his relentless will that lived and drove him on. Almost, at times, he forgot where he was going—forget everything but the blind, primitive impulse of flight. He was a nameless thing, fleeing from anonymous terror.

At last, through the crushing numbness of his fatigue, there dawned the realization that he was gaining a little on the group of lights ahead. Possibly their bearers had paused in doubt or debate. Then, suddenly, he saw that the

lights were spreading out, were diverging and vanishing on either hand, till only four of them remained.

Dimly puzzled, he went on, and came to that triple division of the tunnel which he remembered passing with Agvur. He saw now that the party of Oumnis had divided into three contingents, following all the branches. Doubtless each tunnel led to a separate exit.

Recalling what Agvur had said, he kept to the middle passage. This, if Agvur had spoken truly, would lead to an exit in the twilight zone, not far from the rocket-ship. The other tunnels would lead he knew not where—perhaps to the terrible deserts of heat and the piled, chaotic glaciers of the nightward hemisphere. The one he was following, with luck, would enable him to rejoin his comrades.

A sort of second wind came to Howard now—as if hope had revived his swooning faculties. More clearly than before, he became conscious of the utter silence and profound mystery of this underworld empire, of which he had seen—was to see—so little. His hope quickened when he looked back and saw that the lights behind him had diminished in number, as if the second party had likewise separated to follow all three of the tunnels. It was obvious that there was no general pursuit. In all likelihood the smashing of the transmission levers had deranged all the machineries of the Immortals, even to their system of communication. Howard's escape, doubtless, was known only to those who had been present or near at the time. He had brought chaos and demoralization upon this super-scientific people.

V

Mile after mile of that monotone of gloom. Then, with a start of bewilderment, the earth-man realized that the four lights in front had all disappeared. Looking back, he saw that the lamps which followed him had similarly vanished. About, before and behind there was nothing but a solid, tomb-like wall of darkness. Howard felt a strange disconcertment, together

with the leaden, crushing return of his weariness. He went on with doubtful, slackening steps, following the right hand wall with cautious fingers. After awhile he turned a sharp corner; but he did not recover the lost lights. There was a drafty darkness in the air, and odor of stone and mineral, such as he had not met heretofore in the mouffa-lined caverns. He began to wonder if he had somehow gone astray: there might have been other branchings of the tunnel, which he had missed in his groping. In a blind surge of alarm, he started to run, and crashed headlong against the angular wall of another turn in the passage.

Half-stunned, he picked himself up. He hardly knew, henceforth, whether he was maintaining the original course of his flight or was doubling on his own steps. For aught that he could tell, he might be lost beyond all redirection in a cross-labyrinth of caverns. He stumbled and staggered along, colliding many times with the tunnel-sides, which seemed to have closed in upon him and to have grown rough with flinty projections.

The draft in his face grew stronger, with a smell of water. Presently the blindfold darkness before him melted into a chill, bluish glimmering, which revealed the rugate walls and boulder-fanged roof of the natural passage he was following.

He came out in a huge, chamber-like cave of some marble-pallid stone with twisted columnar forms. The glimmering, he saw, was a kind of phosphorescence emitted by certain vegetable growths, probably of a thallophytic nature, which rose in thick clusters from the floor, attaining the height of a tall man. They were flabby and fulsome-looking, with abortive branches, and pendulous fruit-shaped nodes of etiolated purple along their puffy, whitish-blue stems. The phosphorescence, which issued equally from all portions of these plants, served to light the gloom for some distance around, and brought out dimly the columnated character of the cavern's further walls.

Howard saw, as he passed among them, that the plants were rootless. It seemed that they would topple at a touch; but happening to stumble against one of the clumps, he found that they supported his weight with resilient

solidity. No doubt they were attached firmly by some sort of suction to the smooth stone.

In the middle of the cave, behind a lofty fringing of these luminous fungi, he discovered a pool of water, fed by a thin trickle that descended through the gloom from a high vault that the phosphorescence could not illumine. Impelled by sudden, furious thirst, he slid back the mouffa-hood and drank recklessly, though the fluid was sharp and bitter with strange minerals. Then, with the ravening hunger of one who has not eaten for days, he began to eye the pear-shaped nodes of the tall thallophytes. He broke one of them from its parent stem, tore off the glimmering rind, and found that it was filled with a mealy pulp. A savourous, peppery odor tempted him to taste the pulp. It was not unpleasant, and forgetting all caution (possibly he had become a little mad from his extra-human ordeals) he devoured the stuff in hasty mouthfuls.

The node must have contained a narcotic principle; for almost immediately he was overpowered by an insuperable drowsiness. He fell back and lay where he had fallen, in a deep sodden sopor without dreams, for a length of time which, as far as he could know, might have been the interim of death between two lives. He awoke with violent nausea, a racking headache, and a feeling of hopeless, irredeemable confusion.

He drank again from the bitter pool, and then began to hunt with cloudy senses and feeble, uncertain steps for another exit than the tunnel by which he had entered. His mind was dull and heavily drugged, as if from the lingering of the unknown narcotic, and he could formulate no conscious plan of action but was led only by an animal-like impulse of flight.

He discovered a second opening, low, and fanged with broken-off pillar formations, in the opposite wall of the cavern. It was filed with Stygian darkness; and before entering it, he tore a lumpy branch from one of the phosphorescent fungi, to serve him in lieu of other light.

His subsequent wanderings were nightmarish and interminable. He seemed to have gotten into some tremendous maze of natural caverns, varying

greatly in size, and intersecting each other in a bewildering honeycomb fashion: an underworld that lay beyond the metal-insulated realm of the Oumnis.

There were long, tediously winding tunnels that went down into Cimmerian depth, or climbed at acolivitous angles. There were strait cubby-holes, dripping with unknown liquid ores, through which he crawled like a lizard on his belly; and Dantean gulfs that he skirted on slippery, perilous, broken ledges, hearing far below him the sullen sigh or the weirdly booming roar of sub Mrcrutian waters.

For awhile, his way led mainly downward, as if he were plunging to the bowels of the planet. The air became warmer and more humid. He came at last to the sheer brink of an incommensurable abyss, where noctilucant fungi, vaster than any he had yet seen, grew tall as giant trees along the precipice that he followed for miles. They were like fantastic monolithic tapers; but their luminosity failed to reveal the giddy depth above and beneath.

He met none of the Oumnis in this inexhaustible world of night and silence. But after he had rounded the great gulf, and had started to re-ascend in smaller caverns, he began to encounter, at intervals, certain blind, white, repulsive creatures the size of an overgrown rat, but without even the rudiments of tail or legs. In his demoralized condition of mind and body, he felt a primitive fear of these things, rather than the mere repugnance which their aspect would normally have aroused. However, they were non-aggressive and shrank sluggishly away from him. Once, he trod inadvertently on one of the creatures and leapt away, howling with fright, when it squirmed nauseously beneath his heel. Finding he had crushed its head, he took courage and began to belabor the flopping abnormality with the metal rod which he still carried. He mashed it into an oozy pulp—a pulp that still quivered with life; and then, overcome by bestial, atavistic hunger, and forgetting all the painfully acquired prejudices of civilized man, he knelt down and devoured the pulp with shamless greed. Afterwards, replete, he stretched himself out and slept for many hours.

VI

He awoke with renewed physical strength, but with nerves and mind that were still partially shattered by his experiences. Like a savage who awakens in some primordial cave, he felt the irrational terror of darkness and mystery. His memories were dazed and broken, and he could recall the Oumnis only as a vague an almost supernatural source of fear, from which he had fled.

The fungus-bough, which had served him in lieu of a torch or lantern, was lying beside him in the darkness. With the bough in one hand and the metal rod in the other, he resumed his wanderings. He met more of the white, legless creatures; but he had conquered his fear of them- now, and looked upon them only as a possible source of food. He proceeded to kill and eat one of them anon, relishing the worm-soft flesh as an aborigine would have relished a meal of grubs or white ants.

He had lost all notion of the passing of time or its measurement. lie was a thing that clambered endlessly on Tartarean cavern-slopes or along the brink of lightless rivers and pools and chasms, killing when he was hungry, sleeping when his weariness became too urgent. Perhaps he went on for days; perhaps for many weeks, in a blind, instinctive search for light and outer air.

The flora and fauna of the caverns changed. He dragged himself through passages that were wholly lined with bristling, glowing thallophytes, some of which were tough and sharp as if fibred with iron. He came to tepid lakes whose waters were infested by long, agile, hydra-bodied creatures, divided into tapeworm segments, that rose to dispute his way but were powerless to harm his mouffa-covered limbs with their toothless, pulpy mouths.

For awhile, he seemed to be passing through a zone of unnatural warmth, due, no doubt, to the presence of hidden volcanic activity. There were hot geysers, and gulfs from which sultry vapors rose, filling the air with queer, metallic-smelling gases that seemed to burn corrosively in his nostrils and

lungs. Some remnant of his former scientific knowledge caused him to recoil from such neighborhoods and retrace his footsteps into caverns free of these gases.

Fleeing from one of the mephitic-laden caves, he found himself in a mile-wide chamber, lined with fungi of uncommon exuberance, amid whose luminiferous growths he met with one of his most terrible adventures. A vast and semi-ophidian monster, white as the other life-forms he had met, and equally legless but owning a single, Cyclopean, phosphoric eye, leapt upon him from the unearthly vegetation and hurled him to the ground with the ram-like impact of its blunt, shapeless head. He lay half-stunned, while the monster began to ingest him in its enormous maw, starting with his feet. Seemingly the metal which he wore was no barrier to its appetite. The creature had swallowed him nearly to the hips, when he recovered his senses and realized his frightful predicament.

Smitten with hideous terror, howling and gibbering like a caveman, he lifted the metal rod, which his clutching fingers had somehow retained, and struck frantically at the awful head into whose mouth he was being drawn by inches. The blows made little or no impression on the great rubbery mass; and soon he was waist-deep in the monstrous maw. In his dire need, a trace of reasoning-power returned to him; and using the rod like a rapier he thrust it into the immense, glaring eye, burying it to his hand, and probably penetrating whatever rudimentary semblance of brain the animal possessed. A pale and egg-like fluid oozed from the broken eye, and the slobbering lips tightened intolerably upon Howard, almost crushing him in what proved to be the death-spasm. The white, swollen barrel-thick body tossed for many minutes; and during its convulsions, Howard was knocked insensible. When he came to again, the creature was lying comparatively still; and the sack-like mouth had begun to relax, so that he was able to extricate himself from the dreadful gorge.

The shock of this experience completed his mental demoralization and drove him even further into primitive bruteness. At times, his brain was almost a blank; and he knew nothing, remembered nothing but the blind horror of those infra-planetary caverns and the dumb instinct that still

impelled him to seek escape. Several times, as he continued his way through the thickets of fungi, he was forced to flee or hide from other monsters of the same type as the one that had so nearly ingested him. Then he entered a region of steep acclivities that took him ever upward. The air became chill and the caverns were seemingly void of vegetable or animal life. He wondered dully as to the reason of the growing cold; but his broken mind could suggest no explanation.

Before entering this realm, he had supplied himself with another fragment of luminiferous fungus to light his way. He was groping through a mountain-like wilderness of chasms and riven scarps and dolomites, when, at some distance above, he saw with inexpressible fright a glimmering as of two cold green eyes that moved among the crags. He had virtually forgotten the Oumnis and their lamps; but something—half intuition, half memory--warned him of direr peril than any he had hitherto met in the darkness.

He dropped his luminous torch and concealed himself behind one of the dolomitic formations. From his hiding-place, he saw the passing of two of the Immortals, clad in silvery mouffa, who descended the scarp and vanished in the craggy gulfs below. Whether or not they were hunting for him, he could not know; but when they had gone from sight, he resumed his climb, hurrying at breakneck speed and feeling that he must get as far away as possible from the bearers of those icy green lights.

The dolomites dwindled in size, and the steep chamber narrowed like the neck of a bottle and closed in upon him presently from all sides, till it was only a narrow, winding passage. The floor of the passage became fairly level. Anon, as he followed it, he was startled and blinded by a glare of light directly ahead—a light that was brilliant as pure sunshine. He cowered and stepped back, shielding his eyes with his hands till they became somewhat tempered to the glare. Then, stealthily, with a mingling of confused fears and dim, unworded hopes, he crept toward the light and came out in an endless metal hall, apparently deserted but filled as far as eye could see with the sourceless brilliance.

The mouth of the rough natural passage from which he had emerged was fitted with a sort of valve, which had been left open, doubtless by the Immortals he had seen among the nether crags. The boat-shaped vehicle they had used was standing in the hall. This vehicle, and the hall itself, were familiar to him, and he began to recollect, in a partial way, the ordeals he had undergone among the Oumnis before his flight into outer darkness.

The hall was slightly inclined; and he seemed to remember that the upward grade would presumably lead to a lost world of freedom. Apprehensively and furtively, he began to follow it, loping like an animal.

After he had gone for perhaps a mile, the floor became perfectly level, but the hall itself started to turn in a sort of arc. He was unable to see very far ahead. Then, so abruptly that he could not check his headlong flight, he came in view of three Oumnis, clothed in metal, who were all standing with their backs to him. A boat—vehicle was near at hand. One of the Immortals was tugging at a huge, capstan-like bar that protruded from the wall of the passage; and as if in response to the bar, a sort of gleaming metal valve was descending slowly from the roof. Inch by inch, it came down like a mighty curtain; and soon it would close the entire passage and render impossible the earth-man's egress.

Somehow, it did not occur to Howard that the tunnel beyond the valve might lead to other realms than the outer air for which he longed so desperately. As if by a miracle, something of his former courage and resourcefulness had returned to him; and he did not turn and flee incontinently at sight of the Immortals as he would have done a short time before. He felt that now or never was his opportunity to escape from the sub-Mercutian levels. Leaping forward on the unsuspecting Oumnis, all of whom were intent on the closing of the valve, he struck at the foremost with his metal bar. The Mercutian toppled and went down with a clattering of mouffa on the floor. The one who was operating the lever continued his task, and Howard had no time to strike him down, for the remaining Immortal, with tigerish agility, had sprung back and was levelling the deadly fire-tube which he carried.

Howard saw that the great valve was still descending—was barely two feet above the cavern floor. He made a flying dive for the opening, sprawling on all fours and then crawling prone on his stomach beneath the terrible curtain of metal.

Struggling to rise, he found himself impeded and held back. He was in utter darkness now; but getting to his knees and groping about, he determined the cause of his retardation. The fallen valve had caught the loose elongated heel of the mouffa on his right foot. He had all the sensations of a trapped animal as he sought to wrench himself free. The tough mouffa held, weighed down by the enormous valve; and it seemed that there was no escape.

Then, amid his desperation, he somehow remembered that the mouffa-armor was open at the breast. Awkwardly and painfully, he managed to crawl forth from it, leaving it there like a discarded lizard-skin.

Getting to his feet, he raced on in the darkness. He was without light, for he had dropped the phosphorescent bough in his dive under the closing valve. The cavern was rough and flinty to his naked feet; and he felt an icy wind, bleak as the breath of glaciers, that blew upon him as he went. The floor sloped upward, and in places it was broken into stair-like formations against which he stumbled and fell, bruising himself severely. Then he cut his head cruelly on a sharp stone that projected from the low roof. The wet, warm blood flowed down across his brow and into his eyes.

The passage steepened and the air took on a terrible frigidity. There was no sign of pursuit from the Oumnis; but fearing they would raise the valve and follow him, the earth-man hastened on. He was puzzled by the growing Arctic cold, but the suppositional reason seemed to elude him. His naked limbs and torso were studded with goose-flesh; and he began to shiver with violent ague, in spite of the high speed at which he ran and climbed.

Now the cavern-stairs were more regular and defined. They seemed to mount forever in the darkness; and growing accustomed to them he was able to grope his way from step to step with no more than an occasional fall

or stumble. His feet were cut and bleeding; but the cold had begun to numb them and he felt little pain.

He saw a dim, circular patch of light far above him, and gasping with the icy air, which appeared to grow thinner and more irrespirable, he rushed toward it. Hundreds, thousands of those black, glaciated steps he seemed to climb before he neared the light. He came out beneath a sable heaven crowded with chill, pulseless, glaring stars, in a sort of valley-bottom among drear unending scarps and pinnacles, still and silent as a frozen dream of death. They gleamed in the starlight with reflections of myriad-angled ice; and the valley-bottom itself was lit by patches of a leprons whiteness. One of these patches fringed the mouth of the incline on whose topmost step the earth-man was standing.

He fought agonizingly for breath in the tenuous infra-zero air and his body stiffened momentarily with a permeating rigor as he stood and peered in numb bewilderment at the icy, mountainous chaos of the landscape in which he had emerged. It was like a dead crater in a world of unspeakable and perpetual desolation, where life could never have been.

The flowing blood had congealed upon his brow and cheeks. With glazing eyes, he saw, in a nearby cliff, the continuation of the cavern-steps. Hewn for some unimaginable purpose by the Immortals, they ran upward in the ice toward the higher summits.

It was not the familiar twilight zone of Mercury in which he had come forth—it was the bleak, nightward side, eternally averted from the sun, and blasted with the frightful cold of cosmic space. He felt the pinnacles and chasms close him in, relentless and rigid, like some hyperborean hell. Then the realization of his plight became something very remote and recessive, a dim thought that floated above his ebbing consciousness. He fell forward on the snow with limbs already stiff and unbending; and the mercy of the final numbness grew complete.

THE INVISIBLE CITY

"Confound you," said Langley in a hoarse whisper that came with effort through swollen lips, blue-black with thirst. "You've gulped about twice your share of the last water in the Lob-nor Desert." He shook the canteen which Furnham had just returned to him, and listened with a savage frown to the ominously light gurgling of its contents.

The two surviving members of the Furnham Archaeological Expedition eyed each other with new-born but rapidly growing disfavor. Furnham, the leader, flushed with dark anger beneath his coat of deepening dust and sunburn. The accusation was unjust, for he had merely moistened his parched tongue from Langley's canteen. His own canteen, which he had shared equally With his companion, was now empty.

Up to that moment the two men had been the best of friends. Their months of association in a hopeless search for the ruins of the semi-fabulous city of Kobar had given them abundant reason to respect each other. Their quarrel sprang from nothing else than the mental distortion and morbidity of sheer exhaustion, and the strain of a desperate predicament. Langley, at times, was even growing a trifle light-headed after their long ordeal of wandering on foot through a land without wells, beneath a sun whose flames poured down upon them like molten lead.

"We ought to reach the Tarim River pretty soon," said Furnham stiffly, ignoring the charge and repressing a desire to announce in mordant terms his unfavorable opinion of Langley.

"If we don't, I guess it will be your fault," the other snapped. "There's been a jinx on this expedition from the beginning; and I shouldn't wonder if the jinx were you. It was your idea to hunt for Kobar anyway. I've never believed there was any such place."

Furnham glowered at his companion, too near the breaking point himself to make due allowance for Langley's nerve-wrought condition, and then turned away, refusing to reply. The two plodded on, ignoring each other with sullen ostentatiousness.

The expedition, consisting of five Americans in the employ of a New York museum, had started from Khotan two months before to investigate the archaeological remains of Eastern Turkestan. Ill-luck had dogged them continually; and the ruins of Kobar, their main objective, said to have been built by the ancient Uighurs, had eluded them like a mirage. They found other ruins, had exhumed a few Greek and Byzantine coins, and a few broken Buddhas, but nothing of much novelty or importance, from a museum viewpoint.

At the very outset, soon after leaving the oasis of Tchertchen, one member of the party had died from gangrene caused by the vicious bite of a Bactrian camel. Later on, a second, seized by a cramp while swimming in the shallow Tarim Kver, near the reedy marshes of Lob-nor, that strange remnant of a vast inland sea, had drowned before his companions could reach him. A third had died of some mysterious fever. Then in the desert south of the Tarim, where Furnham and Langley still persisted in a futile effort to locate the lost city, their Mongol guides had deserted them. They took all the camels and most of the provisions, leaving to the two men only their rifles, their canteens, their other personal belongings, the various antique relics they had amassed, and a few tins of food.

The desertion was hard to explain, for the Mongols had heretofore shown themselves reliable enough. However, they had displayed a queer reluctance on the previous day, had seemed unwilling to venture further among the endless undulations of coiling sand and pebbly soil.

Furnham, who knew the language better than Langley, had gathered that they were afraid of something, were deterred by superstitious legends concerning this portion of the Lob-nor Desert. But they had been strangely vague and reticent as to the object of their fear; and Furnham had learned nothing of its actual nature.

Leaving everything but their food, water and rifles to the mercy of the drifting sands, the men had started northward toward the Tarim, which was sixty or seventy miles away. If they could reach it, they would find shelter in one of the sparse settlements of fishermen along its shores; and could eventually make their way back to civilization.

It was now afternoon of the second day of their wanderings. Langley had suffered most, and he staggered a little as they went on beneath the eternally cloudless heavens, across the glaring desolation of the dreary landscape. His heavy Winchester had become an insufferable burden, and he had thrown it away in spite of the remonstrance of Furnham, who still retained his own weapon.

The sun had lowered a little, but burned with grueling rays, tyrannically torrid, through the bright inferno of stagnant air. There was no wind, except for brief and furious puffs that whirled the light sand in the faces of the men, and then died as suddenly as they had risen. The ground gave back the heat and glare of the heavens in shimmering, blinding waves of refraction.

Langley and Furnham mounted a low, gradual ridge and paused in sweltering exhaustion on its rocky spine. Before them was a broad, shallow valley, at which they stared in a sort of groggy wonderment, puzzled by the level and artificial-looking depression, perfectly square, and perhaps a third of a mile wide, which they descried in its center. The depression was bare and empty with no sign of ruins, but was lined with numerous pits that suggested the ground-plan of a vanished city.

The men blinked, and both were prompted to rub their eyes as they peered through flickering heatwaves; for each had received a momentary impression of flashing light, broken into myriad spires and columns, that seemed to fill the shallow basin and fade like a mirage.

Still mindful of their quarrel, but animated by the same unspoken thought, they stared down the long declivity, heading straight toward the depression. If the place were the site of some ancient city they might possibly hope to find a well or water-spring.

They approached the basin's edge, and were puzzled more and more by its regularity. Certainly it was not the work of nature; and it might have been quarried yesterday, for seemingly there were no ravages of wind and weather in the sheer walls; and the floor was remarkably smooth, except for the multitude of square pits that ran in straight, intersecting lines, like the cellars of destroyed or unbuilt houses. A growing sense of strangeness and mystery troubled the two men; and they were blinded at intervals by the flash of evanescent light that seemed to overflow the basin with phantom towers and pillars.

They paused within a few feet of the edge, incredulous and bewildered. Each began to wonder if his brain had been affected by the sun. Their sensations were such as might mark the incipience of delirium. Amid the blasts of furnace-like heat, a sort of icy coolness appeared to come upon them from the broad basin. Clammy but refreshing, like the chill that might emanate from walls of sunless stone, it revived their fainting senses and quickened their awareness of unexplained mystery.

The coolness became even more noticeable when they reached the very verge of the precipice. Here, peering over, they saw that the sides fell unbroken at all points for a depth of twenty feet or more. In the smooth bottom, the cellar-like pits yawned darkly and unfathomably. The floor about the pits was free of sand, pebbles or detritus.

"Heavens, what do you make of that?" muttered Furnham to himself rather than to Langley. He stooped over the edge, staring down with feverish and inconclusive speculations. The riddle was beyond his experience — he had met nothing like it in all his researches. His puzzlement, however, was partly submerged in the more pressing problem of how he and Langley were to descend the sheer walls. Thirst — and the hope of finding water in one of the pits — were more important at that moment than the origin and nature of the square basin.

Suddenly, in his stooping position, a kind of giddiness seized him, and the earth seemed to pitch deliriously beneath his feet. He staggered, he lost his balance, and fell forward from the verge.

Half-fainting, he closed his eyes against the hurtling descent and the crash twenty feet below. Instantly, it seemed, he struck bottom, Amazed and incomprehending, he found that he was lying at full length, prone on his stomach in mid-air, upborne by a hard, flat, invisible substance. His outflung hands encountered an obstruction, cool as ice and smooth as marble; and the chill of it smote through his clothing as he lay gazing down into the gulf. Wrenched from his grasp by the fall, his rifle hung beside him.

He heard the startled cry of Langley, and then realized that the latter had seized him by the ankles and was drawing him back to the precipice. He felt the unseen surface slide beneath him, level as a concrete pavement, glib as glass. Then Langley was helping him to his feet. Both, for the nonce, had forgotten their misunderstanding.

"Say, am I bughouse?" cried Langley. "I thought you were a goner when you fell. What have we stumbled on, anyhow?"

"Stumbled is good," said Furnham reflectively as he tried to collect himself. "That basin is floored with something solid, but transparent as air — something unknown to geologists or chemists. God knows what it is, or where it came from or who put it there. We've found a mystery that puts Kobar in the shade. I move that we investigate."

He stepped forward, very cautiously, still half-fearful of falling, and stood suspended over the basin.

"If you can do it, I guess I can," said Langley as he followed. With Furnham in the lead, the two began to cross the basin, moving slowly and gingerly along the invisible pavement. The sensation of peering down as if through empty air was indescribably weird.

They had started midway between two rows of the dark pits, which lay fifty feet apart. Somehow, it was like following a street. After they had gone some little distance from the verge, Furnham deviated to the left, with the idea of looking directly down into one of these mysterious pits. Before he

could reach a vertical vantage-point, he was arrested by a smooth, solid wall, like that of a building.

"I think we've discovered a city," he announced. Groping his way along the air-clear wall, which seemed free of angles or roughness, he came to an open doorway. It was about five feet wide and of indeterminable height. Fingering the wall like a blind man, he found that it was nearly six inches thick. He and Langley entered the door, still walking on a level pavement, and advanced without obstruction, as if in a large empty room.

For an instant, as they went forward, light seemed to flash above them in great arches and arcades, touched with evanescent colors like those in fountain-spray. Then it vanished, and the sun shone down as before from a void and desert-heaven. The coolness emanating from the unknown substance was more pronounced than ever; and the men almost shivered. But they were vastly refreshed, and the torture of their thirst was somewhat mitigated.

Now they could look perpendicularly into the square pit below them in the stone floor of the excavation. They were unable to see its bottom, for it went down into shadow beyond the westering sun-rays. But both could see the bizarre and inexplicable object which appeared to float immobile in air just below the mouth of the pit. They felt a creeping chill that was more insidious, more penetrant than the iciness of the unseen walls.

"Now I'm seeing things," said Langley.

"Guess I'm seeing them too," added Furnham.

The object was a long, hairless, light-grey body, lying horizontally, as if in some invisible sarcophagus or tomb. Standing erect, it would have been fully seven feet in height. It was vaguely human in its outlines, and possessed two legs and two arms; but the head was quite unearthly. The thing seemed to have a double set of high, concave ears, lined with perforations; and in place of nose, mouth and chin, there was a long, tapering trunk which lay coiled on the bosom of the monstrosity like a

serpent. The eyes — or what appeared to be such — were covered by leathery, lashless and hideously wrinkled lids.

The thing lay rigid; and its whole aspect was that of a well-preserved corpse or mummy. Half in light and half in shadow, it hung amid the funereal, fathomless pit; and beneath it, at some little distance, as their eyes became accustomed to the gloom, the men seemed to perceive another and similar body.

Neither could voice the mad, eerie thoughts that assailed them. The mystery was too macabre and overwhelming and impossible. It was Langley who spoke at last.

"Say, do you suppose they are all dead?"

Before Furnham could answer, he and Langley heard a thin, shrill, exiguous sound, like the piping off some unearthly flute whose notes were almost beyond human audition. They could not determine its direction; for it seemed to come from one side and then from another as it continued. Its degree of apparent nearness or distance was also variable. It went on ceaselessly and monotonously, thrilling them with an eeriness as of untrod worlds, a terror as of uncharted dimensions. It seemed to fade away in remote ultramundane gulfs; and then, louder and clearer than before, the piping came from the air beside them.

Inexpressibly startled, the two men stared from side to side in an effort to locate the source of the sound. They could find nothing. The air was clear and still about them; and their view of the rocky slopes that rimmed the basin was blurred only by the dancing haze of heat.

The piping ceased, and was followed by a dead, uncanny silence. But Furnham and Langley had the feeling that someone or something was near them — a stealthy presence that lurked and crouched and drew closer till they could have shrieked aloud with the terror of suspense. They seemed to wait amid the unrealities of delirium and mirage, haunted by some elusive, undeclared horror.

Tensely they peered and listened, but there was no sound or visual ostent. Then Langfey cried out, and fell heavily to the unseen floor, borne backward by the onset of a cold and tangible thing, resistless as the launching coils of an anaconda. He lay helpless, unable to move beneath the dead and fluid weight of the unknown incubus, which crushed down his limbs and body and almost benumbed him with an icy chill as of etheric space. Then something touched his throat, very lightly at first, and then with a pressure that deepened intolerably to a stabbing pain, as if he had been pierced by an icicle.

A black faintness swept upon him, and the pain seemed to recede as if the nerves that bore it to his brain were spun like lengthening gossamers across gulfs of anesthesia.

Furnham, in a momentary paralysis, heard the cry of his companion, and saw Langley fall and struggle feebly, to lie inert with closing eyes and whitening face, Mechanically, without realizing for some moments what had happened, he perceived that Langley's garments were oddly flattened and pressed down beneath an invisible weight. Then, from the hollow of Langley's neck, he saw the spurting of a thin rill of blood, which mounted straight in air for several inches, and vanished in a sort of red mist.

Bizarre, incoherent thoughts arose in Furnham's mind. It was all too incredible, too unreal. His brain must be wandering, it must have given way entirely... but something was attacking Langley — an invisible vampire of this invisible city.

He had retained his rifle. Now he stepped forward and stood beside the fallen man. His free hand, groping in the air, encountered a chill, clammy surface, rounded like the back of a stooping body. It numbed his fingertips even as he touched it. Then something seemed to reach out like an arm and hurl him violently backward.

Reeling and staggering, he managed to retain his balance and returned more cautiously. The blood still rose in a vanishing rill from Langley's throat. Estimating the position of the unseen attacker, Furnham raised his rifle and

took careful aim, with the muzzle less than a yard away from its hidden mark.

The gun roared with deafening resonance, and its sound died away in slow echoes, as if repeated by a maze of walls. The blood ceased to rise from Langley's neck, and fell to a natural trickle. There was no sound, no manifestation of any kind from the thing that had assailed him. Furnham stood in doubt, wondering if his shot had taken effect. Perhaps the thing had been frightened away, perhaps it was still close at hand, and might leap upon him at any moment, or return to its prey.

He peered at Langley, who lay white and still. The blood was ceasing to flow from the tiny puncture. He stepped toward him, with the idea of trying to revive him, but was arrested by a strange circumstance. He saw that Langley's face and upper body were blurred by a grey mist that seemed to thicken and assume palpable outlines. It darkened apace, it took on solidity and form; and Furnham beheld the monstrous thing that lay prone between himself and his companion, with part of its fallen bulk still weighing upon Langley. From its inertness, and the bullet-wound in its side, whence oozed a viscid purple fluid, he felt sure that the thing was dead.

The monster was alien to all terrestrial biology — a huge, invertebrate body, formed like an elongated starfish, with the points ending in swollen tentacular limbs. It had a round, shapeless head with the curving, needle-tipped bill of some mammoth insect. It must have come from other planets or dimensions than ours. It was wholly unlike the mummified creature that floated in the pit below, and Furnham felt that it represented an inferior animal-like type. It was evidently composed of an unknown order of organic matter that became visible to human eyes only in death.

His brain was swamped by the mad enigma of it all; What was this place upon which he and Langley had stumbled? Was it an outpost of worlds beyond human knowledge or observation? What was the material of which these buildings had been wrought? Who were their builders? Whence had they come and what had been their purpose? Was the city of recent date or

was it, perhaps, a sort of ruin, whose builders lay dead in its vaults — a ruin haunted only by the vampire monster that had assailed Langley?

Shuddering with repulsion at the dead monster, he started to drag the still-unconscious man from beneath the loathsome mass. He avoided touching the dark, semi-translucent body, which lapsed forward, quivering like a stiff jelly when he had pulled his companion away from it.

Like something very trivial and far away, he remembered the absurd quarrel which Langley had picked with him, and remembered his own resentment as part of a doubtful dream, now lost in the extra-human mystery of their surroundings. He bent over his comrade, anxiously, and saw that some of the natural tan was returning to the pale face and that the eyelids were begging to flutter. The blood had clotted on the tiny wound. Taking Langley's canteen, he poured the last of its contents between the owner's teeth.

In a few moments Langley was able to sit up. Furnham helped him to his feet, and the two began to cross their way from the crystal maze.

They found the doorway; and Furnham, still supporting the other, decided to retrace their course along the weird street by which they had started to cross the basin. They had gone but a few paces when they heard a faint, almost inaudible rustling in the air before them, together with a mysterious grating noise. The rustling seemed to spread and multiply on every hand, as if an invisible crowd were gathering; but the grating soon ceased.

They went on, slowly and cautiously, with a sense of imminent, uncanny peril. Langley was now strong enough to walk without assistance; and Furnham held his cocked rifle ready for instant use. The vague rustling sounds receded, but still encircled them.

Midway between the underlying rows of pits, they moved on toward the desert precipice, keeping side by side. A dozen paces on the cold, solid pavement, and then they stepped into empty air and landed several feet below with a terrific jar, on another hard surface.

It must have been the top of a flight of giant stairs; for, losing their balance, they both lurched and fell, and rolled downward along a series of similar surfaces, and lay stunned at the bottom.

Langley had been rendered unconscious by the fall; but Furnham was vaguely aware of several strange, dreamlike phenomena. He heard a faint, ghostly, sibilant rustling, he felt a light and clammy touch upon his face, and smelled an odor of suffocating sweetness, in which he seemed to sink as into an unfathomable sea. The rustling died to a vast and spatial silence; oblivion darkened above him; and he slid swiftly into nothingness.

It was night when Furnham awoke. His first impression was the white dazzle of a full moon shining in his eyes. Then he became aware that the circle of the great orb was oddly distorted and broken, like a moon in some cubistic painting. All around and above him were bright, crystalline angles, crossing and intermingling -the outlines of a translucent architecture, dome on dome and wall on wall. As he moved his head, showers of ghostly irises — the lunar yellow and green and purple -- fell in his eyes from the broken orb and vanished.

He saw that he was lying on a glass-like floor, which caught the light in moving sparkles. Langley, still unconscious, was beside him. Doubtless they were still in the mysterious oubliette down whose invisible stairs they had fallen. Far off, to one side, through a mélange of the transparent partitions, he could see the vague rocks of the Gobi, twisted and refracted in the same manner as the moon.

Why, he wondered, was the city now visible? Was its substance rendered perceptible, in a partial sort of way, by some unknown ray which existed in moonlight but not in the direct beams of the sun? Such an explanation sounded altogether too unscientific; but he could not think of any other at the moment.

Rising on his elbow, he saw the glassy outlines of the giant stairs down which he and Langley had plunged. A pale, diaphanous form, like a phantom of the mummified creature they had seen in the pit, was

descending the stairs. It moved forward with fleet strides, longer than those of a man, and stooped above Furnham with its spectral trunk waving inquisitively and poising an inch or two from his face. Two round, phosphorescent eyes, emitting perceptible beams like lanterns, glowed solemnly in its head above the beginning of the proboscis.

The eyes seemed to transfix Furnham with their unearthly gaze. He felt that the light they emitted was flowing in a ceaseless stream into his own eyes — into his very brain. The light seemed to shape itself into images, formless and incomprehensible at first, but growing clearer and more coherent momentarily. Then, in some indescribable way, the images were associated with articulate words, as if a voice were speaking: words that he understood as one might understand the language of dreams.

"We mean you no harm," the voice seemed to say. "But you have stumbled upon our city; and we cannot afford to let you escape. We do not wish to have our presence known to men.

"We have dwelt here for many ages, The Lob-nor desert was a fertile realm when we first established our city. We came to your world as fugitives from a great planet that once formed part of the solar system — a planet composed entirely of ultra-violet substances, which was destroyed in a terrible cataclysm. Knowing the imminence of the catastrophe, some of us were able to build a huge space-flier, in which we fled to the Earth. From the materials of the flier, and other materials we had brought along for the express purpose, we built our city, whose name, as well as it can be conveyed in human phonetics, is Ciis.

"The things of your world have always been plainly visible to us; and, in fact, due to our immense scale of perceptions, we probably see much that is not manifest to you. Also, we have no need of artificial light at any time. We discovered, however, at an early date, that we ourselves and our buildings were invisible to men. Strangely enough, our bodies undergo in death a degeneration of substance which brings them within the infra-violet range; and thus within the scope of your visual cognition."

The voice seemed to pause, and Furnham realized that it had spoken only in his thought by a sort of telepathy. In his own mind, he tried to shape a question:

"What do you intend to do with us?"

Again he heard the still, toneless voice:

"We plan to keep you with us permanently. After you fell through the trap-door we had opened, we overpowered you with an anesthetic; and during your period of unconsciousness, which lasted many hours, we injected into your bodies a drug which has already affected your vision, rendering visible, to a certain degree, the ultra-violet substances that surround you. Repeated injections, which must be given slowly, will make these substances no less plain and solid to you than the materials of your own world. Also, there are other processes to which we intend to subject you... processes that will serve to adjust and acclimate you in all ways to your new surroundings."

Behind Furnham's weird interlocutor, several more fantasmal figures had descended the half-visible steps. One of them was stooping over Langley, who had begun to stir and would recover full consciousness in a few instants. Furnham sought to frame other questions, and received an immediate reply.

"The creature that attacked your companion was a domestic animal. We were busy in our laboratories at the time, and did not know of your presence till we heard the rifle shots.

"The flashes of light which you saw among our invisible walls on your arrival were due to some queer phenomenon of refraction. At certain angles the sunlight was broken or intensified by the molecular arrangement of the unseen substance."

At this juncture Langley sat up, looking about him in a bewildered fashion.

"What the hell is all this, and where the hell are we?" he inquired as he peered from Furnham to the people of the city.

Furnham proceeded to explain, repeating the telepathic information he had just received. By the time he had ceased speaking, Langley himself appeared to become the recipient of some sort of mental reassurance from the phantom-like creature who had been Furnham's interlocutor; for Langley stared at this being with a mixture of enlightenment and wonder in his expression.

Once more there came the still, super-auditory voice, fraught now with imperious command.

"Come with us. Your initiation into our life is to begin immediately. My name is Aispha — if you wish to have a name for me in your thoughts. We ourselves, communicating with each other without language, have little need for names; and their use is a rare formality among us. Our generic name, as a people, is the Tiisins."

Furnham and Langley arose with an unquestioning alacrity, for which afterwards they could hardly account, and followed Aispha. It was as if a mesmeric compulsion had been laid upon them. Furnham noted, in an automatic sort of way, as they left the oubliette, that his rifle had vanished. No doubt it had been carefully removed during his period of insensibility.

He and Langley climbed the high steps with some difficulty. Queerly enough, considering their late fall, they found themselves quite free of stiffness and bruises; but at the time they felt no surprise — only a drugged acquiescence in all the marvels and perplexities of their situation.

They found themselves on the outer pavement, amid the bewildering outlines of the luminous buildings which towered above them with intersections of multiform crystalline curves and angles. Aispha went on without pause, leading them toward the fantastic serpentine arch of an open doorway in one of the tallest of these edifices, whose pale domes and pinnacles were heaped in immaterial splendor athwart the zenith-nearing moon.

Four of the ultra-violet people — the companions of Aispha — brought up the rear. Aispha was apparently unarmed; but the others carried weapons like heavybladed and blunt-pointed sickles of glass or crystal. Many others of this incredible race, intent on their own enigmatic affairs, were passing to and fro in the open street and through the portals of the unearthly buildings. The city was a place of silent and fantasmal activity.

At the end of the street they were following, before they passed through the arched entrance, Furnham and Langley saw the rock-strewn slope of the Lob-nor, which seemed to have taken on a queer filminess and insubstantiality in the moonlight. It occurred to Furnham, with a sort of weird shock, that his visual perception of earthly objects, as well as of the ultra-violet city, was being affected by the injections of which Aispha told him.

The building they now entered was full of apparatuses made in the form of distorted spheres and irregular disks and cubes, some of which seemed to change their outlines from moment to moment in a confusing manner. Certain of them appeared to concentrate the moonlight like ultra-powerful lenses, turning it to a fiery, blinding brilliance. Neither Furnham nor Langley could imagine the purpose of these devices; and no telepathic explanation was vouchsafed by Aispha or any of his companions.

As they went on into the building there was a queer sense of some importunate and subtle vibration in the air, which affected the men unpleasantly. They could not assign its source nor could they be sure whether their own perception of it was purely mental or came through the avenues of one or more of the physical senses. Somehow it was both disturbing and narcotic; and they sought instinctively to resist its influence.

The lower story of the edifice was seemingly one vast room. The strange apparatuses grew taller about them, rising as if in concentric tiers as they went on. In the huge dome above them, living rays of mysterious light appeared to cross and re-cross at all angles of incidence, weaving a bright, ever-changing web that dazzled the eye.

They emerged in a clear, circular space at the center of the building. Here ten or twelve of the ultra-violet people were standing about a slim column, perhaps five feet high, that culminated in a shallow basin-like formation. There was a glowing oval-shaped object in the basin, large as the egg of some extinct bird. From this object, numerous spokes of light extended horizontally in all directions, seeming to transfix the heads and bodies of those who stood in a loose ring about the column. Furnham and Langley became aware of a high, thin, humming noise which emanated from the glowing egg and was somehow inseparable from the spokes of light, as if the radiance had become audible.

Aispha paused facing the men; and a voice spoke in their minds.

"The glowing object is called the Doir. An explanation of its real nature and origin would be beyond your present comprehension. It is allied, however, to that range of substances which you would classify as minerals; and is one of a number of similar objects which existed in our former world. It generates a mighty force which is intimately connected with our life-principle; and the rays emanating from it serve us in place of food. If the Doir were lost or destroyed, the consequences would be serious; and our life-term, which normally is many thousand years, would be shortened for want of the nourishing and revivifying rays."

Fascinated, Furnham and Langley stared at the eggshaped orb. The humming seemed to grow louder; and the spokes of light lengthened and increased in number. The men recognized it now as the source of the vibration that had troubled and oppressed them. The effect was insidious, heavy, hypnotic, as if there were a living brain in the object that sought to overcome their volition and subvert their senses and their minds in some unnatural thralldom.

They heard the mental command of Aispha:

"Go forward and join those who partake of the luminous emanations of the Doir. We believe that by so doing you will, in course of time, become purged of your terrestrial grossness; that the very substance of your bodies

may eventually be transformed into something not unlike that of our own; and your senses raised to a perceptual power such as we possess."

Half unwillingly, with an eerie consciousness of compulsion, the men started forward.

"I don't like this," said Furnham in a whisper to Langley. "I'm beginning to feel queer enough already." Summoning his utmost will power he stopped short of the emanating rays and put out his hand to arrest Langley.

With dazzled eyes, they stood peering at the Doir. A cold, restless fire, alive with some nameless evil that was not akin to the evil of Earth, pulsated in its heart; and the long, sharp beams, quivering slightly, passed like javelins into the semi-crystalline bodies of the beings who stood immobile around the column.

"Hasten!" came the unvocal admonition of Aispha. "In a few moments the force in the Doir, which has a regular rhythm of ebb and flow, will begin to draw back upon itself. The rays will be retracted; and you will have to wait for many minutes before the return of the emanation."

A quick, daring thought had occurred to Furnham. Eyeing the Doir closely, he had been impressed by its seeming fragility. The thing was evidently not attached to the basin in which it reposed; and in all likelihood it would shatter like glass if hurled or even dropped on the floor. He tried to suppress his thought, fearing that it would be read by Aispha or others of the ultra-violet people. At the same time, he sought to phrase, as innocently as possible, a mental question:

"What would happen if the Doir were broken?"

Instantly he received an impression of anger, turmoil and consternation in the mind of Aispha. His question, however, was apparently not answered; and it seemed that Aispha did not want to answer it — that he was concealing something too dangerous and dreadful to be revealed. Furnham felt, too, that Aispha was suspicious, had received an inkling of his own repressed thought.

It occurred to him that he must act quickly if at all. Nerving himself, he leaped forward through the ring of bodies about the Doir. The rays had already begun to shorten slightly; but he had the feeling of one who hurls himself upon an array of lance-points. There was an odd, indescribable sensation, as if he were being pierced by something that was both hot and cold; but neither the warmth nor the chill was beyond endurance. A moment, and he stood beside the column, lifting the glowing egg in his hands and poisoning it defiantly as he turned to face the ultra-violet people.

The thing was phenomenally light; and it seemed to burn his fingers and to freeze them at the same time. He felt a strange vertigo, an indescribable confusion; but he succeeded in mastering it. The contact of the Doir might be deadlier to the human tissues than that of radium for aught he knew. He would have to take his chances. At any rate it would not kill him immediately; and if he played his cards with sufficient boldness and skill, he could make possible the escape of Langley -- if not his own escape.

The ring of ultra-violet beings stood as if stupefied by his audacity. The retracting spokes of light were slowly drawing back into the egg; but Furnham himself was still impaled by them. His fingers seemed to be growing translucent where they clutched the weird ball.

He met the phosphoric gaze of Aispha, and heard the frantic thoughts that were pouring into his mind, not only from Aispha but from all the partakers of the Doir's luminous beams. Dread, unhuman threats, desperate injunctions to return the Doir to its pedestal, were being laid upon him. Rallying all his will, he defied them.

"Let us go free," he said, mentally addressing Aispha. "Give me back my weapon and permit my companion and me to leave your city. We wish you no harm; but we cannot allow you to detain us. Let us go or I will shatter the Doir — will smash it like an egg on the floor."

At the shaping of his destructive thought, a shudder passed among the semi-spectral beings; and he felt the dire fear that his threat had aroused in them. He had been right: the Doir was fragile; and some awful catastrophe, whose

nature he could not quite determine, would ensue instantly upon its shattering.

Step by step, glancing frequently about to see that no one approached him by stealth from behind, Furnham returned to Langley's side. The Tiisins drew back from him in evident terror. All the while he continued to issue his demands and comminations:

"Bring the rifle quickly... the weapon you took from me... and give it into my companion's hands. Let us go without hindrance or molestation — or I will drop the Doir. When we are outside the city, one of you — one only — shall be permitted to approach us, and I will deliver the Doir to him."

One of the Tiisins left the group to return in less than a minute with Furnham's Winchester. He handed it to Langley, who inspected the weapon carefully and found that it had not been damaged or its loading or mechanism tampered with in any way. Then, with the ultra-violet creatures following them in manifest perturbation, Furnham and Langley made their way from the building and started along the open street in the general direction (as Langley estimated from the compass he carried) of the Tarim River.

They went on amid the fantastic towering of the crystalline piles; and the people of the city, called as if by some unworded summons, poured from the doorways in an ever-swelling throng and gathered behind them. There was no active demonstration of any overt kind; but both the men were increasingly aware of the rage and consternation that had been aroused by Furnham's audacious theft of the Doir — a theft that seemed to be regarded in the light of actual blasphemy.

The hatred of the Tiisins, like a material radiation -dark, sullen, stupefying, stultifying, beat upon them at every step. It seemed to dog their brains and their feet like some viscid medium of nightmare; and their progression toward the Gobi slope became painfully slow and tedious.

Before them, from one of the buildings, a tentacled, starfish monster, like the thing that had assailed Langley, emerged and lay crouching in the street

as if to dispute their passage. Raising its evil beak, it glared with filmy eyes, but slunk away from their approach as if at the monition of its owners.

Furnham and Langley, passing it with involuntary shivers of repugnance, went on. The air was oppressed with alien, unformulable menace. They felt an abnormal drowsiness creeping upon them. There was an unheard, narcotic music, which sought to overcome their vigilance, to beguile them into slumber.

Furnham's fingers grew numb with the unknown radiations of the Doir, though the sharp beams of light, by accelerative degrees, had withdrawn into its center, leaving only a formless misty glow that filled the weird orb. The thing seemed latent with terrible life and power. The bones of his transparent hand were outlined against it like those of a skeleton.

Looking back, he saw that Aispha followed closely, walking in advance of the other Tiisins. He could not read the thoughts of Aispha as formerly. It was as if a blank, dark wall had been built up. Somehow he had a premonition of evil — of danger and treachery in some form which he could not understand or imagine.

He and Langley came to the end of the street, where the ultra-violet pavement joined itself to the desert acclivity. As they began their ascent of the slope both men realized that their visual powers had indeed been affected by the injection treatment of the Tiisins; for the soil seemed to glow beneath them, faintly translucent; and the boulders were like semi-crystalline masses, whose inner structure they could see dimly.

Aispha followed them on the slope; but the other people of Ciis, as had been stipulated by Furnham, paused at the juncture of their streets and buildings with the infra-violet substances of Earth.

After they had gone perhaps fifty yards on the gentle acclivity, Furnham came to a pause and waited for Aispha, holding out the Doir at arm's length. Somehow he had a feeling that it was unwise to return the mystic egg; but he would keep his promise, since the people of Ciis had kept their part of the bargain so far.

Aispha took the Doir from Furnham's hands; but his thoughts, whatever they were, remained carefully shrouded. There was a sense of something ominous and sinister about him as he turned and went back down the slope with the fiery egg shining through his body like a great watchful eye. The beams of light were beginning to emanate from its center once more. The two men, looking back ever and anon, resumed their journey. Ciis glimmered below them like the city of a mirage in the moonlit hollow. They saw the ultraviolet people crowding to await Aispha at the end of their streets.

Then, as Aispha neared his fellows two rays of cold, writhing fire leaped forth from the base of a tower that glittered like glass at the city's verge. Clinging to the ground, the rays ran up the slope with the undulant motion of pythons, following Langley and Furnham at a speed that would soon overtake them.

"They're double crossing us!" warned Furnham. He caught the Winchester from Langley, dropped to his knees and aimed carefully, drawing a bead on the luminous orb of the Doir through the spectral form of Aispha, who had now reached the city and was about to enter the waiting throng.

"Run!" he called to Langley. "I'll make them pay for their treachery; and perhaps you can get away in the meanwhile."

He pulled the trigger, missing Aispha but dropping at least two of the Tiisins who stood near the Doir. Again, steadily, he drew bead, while the rays from the tower serpented onward, pale, chill and deadly-looking, till they were almost at his feet. Even as he aimed, Aispha took refuge in the foremost ranks of the crowd, through whose filmy bodies the Doir still glowed.

This time the high-powered bullet found its mark, though it must have passed through more than one of the ultra-violet beings before reaching Aispha and the mystic orb.

Furnham had hardly known what the result would be, but he felt sure that some sort of catastrophe would ensue the destruction of the Doir. What really happened was incalculable and almost beyond description. Before the Doir could fall from the hands of its stricken bearer, it seemed to expand in a rushing wheel of intense light, revolving as it grew, and blotting out the form of the ultra-violet people in the foreground. With awful velocity, the wheel struck the nearer buildings, which appeared to soar and vanish like towers of fading mirage. There was no audible explosion — no sound of any kind — only that silent, ever-spinning, ever-widening disk of light that threatened to involve by swift degrees the whole extent of Ciis.

Gazing spellbound, Furnham had almost forgotten the serpentine rays. Too late he saw that one of them was upon him. He leaped back, but the thing caught him, coiling about his limbs and body like an anaconda. There was a sensation of icy cold, of horrible constriction; and then, helpless, he found that the strange beam of force was dragging him back down the slope toward Ciis, while its fellow went on in pursuit of the fleeing Langley.

In the meanwhile the spreading disk of fire had reached the tower from which the ray emanated. Suddenly, Furnham was free — the serpentine beams had both vanished. He stood rooted to the spot in speechless awe; and Langley, returning down the hill, also paused, watching the mighty circle of light that seemed to fill the entire basin at their feet with a soundless vortex of destruction.

"My God!" cried Furnham after a brief interval. "Look what's happening to the slope."

As if the force of the uncanny explosion were now extending beyond Ciis, boulders and masses of earth began to rise in air before the white, glowing maelstrom, and sailed in slow, silent levitation toward the men.

Furnham and Langley started to run, stumbling up the slope, and were overtaken by something that lifted them softly, buoyantly, irresistibly, with a strange feeling of utter weightlessness, and bore them like windwafted leaves or feathers through the air. They saw the bouldered crest of the

acclivity flowing far beneath them; and then they were floating, floating, ever higher in the moonlight, above leagues of dim desert. A faintness came upon them both — a vague nausea — an illimitable vertigo; and slowly, somewhere in that incredible flight, they lapsed into unconsciousness.

The moon had fallen low, and its rays were almost horizontal in Furnham's eyes when he awoke. An utter confusion possessed him at first; and his circumstances were more than bewildering. He was lying on a sandy slope, among scattered shrubs, meager and stunted; and Langley was reclining not far away. Raising himself a little, he saw the white and reedfringed surface of a river — which could be no other than the Tarim — at the slope's bottom. Half incredulous, he realized that the force of the weird explosion had carried Langley and himself many miles and had deposited them, apparently unhurt, beside the goal of their desert wandering!

Furnham rose to his feet, feeling a queer lightness and unsteadiness. He took a tentative step — and landed four or five feet away. It was as if he had lost half his normal weight. Moving with great care he went over to Langley, who had now started to sit up. He was reassured to find that his eye-sight was becoming normal again; for he perceived merely a faint glowing in the objects about him. The sand and boulders were comfortably solid; and his own hands were no longer translucent.

"Gosh!" he said to Langley, "That was some explosion. The force that was liberated by the shattering of the Doir must have done something to the gravity of all surrounding objects. I guess the city of Ciis and its people must have gone back into outer space; and even the infra-violet substances about the city must have been more or less degravitated. But I guess the effect is wearing off as far as you and I are concerned -otherwise we'd be traveling still."

Langley got up and tried to walk, with the same disconcerting result that had characterized Furnham's attempt. He mastered his limbs and his equilibrium after a few experiments.

"I still feel like a sort of dirigible," he commented. "Say, I think we'd better leave this out of our report to the museum. A city, a people, all invisible, in the heart of the Lob-nor — that would be too much for scientific credibility."

"I agree with you," said Furnham, "the whole business would be too fantastic, outside of a super-scientific story. In fact," he added a little maliciously, "it's even more incredible than the existence of the ruins of Kobar."

THE ISLE OF THE TORTURERS

Between the sun's departure and return, the Silver Death had fallen upon Yoros. Its advent, however, had been foretold in many prophecies, both immemorial and recent. Astrologers had said that this mysterious malady, heretofore unknown on earth, would descend from the great star, Achernar, which presided balefully over all the lands of the southern continent of Zothique; and having sealed the flesh of a myriad men with its bright, metallic pallor, the plague would still go onward in time and space, borne by the dim currents of ether to other worlds.

Dire was the Silver Death; and none knew the secret of its contagion or the cure. Swift as the desert wind, it came into Yoros from the devastated realm of Tasuun, overtaking the very messengers who ran by night to give warning of its nearness. Those who were smitten felt an icy, freezing cold, an instant rigor, as if the outermost gulf had breathed upon them. Their faces and bodies whitened strangely, gleaming with a wan luster, and became stiff as long-dead corpses, all in an interim of minutes.

In the streets of Silpon and Siloar, and in Faraad, the capital of Yoros, the plague passed like an eery, glittering light from countenance to countenance under the golden lamps; and the victims fell where they were stricken; and the deathly brightness remained upon them.

The loud, tumultuous public carnivals were stifled by its passing, and the merry-makers were frozen in frolic attitudes. In proud mansions, the wine-flushed revelers grew pale amid their garish feasts, and reclined in their opulent chairs, still holding the half-emptied cups with rigid fingers. Merchants lay in their counting-houses on the heaped coins they had begun to reckon; and thieves, entering later, were unable to depart with their booty. Diggers died in the half completed graves they had dug for others; but no one came to dispute their possession.

There was no time to flee from the strange, inevitable scourge. Dreadfully and quickly, beneath the clear stars, it breathed upon Yoros; and few were they who awakened from slumber at dawn. Fulbra, the young king of Yoros, who had but newly succeeded to the throne, was virtually a ruler without a people.

Fulbra had spent the night of the plague's advent on a high tower of his palace above Faraad: an observatory tower, equipped with astronomical appliances. A great heaviness had lain on his heart, and his thoughts were dulled with an opiate despair; but sleep was remote from his eye-lids. He knew the many predictions that foretold the Silver Death; and moreover he had read its imminent coming in the stars, with the aid of the old astrologer and sorcerer, Vemdeez. This latter knowledge he and Vemdeez had not cared to promulgate, knowing full well that the doom of Yoros was a thing decreed from all time by infinite destiny; and that no man could evade the doom, unless it were written that he should die in another way than this.

Now Vemdeez had cast the horoscope of Fulbra; and though he found therein certain ambiguities that his science could not resolve, it was nevertheless written plainly that the king would not die in Yoros. Where he would die, and in what manner, were alike doubtful. But Vemdeez, who had served Altath the father of Fulbra, and was no less devoted to the new ruler, had wrought by means of his magical art an enchanted ring that would protect Fulbra from the Silver Death in all times and places. The ring was made of a strange, red metal, darker than ruddy gold or copper, and was set with a black and oblong gem, not known to terrestrial lapidaries, that gave forth eternally a strong aromatic perfume. The sorcerer told Fulbra never to remove the ring from the middle finger on which he wore it — not even in lands afar from Yoros and in days after the passing of the Silver Death: for if once the plague had breathed upon Fulbra, he would bear its subtle contagion always in his flesh; and the contagion would assume its wonted virulence with the ring's removal. But Vemdeez did not tell the origin of the red metal and the dark gem, nor the price at which the protective magic had been purchased.

With a sad heart, Fulbra had accepted the ring and had worn it; and so it was that the Silver Death blew over him in the night and harmed him not. But waiting anxiously on the high tower, and watching the golden lights of Faraad rather than the white, implacable stars, he felt a light, passing chillness that belonged not to the summer air. And even as it passed the gay noises of the city ceased; and the moaning lutes faltered strangely and expired. A stillness crept on the carnival; and some of the lamps went out and were not re-lit. In the palace beneath him there was also silence; and he heard no more the laughter of his courtiers and chamberlains. And Vemdeez came not, as was his custom, to join Fulbra on the tower at midnight. So Fulbra knew himself for a realmless king; and the grief that he still felt for the noble Altath was swollen by a great sorrow for his perished people.

Hour by hour he sat motionless, too sorrowful for tears. The stars changed above him; and Achernar glared down perpetually like the bright, cruel eye of a mocking demon; and the heavy balsam of the black-jeweled ring arose to his nostrils and seemed to stifle him. And once the thought occurred to Fulbra, to cast the ring away and die as his people had died. But his despair was too heavy upon him even for this; and so, at length, the dawn came slowly in heavens pale as the Silver Death, and found him still on the tower.

In the dawn, King Fulbra rose and descended the coiled stairs of porphyry into his palace. And midway on the stairs he saw the fallen corpse of the old sorcerer Vemdeez, who had died even as he climbed to join his master. The wrinkled face of Vemdeez was like polished metal, and was whiter than his beard and hair; and his open eyes, which had been dark as sapphires, were frosted with the plague. Then, grieving greatly for the death of Vemdeez, whom he had loved, as a foster-father, the king went slowly on. And in the suites and halls below, he found the bodies of his courtiers and servants and guardsmen. And none remained alive, excepting three slaves who warded the green, brazen portals of the lower vaults, far beneath the palace.

Now Fulbra bethought him of the counsel of Vemdeez, who had urged him to flee from Yoros and to seek shelter in the southern isle of Cyntrom, which paid tribute to the kings of Yoros. And though he had no heart for this, nor for any course of action, Fulbra bade the three remaining slaves to

gather food and such other supplies as were necessary for a voyage of some length, and to carry them aboard a royal barge of ebony that was moored at the palace porticoes on the river Voum,

Then, embarking with the slaves, he took the helm of the barge, and directed the slaves to unfurl the broad amber sail. And past the stately city of Faraad, whose streets were thronged with the silvery dead, they sailed on the widening jasper estuary of the Voum, and into the amaranth-colored gulf of the Indaskian Sea.

A favorable wind was behind them, blowing from the north over desolate Tasuun and Yoros, even as the Silver Death had blown in the night. And idly beside them, on the Voum, there floated seaward many vessels whose crews and captains had all died of the plague. And Faraad was still as a necropolis of old time; and nothing stirred on the estuary shores, excepting the plummy, fanshaped palms that swayed southward in the freshening wind. And soon the green strand of Yoros receded, gathering to itself the blueness and the dreams of distance.

Creaming with a winy foam, full of strange murmurous voices and vague tales of exotic things, the halcyon sea was about the voyagers now beneath the high-lifting summer sun. But the sea's enchanted voices and its long languorous, immeasurable cradling could not soothe the sorrow of Fulbra; and in his heart a despair abided, black as the gem that was set in the red ring of Vemdeez.

Howbeit, he held the great helm of the ebon barge, and steered as straightly as he could by the sun toward Cyntrom. The amber sail was taut with the favoring wind; and the barge sped onward all that day, cleaving the amaranth waters with its dark prow that reared in the carven form of an ebony goddess. And when the night came with familiar austral stars, Fulbra was able to correct such errors as he had made in reckoning the course.

For many days they flew southward; and the sun lowered a little in its circling behind them; and new stars climbed and clustered at evening about the black goddess of the prow. And Fulbra, who had once sailed to the isle

of Cymtrom in boyhood days with his father Altath, thought to see ere long the lifting of its shores of camphor and sandalwood from the winy deep. But in his heart there was no gladness; and often now he was blinded by wild tears, remembering that other voyage with Altath.

Then, suddenly and at high noon, there fell an airless cabin, and the waters became as purple glass about the barge. The sky changed to a dome of beaten copper, arching close and low; and as if by some evil wizardry, the dome darkened with untimely night, and a tempest rose like the gathered breath of mighty devils and shaped the sea into vast ridges, and abysmal valleys. The mast of ebony snapped like a reed in the wind, and the sail was torn asunder, and the helpless vessel pitched headlong in the dark troughs and was hurled upward through veils of blinding foam to the giddy summits of the billows.

Fulbra clung to the useless helm, and the slaves, at his command, took shelter in the forward cabin. For countless hours they were borne onward at the will of the mad hurricane; and Fulbra could see naught in the lowering gloom, except the pale crests of the beetling waves; and he could tell no longer the direction of their course.

Then, in that lurid dusk, he beheld at intervals another vessel that rode the storm-driven sea, not far from the barge. He thought that the vessel was a galley such as might be used by merchants that voyaged among the southern isles, trading for incense and plumes and vermilion; but its oars were mostly broken, and the toppled mast and sail hung forward on the prow.

For a time the ships drove on together; till Fulbra saw, in a rifting of the gloom, the sharp and somber crags of an unknown shore, with sharper towers that lifted palely above them. He could not turn the helm; and the barge and its companion vessel were carried toward the looming rocks, till Fulbra thought that they would crash thereon. But, as if by some enchantment, even as it had risen, the sea fell abruptly in a windless calm; and quiet sunlight poured from a clearing sky; and the barge was left on a

broad crescent of ochre-yellow sand between the crags and the lulling waters, with the galley beside it.

Dazed and marveling, Fulbra leaned on the helm, while his slaves crept timidly forth from the cabin, and men began to appear on the decks of the galley. And the king was about to hail these men, some of whom were dressed as humble sailors and others in the fashion of rich merchants. But he heard a laughter of strange voices, high and shrill and somehow evil, that seemed to fall from above; and looking up he saw that many people were descending a sort of stairway in the cliffs that enclosed the beach.

The people drew near, thronging about the barge and the galley. They wore fantastic turbans of blood-red, and were clad in closely fitting robes of vulturine black. Their faces and hands were yellow as saffron; their small and slaty eyes were set obliquely beneath lashless lids; and their thin lips, which smiled eternally, were crooked. as the blades of scimitars.

They bore sinister and wicked-looking weapons, in the form of saw-toothed swords and doubled-headed spears. Some of them bowed low before Fulbra and addressed him obsequiously, staring upon him all the while with an unblinking gaze that he could not fathom. Their speech was no less alien than their aspect; it was full of sharp and hissing sounds; and neither the king nor his slaves could comprehend it. But Fulbra bespoke the people courteously, in the mild and mellow-flowing tongue of Yoros, and inquired the name of this land whereon the barge had been cast by the tempest.

Certain of the people seemed to understand him, for a light came in their slaty eyes at his question; and one of them answered brokenly in the language of Yoros, saying that the land was the Isle of Uccastrog, Then, with something of covert evil in his smile, this person added that all shipwrecked mariners and seafarers would receive a goodly welcome from Ildrac, the king of the Isle.

At this, the heart of Fulbra sank within him; for he had heard numerous tales of Uccastrog in bygone years; and the tales were not such as would reassure a stranded traveler. Uccastrog, which lay far to the east of

Cyntrom, was commonly known as the Isle of the Torturers; and men said that all who landed upon it unaware, or were cast thither by the seas, were imprisoned by the inhabitants and were subjected later to unending curious tortures whose infliction formed the chief delight of these cruel beings. No man, it was rumored, had ever escaped from Uccastrog; but many had lingered for years in its dungeons and hellish torture chambers, kept alive for the pleasure of King Ildrac and his followers. Also, it was believed that the Torturers were great magicians who could raise mighty storms with their enchantments, and could cause vessels to be carried far from the maritime routes, and then fling them ashore upon Uccastrog.

Seeing that the yellow people were all about the barge, and that no escape was possible, Fulbra asked them to take him at once before King Ildrac. To Ildrac he would announce his name and royal rank; and it seemed to him, in his simplicity, that one king, even though cruel-hearted, would scarcely torture another or keep him captive. Also, it might be that the inhabitants of Uccastrog had been somewhat maligned by the tales of travelers.

So Fulbra and his slaves were surrounded by certain of the throng and were led toward the palace of Ildrac, whose high, sharp towers crowned the crags beyond the beach, rising above those clustered abodes in which the island people dwelt. And while they were climbing the hewn steps in the cliff, Fulbra heard a loud outcry below and a clashing of steel against steel; and looking back, he saw that the crew of the stranded galley had drawn their swords and were fighting the islanders. But being outnumbered greatly, their resistance was borne down by the swarming Torturers; and most of them were taken alive. And Fulbra's heart misgave him sorely at this sight; and more and more did he mistrust the yellow people.

Soon he came into the presence of Ildrac, who sat on a lofty brazen chair in a vast hall of the palace. Ildrac was taller by half a head than any of his followers; and his features were like a mask of evil wrought from some pale, gilded metal; and he was clad in vestments of a strange hue, like sea-purple brightened with fresh-flowing blood. About him were many guardsmen, armed with terrible scythe-like weapons; and the sullen, slant-eyed girls of the palace, in skirts of vermilion and breast-cups of lazuli,

went to and fro among huge basaltic columns. About the hall stood numerous engineering of wood and stone and metal such as Fulbra had never beheld, and having a formidable aspect with their heavy chains, their beds of iron teeth and their cords and pulleys of fish-skin.

The young king of Yoros went forward with a royal and fearless bearing, and addressed Ildrac, who sat motionless and eyed him with a level, unwinking gaze. And Fulbra told Ildrac his name and station, and the calamity that had caused him to flee from Yoros; and he mentioned also his urgent desire to reach the Isle of Cyntrom.

'It is a long voyage to Cyntrom,' said Ildrac, with a subtle smile. 'Also, it is not our custom to permit guests to depart without having fully tasted the hospitality of the Isle of Uccastrog. Therefore, King Fulbra, I must beg you to curb your impatience. We have much to show you here, and many diversions to offer. My chamberlains will now conduct you to a room befitting your royal rank. But first I must ask you to leave with me the sword that you carry at your side; for swords are often sharp — and I do not wish my guests to suffer injury by their own hands.'

So Fulbra's sword was taken from him by one of the palace guardsmen; and a small ruby-hilted dagger that he carried was also removed. Then several of the guards, hemming him in with their scythed weapons, led him from the hall and by many corridors and downward flights of stairs into the soft rock beneath the palace. And he knew not whither his three slaves were taken, or what disposition was made of the captured crew of the galley. And soon he passed from the daylight into cavernous halls illumed by sulfur-colored flames in copper cressets; and all around him, in hidden chambers, he heard the sound of dismal moans and loud, maniacal howlings that seemed to beat and die upon adamantine doors.

In one of these halls, Fulbra and his guardsmen met a young girl, fairer and less sullen of aspect than the others; and Fulbra thought that the girl smiled upon him compassionately as he went by; and it seemed that she murmured faintly in the language of Yoros: 'Take heart, King Fulbra,' for there is one who would help you.' And her words apparently, were not heeded or

understood by the guards, who knew only the harsh and hissing tongue of Uccastrog.

After descending many stairs, they came to a ponderous door of bronze; and the door was unlocked by one of the guards, and Fulbra was compelled to enter; and the door clanged dolorously behind him. The chamber into which he had been thrust was walled on three sides with the dark stone of the island, and was walled on the fourth with heavy, unbreakable glass. Beyond the glass he saw the blue-green, glimmering waters of the undersea, lit by the hanging cressets of the chamber; and in the waters were great devil-fish whose tentacles writhed along the wall; and huge pythonomorphs with fabulous golden coils receding in the gloom; and the floating corpses of men that stared in upon him with eyeballs from which the lids had been excised.

There was a couch in one corner of the dungeon, close to the wall of glass; and food and drink had been supplied for Fulbra in vessels of wood. The king laid himself down, weary and hopeless, without tasting the food. Then, lying with close-shut eyes while the dead men and sea-monsters peered in upon him by the glare of the cressets, he strove to forget his griefs and the dolorous doom that impended. And through his clouding terror and sorrow, he seemed to see the comely face of the girl who had smiled upon him compassionately, and who, alone of all that he had met in Uccastrog, had spoken to him with words of kindness. The face returned ever and anon, with a soft haunting, a gentle sorcery; and Fulbra felt, for the first time in many suns, the dim stirring of his buried youth and the vague, obscure desire of life. So, after a while, he slept; and the face of the girl came still before him in his dreams.

The cressets burned above him with undiminished flames when he awakened; and the sea beyond the wall of glass was thronged with the same monsters as before, or with others of like kind. But amid the floating corpses he now beheld the flayed bodies of his own slaves, who, after being tortured by the island people, had been cast forth into the submarine cavern that adjoined his dungeon, so that he might see them on awakening.

He sickened with new horror at the sight; but even as he stared at the dead faces, the door of bronze swung open with a sullen grinding, and his guards entered. Seeing that he had not consumed the food and water provided for him, they forced him to eat and drink a little, menacing him with their broad, crooked blades till he complied. And then they led him from the dungeon and took him before King Ildrac, in the great hall of tortures.

Fulbra saw, by the level golden light through the palace windows and the long shadows of the columns and machines of torment, that the time was early dawn. The hall was crowded with the Torturers and their women; and many seemed to look on while others, of both sexes, busied themselves with ominous preparations. And Fulbra saw that a tall brazen statue, with cruel and demonian visage, like some implacable god of the underworld, was now standing at the right hand of Ildrac where he sat aloft on his brazen chair.

Fulbra was thrust forward by his guards, and Ildrac greeted him briefly, with a wily smile that preceded the words and lingered after them. And when Ildrac had spoken, the brazen image also began to speak, addressing Fulbra in the language of Yoros, with strident and metallic tones, and telling him with full and minute circumstance the various infernal tortures to which he was to be subjected on that day.

When the statue had done speaking, Fulbra heard a soft whisper in his ear, and saw beside him the fair girl whom he had previously met in the nether corridors. And the girl, seemingly unheeded by the Torturers, said to him: 'Be courageous, and endure bravely all that is inflicted; for I shall effect your release before another day, if this be possible.'

Fulbra was cheered by the girl's assurance; and it seemed to him that she was fairer to look upon than before; and he thought that her eyes regarded him tenderly; and the twin desires of love and life were strangely resurrected in his heart, to fortify him against the tortures of Ildrac.

Of that which was done to Fulbra for the wicked pleasure of King Ildrac and his people, it were not well to speak fully. For the islanders of

Uccastrog had designed innumerable torments, curious and subtle, wherewith to harry and excruciate the five senses; and they could harry the brain itself, driving it to extremes more terrible than madness; and could take away the dearest treasures of memory and leave unutterable foulness in their place.

On that day, however, they did not torture Fulbra to the uttermost. But they racked his ears with cacophonous sounds; with evil flutes that chilled the blood and curdled it upon his heart; with deep drums that seemed to ache in all his tissues; and thin tabors that wrenched his very bones. Then they compelled him to breathe the mounting fumes of braziers wherein the dried gall of dragons and the adipocere of dead cannibals were burned together with a fetid wood. Then, when the fire had died down, they freshened it with the oil of vampire bats; and Fulbra swooned, unable to bear the feter any longer.

Later, they stripped away his kingly vestments and fastened about his body a silken girdle that had been freshly dipt in an acid carrosive only to human flesh; and the acid ate slowly, fretting his skin with infinite pangs.

Then, after removing the girdle lest it slay him, the Torturers brought in certain creatures that had the shape of elling serpents, but were covered from head to tail with sable hairs like those of a caterpillar. And these creatures twined themselves tightly about the arms and legs of Fulbra; and though he fought wildly in his revulsion, he could not loosen them with his hands; and the hairs that covered their constringent coils began to pierce his limbs like a million tiny needles, till he screamed with the agony. And when his breath failed him and he could scream no longer, the baby serpents were induced to relinquish their hold by a languorous piping of which the islanders knew the secret. They dropped away and left him; but the mark of their coils was imprinted redly about his limbs; and around his body there burned the raw branding of the girdle.

King Ildrac and his people looked on with a dreadful gloating; for in such things they took their joy, and strove to pacify an implacable obscure desire. But seeing now that Fulbra could endure no more, and wishing to wreak

their will upon him for many future days, they took him back to his dungeon.

Lying sick with remembered horror, feverish with pain, he longed not for the clemency of death, but hoped for the coming of the girl to release him as she had promised. The long hours passed with a half-delirious tedium; and the cressets, whose flames had been changed to crimson, appeared to fill his eyes with flowing blood; and the dead men and the sea-monsters swam as if in blood beyond the wall of glass. And the girl came not; and Fulbra had begun to despair. Then, at last, he heard the door open gently and not with the harsh clangor that had proclaimed the entrance of his guards.

Turning, he saw the girl, who stole swiftly to his couch with a lifted fingertip, enjoining silence. She told him with soft whispers that her plan had failed; but surely on the following night she would be able to drug the guards and obtain the keys of the outer gates; and Fulbra could escape from the palace to a hidden cove in which a boat with water and provisions lay ready for his use. She prayed him to endure for another day the torments of Ildrac; and to this, perforce, he consented. And he thought that the girl loved him; for tenderly she caressed his feverous brow, and rubbed his torture-burning limbs with a soothing ointment. He deemed that her eyes were soft with a compassion that was more than pity. So Fulbra believed the girl and trusted her, and took heart against the horror of the coming day. Her name, it seemed, was Ilvaa; and her mother was a woman of Yoros who had married one of the evil islanders, choosing this repugnant union as an alternative to the flaying-knives of Ildrac.

Too soon the girl went away, pleading the great danger of discovery, and closed the door softly upon Fulbra. And after a while the king slept; and Ilvaa returned to him amid the delirious abominations of his dreams, and sustained him against the terror of strange hells.

At dawn the guards came with their hooked weapons, and led him again before Ildrac. And again the brazen, demoniac statue, in a strident voice, announced the fearful ordeals that he was to undergo. And this time he saw

that other captives, including the crew and merchants of the galley, were also awaiting the malefic ministrations of the Torturers in the vast hall.

Once more in the throng of watchers the girl Ilvaa pressed close to him, unreprimanded by his guards, and murmured words of comfort; so that Fulbra was enheartened against the enormities foretold by the brazen oracular image. And indeed a bold and hopeful heart was required to endure the ordeals of that day...

Among other things less goodly to be mentioned, the Torturers held before Fulbra a mirror of strange wizardry, wherein his own face was reflected as if seen after death. The rigid features, as he gazed upon them, became marked with the green and bluish marbling of corruption; and the withering flesh fell in on the sharp bones, and displayed the visible fretting of the worm. Hearing meanwhile the dolorous groans and agonizing cries of his fellow captives all about the hall, he beheld other faces, dead, swollen, lidless, and flayed, that seemed to approach him from behind and to throng about his own face in the mirror. Their looks were dank and dripping, like the hair of corpses recovered from the sea; and sea-weed was mingled with the locks. Then, turning at a cold and clammy touch, he found that these faces were no illusion but the actual reflection of cadavers drawn from the under-sea by a malign sorcery, that had entered the hall of Ildrac like living men and were peering over his shoulder.

His own slaves, with flesh that the sea-things had gnawed even to the bone, were among them. And the slaves came toward him with glaring eyes that saw only the voidness of death. And beneath the sorcerous control of Ildrac, their evilly animated corpses began to assail Fulbra, clawing at his face and raiment with half-eaten fingers. And Fulbra, faint with loathing, struggled against his dead slaves, who knew not the voice of their master and were deaf as the wheels and racks of torment used by Ildrac...

Anon the drowned and dripping corpses went away; and Fulbra was stripped by the Torturers and was laid supine on the palace floor, with iron rings that bound him closely to the flags at knee and wrist, at elbow and ankle. Then they brought in the disinterred body of a woman, nearly eaten,

in which a myriad maggots swarmed on the uncovered bones and tatters of dark corruption; and this body they placed on the right hand of Fulbra. And also they fetched the carrion of a black goat that was newly touched with beginning decay; and they laid it down beside him on the left hand. Then, across Fulbra, from right to left, the hungry maggots crawled in a long and undulant wave...

After the consummation of this torture, there came many others that were equally ingenious and atrocious, and were well designed for the delectation of King Ildrac and his people. And Fulbra endured the tortures valiantly, upheld by the thought of Ilvaa.

Vainly, however, on the night that followed this day, he waited in his dungeon for the girl. The cressets burned with a bloodier crimson; and new corpses were among the flayed and floating dead in the sea-cavern; and strange double-bodied serpents of the nether deep arose with an endless squirming; and their horned heads appeared to bloat immeasurably against the crystal wall. Yet the girl Ilvaa came not to free him as she had promised; and the night passed. But though despair resumed its old dominion in the heart of Fulbra, and terror came with talons steeped in fresh venom, he refused to doubt Ilvaa, telling himself that she had been delayed or prevented by some unforeseen mishap.

At dawn of the third day, he was again taken before Ildrac. The brazen image, announcing the ordeals of the day, told him that he was to be bound on a wheel of adamant; and, lying on the wheel, was to drink a drugged wine that would steal away his royal memories for ever, and would conduct his naked soul on a long pilgrimage through monstrous and infamous hells before bringing it back to the hall of Ildrac and the broken body on the wheel.

Then certain women of the Torturers, laughing obscenely, came forward and bound King Fulbra to the adamantine wheel with thongs of dragon-gut. And after they had done this, the girl Ilvaa, smiling with the shameless exultation of open cruelty, appeared before Fulbra and stood close beside him, holding a golden cup that contained the drugged wine. She mocked

him for his folly and credulity in trusting her promises; and the other women and the male Torturers, even to Ildrac on his brazen seat, laughed loudly and evilly at Fulbra, and praised Ilvaa for the perfidy she had practised upon him.

So Fulbra's heart grew sick with a darker despair than any he had yet known, The brief, piteous love that had been born amid sorrow and agony perished within him, leaving but ashes steeped in gall. Yet, gazing at Ilvaa with sad eyes, he uttered no word of reproach. He wished to live no longer; and yearning for a swift death, he bethought him of the wizard ring of Vemdeez and of that which Vemdeez had said would follow its removal from his finger. He still wore the ring, which the Torturers had deemed a bauble of small value. But his hands were bound tightly to the wheel, and he could not remove it. So, with a bitter cunning, knowing full well that the islanders would not take away the ring if he should offer it to them, he feigned a sudden madness and cried wildly:

'Steal my memories, if ye will, with your accursed wine -and send me through a thousand hells and bring me back again to Uccastrog; but take not the ring that I wear on my middle finger; for it is more precious to me than many kingdoms or the pale breasts of love.'

Hearing this, King Ildrac rose from his brazen seat; and bidding Ilvaa to delay the administration of the wine, he came forward and inspected curiously the ring of Vemdeez, which gleamed darkly, set with its rayless gem, on Fulbra's finger. And all the while, Fulbra cried out against him in a frenzy, as if fearing that he would take the ring.

So Ildrac, deeming that he could plague the prisoner thereby and could heighten his suffering a little, did the very thing for which Fulbra had planned. And the ring came easily from the shrunken finger; and Ildrac, wishing to mock the royal captive, placed it on his own middle digit.

Then, while Ildrac regarded the captive with a more deeply graven smile of evil on the pale, gilded mask of his face, there came to King Fulbra of Yoros the dreadful and longed-for thing. The Silver Death, that had slept so

long in his body beneath the magical abeyance of the ring of Vemdeez, was made manifest even as he hung on the adamantine wheel. His limbs stiffened with another rigor than that of agony; and his face shone brightly with the coming of the Death; and so he died.

Then, to Ilvaa and to many of the Torturers who stood wondering about the wheel, the chill and instant contagion of the Silver Death was communicated. They fell even where they had stood; and the pestilence remained like a glittering light on the faces and the hands of the men and shone forth from the nude bodies of the women. And the plague passed along the immense hall; and the other captives of King Ildrac were released thereby from their various torments; and the Torturers found surcease from the dire longing that they could assuage only through the pain of their fellowmen. And through all the palace, and throughout the Isle of Uccastrog, the Death flew swiftly, visible in those upon whom it had breathed, but otherwise unseen and inpalpable.

But Ildrac, wearing the ring of Vemdeez, was immune. And guessing not the reason for his immunity, he beheld with consternation the doom that had overtaken his followers, and watched in stupefaction the freeing of his victims. Then, fearful of some inimic sorcery, he rushed from the hall; and standing in the early sun on a palace-terrace above the sea, he tore the ring of Vemdeez from his finger and hurled it to the foamy billows far below, deeming in his terror that the ring was perhaps the source or agent of the unknown hostile magic.

So Ildrac, in his turn, when all the others had fallen, was smitten by the Silver Death; and its peace descended upon him where he lay in his robes of blood-brightened purple, with features shining palely to the unclouded sun. And oblivion claimed the Isle of Uccastrog; and the Torturers were one with the tortured.

THE JUSTICE OF THE ELEPHANT

Nikhil Singh, Rajah of Anapur, was acquiring the obese complacency of middle age; and his memories were blurred and befogged by a liberal use of Raiput opium. It was seldom that he recalled Ameera; though, as a general rule, an unfaithful woman is not the easiest thing in the world to forget. But Nikhal Singh had possessed so many wives and concubines; and one more or less was of no great importance, even though she had been eyed like the sloe and footed like the gazelle and had preferred an elephant-driver to a Rajah. And as Nikhal Singh grew older, and became wearier of women and fonder of opium, such matters were even less memorable or worthy of consideration.

However, the incident had angered him greatly at the time; and the doom he devised for Ameera was the most atrocious one conceivable. Her story was long remembered and whispered in the royal zenana; though whether or not the example had served to deter others from similar derelictions is a moot problem.

Ameera was a dancing-girl, and therefore of low birth; and her rise in the Rajah's favor had not been regarded with unqualified approval by his legitimate wives. Under the circumstances, it was highly unwise for Ameera to carry on a love affair with the comely young elephant-driver, Rama Das; for there were many jealous eyes to note the amour, and jealous tongues to bear tattle thereof to Nikhal Singh. Ameera had been watched; and a man was seen leaving her apartments in the early morning hours. The man was not positively identified as Rama Das; but the presence of anyone save the Rajah in those sacrosanct purlieus was enough to damn the unfortunate girl.

The punishment inflicted by Nikhal Singh was no less swift than dreadful. The girl was condemned to a death usually reserved for the lowest criminals; and her suspected lover, Rama Das, by a refinement of Rajput cruelty, was chosen to her executioner. She was made to kneel and place her

head on a block of stone in the palace courtyard; and thereupon the great elephant ridden by Rama Das, at a signal from the driver, lifted one of his enormous hoofs and brought it down on the head of the dancing-girl, crushing her to an instant pulp. During the awful ordeal, no sign of recognition or emotion was betrayed either by Rama Das or Ameera; and the gloating Rajah was perhaps disappointed in this respect. A day or two afterward the young elephant-driver disappeared from Anapur; and no one knew whether he had been secretly made away with by Nikhal Singh or had vanished of his own accord.

Ten years had now passed; and the affair was overlaid, even in the minds of the Rajahs eldest wives, by a score of later scandals and by the petty happenings of the palace. And when the position of mahout to Ragna, the huge elephant that bore the Rajah himself on all formal occasions, became vacant through death, no one would have connected the half-forgotten Rama Das with the new applicant, Ram Chandar, who vowed his fitness to take charge of Ragna and offered credentials testifying to years of faithful and efficient service to the Maharajah of a state in Bundelcund. And least of all would it have occurred to Nikhal Singh himself that the grave, taciturn, heavy-bearded Ram Chandar and the blithe, beardless Rama Das were the same person.

Somehow, though there were many other applicants, Ram Chandar insinuated himself into the desired position. And since he was a competent driver, who had obviously mastered the language of elephants down to its last and most subtle inflection, no one, not even his fellow mahouts, found reason to disapprove or criticize his appointment. Ragna also appeared to like his new driver; and that ideal confidence and understanding which often exists between the mahout and the animal soon sprang up between these two. Ragna, after the fashion of a well-tutored elephant, was wise and erudite in regard to all that it was proper for him to know; but he learned some new manners and graces beneath the instruction of Ram Chandar; and was even taught in private one or two tricks that are not usually part of the curriculum of a state elephant. Of these latter, no one dreamt; and Ram Chandar preserved an inscrutable silence. And Nikhal Singh was wholly

unaware of the strange, sardonic, sinister regard with which he was watched by the new nahout from Bundelcund.

Nikhil Singh had grown fonder than ever of his opium, and cared less and less for other pleasures or distractions. But now, in his fortieth year, for political reasons, it was agreed upon by his ministers that he must take another wife. The Ranees had recently died without leaving him a male heir; and the young daughter of the neighboring Rajah of Aylmere was selected as her successor. All the necessary arrangements and elaborate protocols were made; and the day was set for the marriage. Nikhil Singh was secretly bored by the prospect but was publicly resigned to his royal duty. The feelings of the bride, perhaps, were even more problematical.

The day of the marriage dawned in torrid saffron. A great procession coming from Aylmere was to bring the bride into Anapur; and Nikhil Singh, with another stately procession, was to meet her outside the gates of his capital.

It was a gorgeous ceremony. Nikhil Singh, seated in a golden and jewel-crusted howdah on the superb elephant Ragna, passed through the streets of Anapur followed by the court dignitaries on other elephants and a small army of horsemen, all splendidly caparisoned. There was much firing of jezails and cannon by the soldiers and banging of musical instruments among the populace. The mahout, Ram Chandar, grave and impassive as usual, sat on Ragna's neck. Nikhil Singh, who had fortified himself with a large lump of his favorite drug, was equally impassive on his brodered cushions in the howdah.

The procession emerged through the open gate of Anapur, and beheld at some distance, in a cloud of summer dust, the approach of the bride and her attendants, forming an array no less magnificent and sumptuous than that which was headed by Nikhil Singh.

As the two processions neared each other, an event occurred which was not a pre-arranged part of the ceremonial. At a secret signal from Ram Chandar, perceived and understood only by the elephant himself, Rana suddenly

halted, reached into the great howdah with his tunk, seized Nikhal Singh in a tenacious embrace, and haling the Rajah forth in a most undignified and ignominious manner, deposited him on his the knees in the road and forced him to bow his head in the dust before bride's approaching litter. Then, almost before his action was comprehended by the stupefied throng, Ragna raised one of his front hoofs and calmly proceeded to crush the Rajah's head into a flat, formless jelly. Then, trumpeting wildly, menacing all who stood in his way, and apparently defying the frantic signals and commands of his driver, Ragna plunged through the crowd and quickly vanished in the near-by jungle, still carrying Ram Chandar and the empty howdah.

Amid the confusion and consternation that prevailed, it was assumed that Ragna had been seized by the vicious madness to which elephants are sometimes liable. When a semblance of order had been restored, he was followed by a troop of the Rajah's horsemen, armed with jezails. They found him an hour later, browsing peacefully in a jungle-glade without his driver, and dispatched him with a volley, not trusting his appearance of renewed mildness.

The assumption that Ragna had gone musth was universal; and no one thought of Rama Das and the death of Ameera, ten years before. However, the disappearance of the new mahout, Ram Chandar, was no less a mystery than the earlier vanishment of Rama Das, if anyone had remembered to draw the parallel. The body of Ram Chandar was never found, and no one knew to a certainty whether he had been killed by Ragna in the thick jungle or had run away from Anapur through fear of being held responsible for Ragna's behavior. But mad elephants are prone to wreak their malignity on all accessible victims, even their own mahouts; so it was considered very unlikely that Ram Chandar could have escaped.

THE KISS OF ZORAIDA

With one backward look at the bowery suburbs of Damascus, and the street that was peopled only by the long, faint shadows of a crescent moon, Selim dropped from the high wall among the leafing almonds and flowering lilacs of Abdur Ali's garden. The night was almost sultry, and the air was steeped with a distilled languor of voluptuous perfume. Even if he had been in some other garden, in another city, Selim could not have breathed that perfume without thinking of Zoraida, the young wife of Abdur Ali. Evening after evening, for the past fortnight, during her lord and master's absence, she had met him among the lilacs, till he had grown to associate the very odor of her hair and the savor of her lips with their fragrance.

The garden was silent, except for a silver-lipping fountain; and no leaf or petal stirred in the balmy stillness. Abdur Ali had gone to Aleppo on urgent business and was not expected back for several more days; so the slightly tepid thrill of anticipation which Selim felt was untinged by any thought of danger. The whole affair, even from the beginning, had been as safe as that sort of thing could possibly be: Zoraida was Abdur Ali's wife, so there were no jealous women who might tattle to their common lord; and the servants and eunuchs of the household, like Zoraida herself, hated the severe and elderly jewel-merchant. It had been unnecessary even to bribe them into complaisance. Everything and everyone had helped to facilitate the amour. In fact, it was all too easy; and Selim was beginning to weary a little of this heavy-scented garden and the oversweet affection of Zoraida. Perhaps he would not come again after tonight, or tomorrow night. . . . There were other women, no less fair than the jeweler's wife, whom he had not kissed so often . . . or had not kissed at all.

He stepped forward among the flower-burdened bushes. Was there a figure standing in the shadow, near the fountain? The figure was dim, and darkly muffled, but it must be Zoraida. She had never failed to meet him there, she was ever the first at their rendezvous. Sometimes she had taken him into the luxurious harem; and sometimes, on warm evenings like this, they had

spent their long hours of passion beneath the stars, amid the lilacs and almonds.

As Selim approached, he wondered why she did not rush to meet him, as was her wont. Perhaps she had not yet seen him. He called softly: "Zoraida!"

The waiting figure emerged from the shadow. It was not Zoraida, but Abdur Ali. The faint moon-rays glinted on the dull iron barrel and bright silver frettings of a heavy pistol which the old merchant held in his hand.

"You wish to see Zoraida?" The tone was harsh, metallicly bitter.

Selim, to say the least, was taken aback. It was all too plain that his affair with Zoraida had been discovered, and that Abdur Ali had returned from Aleppo before the appointed time to catch him in a trap. The predicament was more than disagreeable, for a young man who had thought to spend the evening with a much-enamoured mistress. And Abdur Ali's direct query was disconcerting. Selim was unable to think of an apt or judicious answer.

"Come, thou shalt see her." Selim felt the jealous fury, but not the savage irony, that underlay the words. He was full of unpleasant premonitions, most of which concerned himself rather than Zoraida. He knew that he could not look for mercy from this austere and terrible old man; and the probabilities before him were such as to preclude more than a passing thought of what might have befallen, or would befall, Zoraida. Selim was something of an egoist; and he could hardly have claimed (except for the ear of Zoraida) that he was deeply in love. His self-solicitude, under the circumstances, was perhaps to be expected, even if not wholly to be admired.

Abdur Ali had covered Selim with the pistol. The young man realized uncomfortably that he himself was unarmed, except for his yataghan. Even as he was remembering this, two more figures came forward from amid the lilac-shadows. They were the eunuchs, Cassim and Mustafa, who guarded Abdur Ali's harem, and whom the lovers believed friendly to their intrigue. Each of the giant blacks was armed with a drawn simitar. Mustafa stationed

himself at Selim's right hand and Cassim at his left. He could see the whites of their eyes as they watched him with impassable vigilance.

"Now," said Abdur Ali, "you are about to enjoy the singular privilege of being admitted to my harem. This privilege, I believe, you have arrogated to yourself on certain former occasions, and without my knowledge. Tonight I shall grant it myself; though I doubt if there are many who would follow my example. Come: Zoraida is waiting for you, and you must not disappoint her, nor delay any longer. You are later than usual at the rendezvous, as I happen to know."

With the blacks beside him, with Abdur Ali and the leveled pistol in his rear, Selim traversed the dim garden and entered the courtyard of the jewel-merchant's house. It was like a journey in some evil dream and nothing appeared wholly real to the young man. Even when he stood in the harem interior, by the soft light of Saracenic lamps of wrought brass, and saw the familiar divans with their deep-hued cushions and coverings, the rare Turkoman and Persian rugs, the taborets of Indian ebony freaked with precious metals and mother-of-pearl, he could not dispel his feeling of strange dubiety.

In his terror and bewilderment, amid the rich furnishings and somber splendor, he did not see Zoraida for a moment. Abdur Ali perceived his confusion and pointed to one of the couches.

"Hast thou no greeting for Zoraida?" The low tone was indescribably sardonic and ferocious.

Zoraida, wearing the scanty harem costume of bright silks in which she was wont to receive her lover, was lying on the sullen crimson fabrics of the divan. She was very still, and seemed to be asleep. Her face was whiter than usual, though she had always been a little pale; and the soft, child-like features, with their hint of luxurious roundness, wore a vaguely troubled expression, with a touch of bitterness about the mouth. Selim approached her, but she did not stir.

"Speak to her," snarled the old man. His eyes burned like two spots of slowly eating fire in the brown and crumpled parchment of his face.

Selim was unable to utter a word. He had begun to surmise the truth; and the situation overwhelmed him with a horrible despair.

"What? Thou hast no greeting for one who loved thee so dearly?" The words were like the dripping of some corrosive acid.

"What has thou done to her?" said Selim after a while. He could not look at Zoraida any longer; nor could he lift his eyes to meet those of Abdur Ali.

"I have dealt with her very gently. As thou seest, I have not marred in any wise the perfection of her beauty—there is no wound, and not even the mark of a blow, on her white body. Was I not more generous . . . to leave her thus . . . for thee?"

Selim was not a coward, as men go; yet he gave an involuntary shudder.

"But ... thou hast not told me."

"It was a rare and precious poison, which slays immediately and with little pain. A drop of it would have been enough—or even so much as still remains upon her lips. She drank it of her own choice. I was merciful to her—as I shall be to thee."

"I am at thy disposal," said Selim with all the hardihood he could muster.

The jewel-dealer's face became a mask of malignity, like that of some avenging fiend.

"My eunuchs know their master, and they will slice thee limb from limb and member from member if I give the word."

Selim looked at the two negroes. They returned his gaze with impassive eyes that were utterly devoid of all interest, either friendly or unfriendly.

The light ran without a quiver along their gleaming muscles and upon their glittering swords.

"What is thy will? Dost thou mean to kill me?"

"I have no intention of slaying thee myself. Thy death will come from another source.

Selim looked again at the armed eunuchs.

"No, it will not be that—unless you prefer it."

"In Allah's name, what doest thou mean, then?" The tawny brown of Selim's face had turned ashen with horror of suspense.

"Thy death will be one which any true lover would envy," said Abdur Ali.

Selim was powerless to ask another question. His nerves were beginning to crumble under the ordeal. The dead woman on the couch, the malevolent old man with his baleful half-hints and his obvious implacability, the muscular negroes who would hew a man into collops at their master's word—all were enough to break down the courage of hardier men than he.

He became aware that Abdur Ali was speaking once more.

"I have brought thee to thy mistress. But it would seem that thou art not a very ardent lover."

"In the name of the Prophet, cease thy mockery."

Abdur Ali did not seem to hear the tortured cry.

"It is true, of course, that she could not reply even if thou shouldst speak to her. But her lips are as fair as ever, even if they are growing a little cold with thy unlover-like delay. Hast thou no kiss to lay upon them, in memory of all the other kisses they have taken—and given?"

Selim was again speechless. Finally:

"But you said there was a poison which--"

"Yes, and I told thee the truth. Even the touch of thy lips to hers, where a trace of the poison lingers, will be enough to cause thy death." There was an awful gloating in Abdur Ali's voice.

Selim shivered and looked again at Zoraida. Aside from her utter stillness and pallor, and the faintly bitter expression about the mouth, she differed in no apparent wise from the woman who had lain so often in his arms. Yet the very knowledge that she was dead was enough to make her seem unspeakably strange and even repulsive to Selim. It was hard to associate this still, marmoreal being with the affectionate mistress who had always welcomed him with eager smiles and caresses.

"Is there no other way?" Selim's question was little louder than a whisper.

"There is none. And you delay too long." Abdur Ali made a sign to the negroes, who stepped closer to Selim, lifting their swords in the lamplight. "Unless thou dost my bidding, thy hands will be sliced off at the wrists," the jeweler went on. "The next blows will sever a small portion of each forearm. Then a brief attention will be given to other parts, before returning to the arms. I am sure thou wilt prefer the other death." Selim stooped above the couch where Zoraida lay. Terror—the abject terror of death—was his one emotion. He had wholly forgotten his love for Zoraida, had forgotten her kisses and endearments. He feared the strange, pale woman before him as much as he had once desired her. "Make haste." The voice of Abdur Ali was steely as the lifted simitars.

Selim bent over and kissed Zoraida on the mouth. Her lips were not entirely cold, but there was a queer, bitter taste. Of course, it must be the poison. The thought was hardly formulated when a searing agony seemed to run through all his veins. He could no longer see Zoraida, in the blinding flames that appeared before him and filled the room like ever-widening suns; and he did not know that he had fallen forward on the couch across her body. Then the flames began to shrink with great swiftness and went out in a swirl of soft gloom. Selim felt that he was sinking into a great gulf, and that

someone (whose name he could not remember) was sinking beside him. Then, all at once, he was alone, and was losing even the sense of solitude. . till there was nothing but darkness and oblivion.

THE LAST HIEROGLYPH

The world itself, in the end, shall be turned to a round cipher.

-Old prophecy of Zothique

In the Book of Vergama

It was said of Vergama, in the lattermost ages, that he had existed immortally ever since the lifting of Zothique from the foundered ruins of continents that history had forgotten. Always, throughout the wide realms and empires of the continent, there had been rumors of Vergama, and various beliefs about his identity, his essence, his birth-place and dwelling-place. The sages disputed learnedly whether he was demon, god, sorcerer, phantom, or a being from worlds whose inhabitants were not akin to any of these. Likewise they debated whether he dwelt in mummy-peopled Cincor, or amid the stark fearful mountains of northern Xylac, or in Naat, isle of evil gramaries lying shrouded with the mist and foam of the sunset ocean, or in some other kingdom or sea-lost island.

No idols were wrought in the image of Vergama, no altars were dedicated to him: yet sometimes he was addressed in prayer by savage peoples, or was called upon with-dark runic formulae by the more venturous wizards. Some claimed that the prayers and the incantations were answered; but this, like all else that concerned Vergama, was a matter of much doubt. Curious and almost omnipotent powers were ascribed to him, and attributes of tremendous bale and benignity; but there was no virtual proof of their manifestation at any time. In a land of murky enchantments, of multiform mysteries, Vergama resided unknown, occult, and apart. It was believed that vast multitudes of people had entered his secret house through the centuries and millenniums; but none had returned there from to declare the actual nature of Vergama and the situation of his abode. Certain prophets, appearing in the ultimate years, avowed that he was coeval with life and death, and was the first and the last of the uncreated gods.

Even till the ending of time, weird legends gathered about Vergama; and there were divers tales of the destinies of them that passed into his shadowy mansion; and much was fabled concerning a volume called the Book of Hieroglyphics, which belonged to this inscrutable entity. Among such tales and fablings, there is the story of what happened to Nushain, the astrologer.

Nushain the astrologer had studied the circling orbs of night from many far-separated regions, and had cast, with such skill as he was able to command, the horoscopes of a myriad men, women and children. From city to city, from realm to realm he had gone, abiding briefly in any place: for often the local magistrates had banished him as a common charlatan; or otherwise, in due time, his consultants had discovered the error of his predictions and had fallen away from him. Sometimes he went hungry and shabby; and small honor was paid to him anywhere. The sole companions of his precarious fortunes were a wretched mongrel dog that had somehow attached itself to him in the desert town of Zul-Bha-Sair, and a mute, one-eyed negro whom he had bought very cheaply on Yoros. He had named the dog Ansarath, after the canine star, and had called the Negro Mouzda, which was a word signifying darkness.

In the course of his prolonged itinerations, the astrologer came to Xylac and made his abode in its capital, Ummaos, which had been built above the shards of an elder city of the same name, long since destroyed by a sorcerer's wrath. Here Nushain lodged with Ansarath and Mouzda in a half-ruinous attic of a rotting tenement; and from the tenement's roof, Nushain was wont to observe the positions and movements of the sidereal bodies on evenings not obscured by the fumes of the city. At intervals some housewife or jade, some porter or huckster or petty merchant, would climb the decaying stairs to his chamber, and would pay him a small sum for the nativity which he plotted with immense care by the aid of his tattered books of astrological science.

When, as often occurred, he found himself still at a loss regarding the significance of some heavenly conjunction or opposition after poring over his books, he would consult Ansarath, and would draw profound auguries from the variable motions of the dog's mangy tail or his actions in searching

for fleas. Certain of these divinations were fulfilled, to the considerable benefit of Nushain's renown in Ummaos. People came to him more freely and frequently, hearing that he was a soothsayer of some note; and, moreover, he was immune from prosecution, owing to the liberal laws of Xylac, which permitted all the sorcerous and mantic arts.

It seemed, for the first time, that the dark planets of his fate were yielding to auspicious stars. For this fortune, and the coins which accrued thereby to his purse, he gave thanks to Vergama who, throughout the whole continent of Zothique, was deemed the most powerful and mysterious of the genii, and was thought to rule over the heavens as well as the earth.

On a summer night, when the stars were strewn thickly like a firey sand on the black azure vault, Nushain went up to the roof of his lodging-place. As was often his custom, he took with him the negro Mouzda, whose one eye possessed a miraculous sharpness and had served well, on many occasions, to supplement the astrologer's own rather near-sighted vision. Through a well codified system of signs and gestures, the mute was able to communicate the result of his observations to Nushain.

On this night the constellation of the Great Dog, which had presided over Nushain's birth, was ascendant in the east. Regarding it closely, the dim eyes of the astrologer were troubled by a sense of something unfamiliar in its configuration. He could not determine the precise character of the change till Mouzda, who evinced much excitement, called his attention to three new stars of the second magnitude which had appeared in close proximity to the Dog's hindquarters. These remarkable novae, which Nushain could discern only as three reddish blurs, formed a small equilateral triangle. Nushain and Mouzda were both certain that they had not been visible on any previous evening.

"By Vergama, this is a strange thing," swore the astrologer, filled with amazement and dumbfoundment. He began to compute the problematic influence of the novae on his future reading of the heavens, and perceived at once that they would exert, according to the law of astral emanations, a

modifying effect on his own destiny, which had been so largely controlled by the Dog.

He could not, however, without consulting his books and tables, decide the particular trend and import of this supervening influence; though he felt sure that it was most momentous, whether for his bale or welfare. Leaving Mouzda to watch the heavens for other prodigies, he descended at once to his attic. There, after collating the opinions of several old-time astrologers on the power exerted by novae, he began to recast his own horoscope. Painfully and with much agitation he labored throughout the night, and did not finish his figurings till the dawn came to mix a deathly grayness with the yellow light of the candles.

There was, it seemed, but one possible interpretation of the altered heavens. The appearance of the triangle of novae in conjunction with the Dog signified clearly that Nushain was to start ere long on an unpremeditated journey which would involve the transit of no less than three elements. Mouzda and Ansarath were to accompany him; and three guides, appearing successively, at the proper times, would lead him toward a destined goal. So much his calculations had revealed, but no more: there was nothing to foretell whether the journey would prove auspicious or disastrous, nothing to indicate its bourn, purpose or direction.

The astrologer was much disturbed by this somewhat singular and equivocal augury. He was ill-pleased by the prospect of an imminent journey, for he did not wish to leave Ummaos, among whose credulous people he had begun to establish himself not without success. Moreover, a strong apprehension was roused within him by the oddly manifold nature and veiled outcome of the journey. All this, he felt, was suggestive of the workings of some occult and perhaps sinister providence; and surely it was no common traveling which would take him through three elements and would require a triple guidance.

During the nights that followed, he and Mouzda watched the mysterious novae as they went over toward the west behind the bright-flaming Dog. And he puzzled interminably over his charts and volumes hoping to

discover some error in the reading he had made. But always, in the end, he was compelled to the same interpretation.

More and more, as time went on, he was troubled by the thought of that unwelcome and mysterious journey which he must make. He continued to prosper in Ummaos, and it seemed that there was no conceivable reason for his departure from that city. He was as one who awaited a dark and secret summons; not knowing whence it would come, nor at what hour. Throughout the days, he scanned with fearful anxiety the faces of his visitors, deeming that the first of the three star-predicted guides might arrive unheralded and unrecognized among them.

Mouzda and the dog Ansarath, with the intuition of dumb things, were sensible of the weird uneasiness felt by their master. They shared it palpably, the negro showing his apprehension by wild and demoniac grimaces, and the dog crouching under the astrologer's table or prowling restlessly to and fro with his half-hairless tail between his legs. Such behavior, in its turn, served to reconfirm the inquietude of Nushain, who deemed it a bad omen.

On a certain evening, Nushain pored for the fiftieth time over his horoscope, which he had drawn with sundry-colored inks on a sheet of papyrus. He was much startled when, on the blank lower margin of the sheet, he saw a curious character which was no part of his own scribbling. The character was a hieroglyph written in dark bituminous brown, and seeming to represent a mummy whose shroudings were loosened about the legs and whose feet were set in the posture of a long stride. It was facing toward that quarter of the chart where stood the sign indicating the Great Dog, which, in Zothique, was a House of the zodiac.

Nushain's surprise turned to a sort of trepidation as he studied the hieroglyph. He knew that the margin of the chart had been wholly clear on the previous night; and during the past day he had not left the attic at any time. Mouzda, he felt sure, would never have dared to touch the chart; and, moreover, the negro was little skilled in writing. Among the various inks employed by Nushain, there was none that resembled the sullen brown of

the character, which seemed to stand out in a sad relief on the white papyrus.

Nushain felt the alarm of one who confronts a sinister and unexplainable apparition. No human hand, surely, had inscribed the mummy-shapen character, like the sign of a strange outer planet about to invade the Houses of his horoscope. Here, as in the advent of the three novae, an occult agency was suggested. Vainly, for many hours, he sought to unriddle the mystery: but in all his books there was naught to enlighten him; for this thing, it seemed, was wholly without precedent in astrology.

During the next day he was busied from morn till eve with the plotting of those destinies ordained by the heavens for certain people of Ummaos. After completing the calculations with his usual toilsome care, he unrolled his own chart once more, albeit with trembling fingers. An eeriness that was nigh to panic seized him when he saw that the brown hieroglyph no longer stood on the margin, but was now placed like a striding figure in one of the lower Houses, where it still fronted toward the Dog, as if advancing on that ascendant sign.

Henceforth the astrologer was fevered with the awe and curiosity of one who watches a fatal but inscrutable portent. Never, during the hours that he pondered above it, was there any change in the intruding character; and yet, on each successive evening when he took out the chart, he saw that the mummy had strode upward into a higher House, drawing always nearer to the House of the Dog....

There came a time when the figure stood on the Dog's threshold. Portentous with mystery and menace that were still beyond the astrologer's divining, it seemed to wait while the night wore on and was shot through with the grey wefting of dawn. Then, overworn with his prolonged studies and vigils, Nushain slept in his chair. Without the troubling of any dream he slept; and Mouzda was careful not to disturb him; and no visitors came to the attic on that day. So the morn and the noon and the afternoon went over, and their going was unheeded by Nushain.

He was awakened at eve by the loud and dolorous howling of Ansarath, which appeared to issue from the room's farthest corner. Confusedly, ere he opened his eyes, he became aware of an odor of bitter spices and piercing natron. Then, with the dim webs of sleep not wholly swept from his vision, he beheld, by the yellowy tapers that Mouzda had lighted, a tall, mummy-like form that waited in silence beside him. The head, arms and body of the shape were wound closely with bitumen-colored cerements; but the folds were loosened from the hips downward, and the figure stood like a walker, with one brown, withered foot in advance of its fellow.

Terror quickened in Nushain's heart, and it came to him that the shrouded shape, whether lich or phantom, resembled the weird, invasive hieroglyph that had passed from House to House through the chart of his destiny. Then, from the thick swathings of the apparition, a voice issued indistinctly, saying: "Prepare yourself, O Nushain, for I am the first guide of that journey which was foretold to you by the stars."

Ansarath, cowering beneath the astrologer's bed, was still howling his fear of the visitant; and Nushain saw that Mouzda had tried to conceal himself in company with the dog. Though a chill as of imminent death was upon him, and he deemed the apparition to be death itself, Nushain arose from the chair with that dignity proper to an astrologer, which he had maintained through all the vicissitudes of his lifetime. He called Mouzda and Ansarath from their hiding-place, and the two obeyed him, though with many cringings before the dark, muffled mummy.

With the comrades of his fortune behind him, Nushain turned to the visitant. "I am ready," he said, in a voice whose quavering was almost imperceptible. "But I would like with me certain of my belongings."

The mummy shook his mobled head. "It were well to take with you nothing but your horoscope: for this alone shall you retain in the end."

Nushain stooped above the table on which he had left his nativity. Before he began to roll the open papyrus, he noticed that the hieroglyph of the mummy had vanished. It was as if the written symbol, after moving athwart

his horoscope, had materialized itself in the figure that now attended him. But on the chart's nether margin, in remote opposition to the Dog, was the sea-blue hieroglyph of a quaint merman with carp-like tail and head half human, half apish; and behind the merman was the black hieroglyph of a small barge.

Nushain's fear, for a moment, was subdued by wonder. But he rolled the chart carefully, and stood holding it in his right hand.

"Come," said the guide. "Your time is brief, and you must pass through the three elements that guard the dwelling place of Vergama from unseasonable intrusion."

These words, in a measure, confirmed the astrologer's divinations. But the mystery of his future fate was in no wise lightened by the intimation that he must enter, presumably at the journey's end, the dim House of that being called Vergama, whom some considered the most secret of all the gods, and others, the most cryptical of demons. In all the lands of Zothique, there were rumors and fables regarding Vergama; but these were wholly diverse and contradictory, except in their common attribution of almost omnipotent powers to this entity. No man knew the situation of his abode; but it was believed that vast multitudes of people had entered it during the centuries and millenniums, and that none had returned therefrom.

Ofttimes had Nushain called upon the name of Vergama, swearing or protesting thereby as men are wont to do by the cognomens of their shrouded lords. But now, hearing the name from the lips of his macabre visitor, he was filled with the darkest and most eerie apprehensions. He sought to subdue these feelings, and to resign himself to the manifest will of the stars. With Mouzda and Ansarath at his heels, he followed the striding mummy, which seemed little hampered, if at all, by its trailing cerements.

With one regretful backward glance at his littered books and papers, he passed from the attic room and down the tenement stairs. A wannish light seemed to cling about the swathings of the mummy; but, apart from this, there was no illumination; and Nushain thought that the house was

strangely dark and silent, as if all its occupants had died or had gone away. He heard no sound from the evening city; nor could he see aught but close-encroaching darkness beyond the windows that should have gazed on a little street. Also, it seemed that the stairs had changed and lengthened, giving no more on the courtyard of the tenement, but plunging deviously into an unsuspected region of stifling vaults and foul, dismal, nitrous corridors.

Here the air was pregnant with death, and the heart of Nushain failed him. Everywhere, in the shadow-curtained crypts and deep-shelved recesses, he felt the innumerable presence of the dead. He thought that there was a sad sighing of stirred cerements, a breath exhaled by long-stiffened cadavers, a dry clicking of lipless teeth beside him as he went. But darkness walled his vision, and he saw nothing save the luminous form of his guide, who stalked onward as if through a natal realm.

It seemed to Nushain that he passed through boundless catacombs in which were housed the mortality and corruption of all the ages. Behind him still he heard the shuffling of Mouzda, and at times the low, frightened whine of Ansarath; so he knew that the twain were faithful to him. But upon him, with a chill of lethal damps, there grew the horror of his surroundings; and he shrank with all the repulsion of living flesh from the shrouded thing that he followed, and those other things that mouldered round about in the fathomless gloom.

Half thinking to hearten himself by the sound of his own voice, he began to question the guide; though his tongue clove to his mouth as if palsied. "Is it indeed Vergama, and none other, who has summoned me forth upon this journey? For what purpose has he called me? And in what land is his dwelling?"

"Your fate has summoned you," said the mummy. "In the end, at the time appointed and no sooner, you shall learn the purpose. As to your third question, you would be no wiser if I should name the region in which the house of Vergama is hidden from mortal trespass: for the land is not listed on any terrene chart, nor map of the starry heavens."

These answers seemed equivocal and disquieting to Nushain, who was possessed by frightful forebodings as he went deeper into the subterranean charnels. Dark, indeed, he thought, must be the goal of a journey whose first stage had led him so far amid the empire of death and corruption; and dubious, surely, was the being who had called him forth and had sent to him as the first guide a sere and shrunken mummy clad in the tomb's habiliments.

Now, as he pondered these matters almost to frenzy, the shelfy walls of the catacomb before him were outlined by a dismal light, and he came after the mummy into a chamber where tall candles of black pitch in sockets of tarnished silver burned about an immense and solitary sarcophagus. Upon the blank lid and sides of the sarcophagus, as Nushain neared it, he could see neither runes nor sculptures nor hieroglyphs engraven; but seemed, from the proportions, that a giant must lie within.

The mummy passed athwart the chamber without pausing. But Nushain, seeing that the vaults beyond were full of darkness, drew back with a reluctance that he could not conquer; and though the stars had decreed his journey, it seemed to him that human flesh could go no farther. Prompted by a sudden impulse, he seized one of the heavy yard-long tapers that burned stilly about the sarcophagus; and, holding it in his left hand, with his horoscope still firmly clutched in the right, he fled with Mouzda and Ansarath on the way he had come, hoping to retrace his footsteps through the gloomy caverns and return to Ummaos by the taper's light.

He heard no sound of pursuit from the mummy. But ever, as he fled, the pitch candle, flaring wildly, revealed to him the horrors that darkness had curtained from his eyes. He saw the bones of men that were piled in repugnant confusion with those of fell monsters, and the riven sarcophagi from which protruded the half-decayed members of innominate beings; members which were neither heads nor hands nor feet. And soon the catacomb divided and redivided before him, so that he must choose his way at random, not knowing whether it would lead him back to Ummaos or into the untrod depths.

Presently he came to the huge, browless skull of an uncouth creature, which reposed on the ground with upward-gazing orbits; and beyond the skull was the monster's moldy skeleton, wholly blocking the passage. Its ribs were cramped by the narrowing walls, as if it had crept there and had died in the darkness, unable to withdraw or go forward. White spiders, demon-headed and large as monkeys, had woven their webs in the hollow arches of the bones; and they swarmed out interminably as Nushain approached; and the skeleton seemed to stir and quiver as they seethed over it abhorrently and dropped to the ground before the astrologer. Behind them others poured in a countless army, crowding and mantling every ossicle. Nushain fled with his companions; and running back to the forking of the caverns, he followed another passage.

Here he was not pursued by the demon spiders. But, hurrying on lest they or the mummy overtake him, he was soon halted by the rim of a great pit which filled the catacomb from wall to wall and was overwide for the leaping of man. The dog Ansarath, sniffing certain odors that arose from the pit, recoiled with a mad howling; and Nushain, holding the taper outstretched above it, discerned far down a glimmer of ripples spreading circle-wise on some unctuous black fluid; and two blood-red spots appeared to swim with a weaving motion at the center. Then he heard a hissing as of some great cauldron heated by wizard fires; and it seemed that the blackness boiled upward, mounting swiftly and evilly to overflow the pit; and the red spots, as they neared him, were like luminous eyes that gazed malignantly into his own...

So Nushain turned away in haste; and, returning upon his steps, he found the mummy awaiting him at the junction of the catacombs.

"It would seem, O Nushain, that you have doubted your own horoscope," said the guide, with a certain irony. "However, even a bad astrologer, on occasion, may read the heavens aright. Obey, then, the stars that decreed your journey."

Henceforward, Nushain followed the mummy without recalcitrance. Returning to the chamber in which stood the immense sarcophagus, he was

enjoined by his guide to replace in its socket the black taper he had stolen. Without other light than the phosphorescence of the mummy's cerements, he threaded the foul gloom of those profounder ossuaries which lay beyond. At last, through caverns where a dull dawning intruded upon the shadows, he came out beneath shrouded heavens, on the shore of a wild sea that clamored in mist and cloud and spindrift. As if recoiling from the harsh air and light, the mummy drew back into the subterrane, and it said:

"Here my dominion ends, and I must leave you to await the second guide."

Standing with the poignant sea-salt in his nostrils, with his hair and garments outblown on the gale, Nushain heard a metallic clangor, and saw that a door of rusty bronze had closed in the cavern-entrance. The beach was walled by unscalable cliffs that ran sheerly to the wave on each hand. So perforce the astrologer waited; and from the torn surf he beheld ere long the emergence of a sea-blue merman whose head was half human, half fish; and behind the merman there hove a small black barge that was not steered or moved by any visible being. At this, Nushain recalled the hieroglyphs of the sea-creature and the boat which had appeared on the margin of his nativity; and unrolling the papyrus, he saw with wonderment that the figures were both gone; and he doubted not that they had passed, like the mummy's hieroglyph, through all the zodiacal Houses, even to that House which presided over his destiny; and thence, mayhap, they had emerged into material being. But in their stead now was the burning hieroglyph of a fire-colored salamander, set opposite to the Great Dog.

The merman beckoned to him with antic gestures, grinning deeply, and showing the white serrations of his shark-like teeth. Nushain went forward and entered the barge in obedience to the signs made by the sea-creature; and Mouzda and Ansarath, in faithfulness to their master, accompanied him. Thereupon the merman swam away through the boiling surf; and the barge, as if oared and ruddered by mere enchantment, swung about forthwith, and warring smoothly against the wind and wave, was drawn straightly over that dim, unnamable ocean.

Half-seen amid rushing foam and mist, the merman swam steadily on before. Time and space were surely outpassed during that voyage; and as if he had gone beyond mortal existence, Nushain experienced neither thirst nor hunger. But it seemed that his soul drifted upon seas of strange doubt and direst alienation; and he feared the misty chaos about him even as he had feared the nighted catacombs. Often he tried to question the mer-creature concerning their destination, but received no answer. And the wind blowing from shores unguessed, and the tide flowing to unknown gulfs, were alike filled with whispers of awe and terror.

Nushain pondered the mysteries of his journey almost to madness; and the thought came to him that, after passing through the region of death, he was now traversing the gray limbo of uncreated things; and, thinking this, he was loath to surmise the third stage of his journey; and he dared not reflect upon the nature of its goal.

Anon, suddenly, the mists were riven, and a cataract of golden rays poured down from a high-seated sun. Near at hand, to the lee of the driving barge, a tall island hove with verdurous trees and light, shell-shaped domes and blossomy gardens hanging far up in the dazzlement of noon. There, with a sleepy purling, the surf was lulled on a low, grassy shore that had not known the anger of storm; and fruited vines and full-blown flowers were pendent above the water. It seemed that a spell of oblivion and slumber was shed from the island, and that any who landed thereon would dwell inviolable for ever in sun-bright dreams. Nushain was seized with a longing for its green, flowery refuge; and he wished to voyage no farther into the dreadful nothingness of the mist-bound ocean. And between his longing and his terror, he quite forgot the terms of that destiny which had been ordained for him by the stars.

There was no halting nor swerving of the barge; but it drew still nearer to the isle in its coasting; and Nushain saw that the intervening water was clear and shallow, so that a tall man might easily wade to the beach. He sprang into the sea, holding his horoscope aloft, and began to walk toward the island; and Mouzda and Ansarath followed him, swimming side by side.

Though hampered somewhat by his long wet robes, the astrologer thought to reach that alluring shore; nor was there any movement on the part of the merman to intercept him. The water was midway between his waist and his armpits; and now it lapped at his girdle; and now at the knee-folds of his garment; and the island vines and blossoms drooped fragrantly above him.

Then, being but a step from that enchanted beach, he heard a great hissing, and saw that the vines, the boughs, the flowers, the very grasses, were intertwined and mingled with a million serpents, writhing endlessly to and fro in hideous agitation. From all parts of that lofty island the hissing came, and the serpents, with foully mottled volumes, coiled, crept and slithered upon it everywhere; and no single yard of its surface was free from their defilement, or clear for human treading.

Turning seaward in his revulsion, Nushain found the merman and the barge waiting close at hand. Hopelessly he re-entered the barge with his followers, and the magically driven boat resumed its course. And now, for the first time, the merman spoke, saying over his shoulder in a harsh, half-articulate voice, not without irony: "It would seem, O Nushain, that you lack faith in your own divinations. However, even the poorest of astrologers may sometimes cast a horoscope correctly. Cease, then, to rebel against that which the stars have written."

The barge drove on, and the mists closed heavily about it, and the noon-bright island was lost to view. After a vague interim the muffled sun went down behind inchoate waters and clouds; and a darkness as of primal night lay everywhere. Presently, through the torn rack, Nushain beheld a strange heaven whose signs and planets he could not recognize; and at this there came upon him the black horror of utmost dereliction. Then the mists and clouds returned, veiling that unknown sky from his scrutiny. And he could discern nothing but the merman, who was visible by a wan phosphor that clung always about him in his swimming.

Still the barge drove on; and in time it seemed that a red morning rose stifled and conflagrant behind the mists. The boat entered the broadening light, and Nushain, who had thought to behold the sun once more, was

dazzled by a strange shore where flames towered in a high unbroken wall, feeding perpetually, to all appearances, on bare sand and rock. With a mighty leaping and a roar as of blown surf the flames went up, and a heat like that of many furnaces smote far on the sea. Swiftly the barge neared the shore; and the merman, with uncouth gestures of farewell, dived and disappeared under the waters.

Nushain could scarcely regard the flames or endure their heat. But the barge touched the strait tongue of land lying between them and the sea; and before Nushain, from the wall of fire, a blazing salamander emerged, having the form and hue of that hieroglyph which had last appeared on his horoscope. And he knew, with ineffable consternation, that this was the third guide of his threefold journey.

"Come with me," said the salamander, in a voice like the crackling of fagots. Nushain stepped from the barge to that strand which was hot as an oven beneath his feet; and behind him, though with palpable reluctance, Mouzda and Ansarath still followed. But, approaching the flames behind the salamander, and half swooning from their ardor, he was overcome by the weakness of mortal flesh; and seeking again to evade his destiny, he fled along the narrow scroll of beach between the fire and the water. But he had gone only a few paces when the salamander, with a great fiery roaring and racing, intercepted him; and it drove him straight toward the fire with terrible flailings of its dragon-like tail, from which showers of sparks were emitted. He could not face the salamander, and he thought the flames would consume him like paper as he entered them: but in the wall there appeared a sort of opening, and the fires arched themselves into an arcade, and he passed through with his followers, herded by the salamander, into an ashen land where all things were veiled with low-hanging smoke and steam.

Here the salamander observed with a kind of irony: "Not wrongly, O Nushain, have you interpreted the stars of your horoscope. And now your journey draws to an end, and you will need no longer the services of a guide." So saying, it left him, going out like a quenched fire on the smoky air.

Nushain, standing irresolute, beheld before him a white stairway that mounted amid the veering vapors. Behind him the flames rose unbroken, like a topless rampart; and on either hand, from instant to instant, the smoke shaped itself into demon forms and faces that menaced him. He began to climb the stairs, and the shapes gathered below and about, frightful as a wizard's familiars, and keeping pace with him as he went upward, so that he dared not pause or retreat. Far up he climbed in the fummy dimness, and came unaware to the open portals of a house of grey stone rearing to unguessed height and amplitude.

Unwillingly, but driven by the thronging of the smoky shapes, he passed through the portals with his companions. The house was a place of long, empty halls, tortuous as the folds of a sea-conch. There were no windows, no lamps; but it seemed that bright suns of silver had been dissolved and diffused in the air. Fleeing from the hellish wraiths that pursued him, the astrologer followed the winding halls and emerged ultimately in an inner chamber where space itself was immured. At the room's center a cowed and muffled figure of colossal proportions sat upright on a marble chair, silent, unstimulating. Before the figure, on a sort of table, a vast volume lay open.

Nushain felt the awe of one who approaches the presence of some high demon or deity. Seeing that the phantoms had vanished, he paused on the room's threshold: for its immensity made him giddy, like the void interval that lies between the worlds. He wished to withdraw; but a voice issued from the cowed being, speaking softly as the voice of his own inmost mind:

"I am Vergama, whose other name is Destiny; Vergama, on whom you have called so ignorantly and idly, as men are wont to call on their hidden lords; Vergama, who has summoned you on the journey which all men must make at one time or another, in one way or another. Come forward, O Nushain, and read a little in my book."

The astrologer was drawn as by an unseen hand to the table. Leaning above it, he saw that the huge volume stood open at its middle pages, which were

covered with a myriad signs written in inks of various colors, and representing men, gods, fishes, birds, monsters, animals, constellations and many other things. At the end of the last column of the right-hand page, where little space was left for other inscriptions, Nushain beheld the hieroglyphs of an equal-sided triangle of stars, such as had lately appeared in proximity to the Dog; and, following these, the hieroglyphs of a mummy, a merman, a barge and a salamander, resembling the figures that had come and gone on his horoscope, and those that had guided him to the house of Vergama.

"In my book," said the cowed figure, "the characters of all things are written and preserved. All visible forms, in the beginning, were but symbols written by me; and at the last they shall exist only as the writing of my book. For a season they issue forth, taking to themselves that which is known as substance... It was I, O Nushain, who set in the heavens the stars that foretold your journey; I, who sent the three guides. And these things, having served their purpose, are now but infoliate ciphers, as before."

Vergama paused, and an infinite silence returned to the room, and a measureless wonder was upon the mind of Nushain. Then the cowed being continued:

"Among men, for a while, there was that person called Nushain the astrologer, together with the dog Aasarath and the negro Mouzda, who followed his fortunes... But now, very shortly, I must turn the page, and before turning it, must finish the writing that belongs thereon."

Nushain thought that a wind arose in the chamber, moving lightly with a weird sigh, though he felt not the actual breath of its passing. But he saw that the fur of Ansarath, cowering close beside him, was ruffled by the wind. Then, beneath his marvelling eyes, the dog began to dwindle and wither, as if seared by a lethal magic; and he lessened to the size of a rat, and thence to the smallness of a mouse and the lightness of an insect, though preserving still his original form. After that, the tiny thing was caught up by the sighing air, and it flew past Nushain as a gnat might fly; and, following it, he saw that the hieroglyph of a dog was inscribed

suddenly beside that of the salamander, at the bottom of the right-hand page. But, apart from this, there remained no trace of Ansarath.

Again a wind breathed in the room, touching not the astrologer, but fluttering the ragged raiment of Mouzda, who crouched near to his master, as if appealing for protection, and the mute became shrunken and shrivelled, turning at the last to a thing light and thin as the black, tattered wing-shard of a beetle, which the air bore aloft. And Nushain saw that the hieroglyph of a one-eyed Negro was inscribed following that of the dog; but, aside from this, there was no sign of Mouzda.

Now, perceiving clearly the doom that was designed for him, Nushain would have fled from the presence of Vergama. He turned from the outspread volume and ran toward the chamber door, his worn, tawdry robes of an astrologer flapping about his thin shanks. But softly in his ear, as he went, there sounded the voice of Vergama:

"Vainly do men seek to resist or evade that destiny which turns them to ciphers in the end. In my book, O Nushain, there is room even for a bad astrologer."

Once more the weird sighing arose, and a cold air played upon Nushain as he ran; and he paused midway in the vast room as if a wall had arrested him. Gently the air breathed on his lean, gaunt figure, and it lifted his greying locks and beard, and it plucked softly at the roll of papyrus which he still held in his hand. To his dim eyes, the room seemed to reel and swell, expanding infinitely. Borne upward, around and around, in a swift vertiginous swirling, he beheld the seated shape as it loomed ever higher above him in cosmic vastness. Then the god was lost in light; and Nushain was a weightless and exile thing, the withered skeleton of a lost leaf, rising and falling on the bright whirlwind.

In the book of Vergama, at the end of the last column of the right-hand page, there stood the hieroglyph of a gaunt astrologer, carrying a furled nativity.

Vergama leaned forward from his chair, and turned the page.

THE LAST INCANTATION

Malygris the magician sat in the topmost room of his tower that was builded on a conicall hill above the heart of Susran, capital of Poseidonis. Wrought of a dark stone mined from deep in the earth, perdurable and hard as the fabled adamant, this tower loomed above all others, and flung its shadow far on the roofs and domes of the city, even as the sinister power of Malygris had thrown its darkness on the minds of men.

Now Malygris was old, and all the baleful might of his enchantments, all the dreadful or curious demons under his control, all the fear that he had wrought in the hearts of kings and prelates, were no longer enough to assuage the black ennui of his days. In his chair that was fashioned from the ivory of mastodons, inset with terrible cryptic runes of red tourmalines and azure crystals, he stared moodily through the one lozenge-shaped window of fulvous glass. His white eyebrows were contracted to a single line on the umber parchment of his face, and beneath them his eyes were cold and green as the ice of ancient floes; his beard, half white, half of a black with glaucous gleams, fell nearly to his knees and hid many of the writhing serpentine characters inscribed in woven silver athwart the bosom of his violet robe. About him were scattered all the appurtenances of his art; the skulls of men and monsters; phials filled with black or amber liquids, whose sacrilegious use was known to none but himself; little drums of vulture-skin, and crotali made from the bones and teeth of the cockodrill, used as an accompaniment to certain incantations. The mosaic floor was partly covered with the skins of enormous black and silver apes: and above the door there hung the head of a unicorn in which dwelt the familiar demon of Malygris, in the form of a coral viper with pale green belly and ashen mottlings. Books were piled everywhere: ancient volumes bound in serpent-skin, with verdigris-eaten clasps, that held the frightful lore of Atlantis, the pentacles that have power upon the demons of the earth and the moon, the spells that transmute or disintegrate the elements; and runes from a lost

language of Hyperborea. which, when uttered aloud. were more deadly than poison or more potent than any philtre.

But, though these things and the power they held or symbolized were the terror of the peoples and the envy, of all rival magicians, the thoughts of Malygris were dark with immitigable melancholy, and weariness filled his heart as ashes fill the hearth where a great fire has died. Immovable he sat, implacable he mused, while the sun of afternoon, declining on the city and on the sea that was beyond the city, smote with autumnal rays through the window of greenish-yellow glass, and touched his shrunken hands with its phantom gold and fired the bales-rubies of his rings till they burned like demonian eyes. But in his musings there was neither light nor fire; and turning from the grayness of the present, from the darkness that seemed to close in so imminently upon the future, he groped among the shadows of memory, even as a blind man who has lost the sun and seeks it everywhere in vain. And all the vistas of time that had been so full of gold and splendor, the days of triumph that were colored like a soaring flame, the crimson and purple of the rich imperial years of his prime, all these were chill and dim and strangely faded now, and the remembrance thereof was no more than the stirring of dead embers. Then Malygris groped backward to the years of his youth, to the misty, remote, incredible years, where, like an alien star, one memory still burned with unfailing luster - the memory of the girl Nylissa whom he had loved in days ere the lust of unpermitted knowledge and necromantic dominion had ever entered his soul. He had well-nigh forgotten her for decades, in the myriad preoccupations of a life so bizarrely diversified, so replete with occult happenings and powers, with supernatural victories and perils; but now, at the mere thought of this slender and innocent child, who had loved him so dearly when he too was young and slim and guileless, and who had died of a sudden mysterious fever on the very eve of their marriage-day, the mummylike umber of his cheeks took on a phantom flush, and deep down in the icy orbs was a sparkle like the gleam of mortuary tapers. In his dreams arose the irretrievable suns of youth, and he saw the myrtle-shaded valley of Meros, and the stream Zemander, by whose ever-verdant marge he had walked at eventide with Nylissa, seeing the birth of summer stars in the heavens, the stream, and the eyes of his beloved.

Now, addressing the demonian viper that dwelt in the head of the unicorn, Malygris spoke, with the low monotonous intonation of one who thinks aloud:

Viper, in the years before you came to dwell with me and to make your abode in the head of the unicorn, I knew a girl who was lovely and frail as the orchids of the jungle, and who died as the orchids die... Viper, am I not Malygris, in whom is centered the mastery of all occult lore, all forbidden dominations, with dominion over the spirits of earth and sea and air, over the solar and lunar demons. over the living and the dead? If so I desire, can I not call the girl Nylissa, in the very semblance of all her youth and beauty, and bring her forth from the never-changing shadows of the cryptic tomb, to stand before me in this chamber, in the evening rays of this autumnal sun?'

'Yes, master,' replied the viper, in a low but singularly penetrating hiss, 'you are Malygris, and all sorcerous or necromantic power is yours, all incantations and spells and pentacles are known to you, It is possible, if you so desire, to summon the girl Nylissa from her abode among the dead, and to behold her again as she was ere her loveliness had known the ravening kiss of the worm.'

'Viper, is it well, is it meet, that I should summon her thus? ... Will there be nothing to lose, and nothing to regret?'

The viper seemed to hesitate. Then, in a more slow and measured hiss: 'It is meet for Malygris to do as he would. Who, save Malygris, can decide if a thing be well or ill?'

'In other words, you will not advise me?' the query was as much a statement as a question, and the viper vouchsafed no further utterance.

Malygris brooded for awhile, with his chin on his knotted hands. Then he arose, with a long-unwonted celerity and sureness of movement that belied his wrinkles, and gathered together, from different coigns of the chamber, from ebony shelves, from caskets with locks of gold or brass or electrum, the sundry appurtenances that were needful for his magic. He drew on the

floor the requisite circles, and standing within the centermost he lit the thuribles that contained the prescribed incense, and read aloud from a long narrow scroll of gray vellum the purple and vermilion runes of the ritual that summons the departed. The fumes of the censers, blue and white and violet, arose in thick clouds and speedily filled the room with ever-writhing interchanging columns, among which the sunlight disappeared and was succeeded by a wan unearthly glow, pale as the light of moons that ascend from Lethe. With preternatural slowness, with unhuman solemnity, the voice of the necromancer went on in a priest-like chant till the scroll was ended and the last echoes lessened and died out in hollow sepulchral vibrations. Then the colored vapors cleared away, as if the folds of a curtain had been drawn back. But the pale unearthly glow still filled the chamber, and between Malygris and the door where hung the unicorn's head there stood the apparition of Nylissa, even as she had stood in the perished years, bending a little like a wind-blown flower, and smiling with the unmindful poignancy of youth. Fragile, pallid, and simply gowned, with anemone blossoms in her black hair, with eyes that held the new-born azure of vernal heavens, she was all that Malygris had remembered, and his sluggish heart was quickened with an old delightful fever as he looked upon her.

'Are you Nylissa?' he asked — 'the Nylissa whom I loved in the myrtle-shaded valley of Meros, in the golden-hearted days that have gone with all dead eons to the timeless gulf?'

'Yes, I am Nylissa,' Her voice was the simple and rippling silver of the voice that had echoed so long in his memory... But somehow, as he gazed and listened, there grew a tiny doubt — a doubt no less absurd than intolerable, but nevertheless insistent: was this altogether the same Nylissa he had known? Was there not some elusive change, too subtle to be named or defined, had time and the grave not taken something away — an innominable something that his magic had not wholly restored? Were the eyes as tender, was the black hair as lustrous, the form as slim and supple, as those of the girl he recalled? He could not be sure, and the growing doubt was succeeded by a leaden dismay, by a grim despondency that choked his heart as with ashes. His scrutiny became searching and exigent and cruel, and momentarily the phantom was less and less the perfect semblance of

Nylissa, momentarily the lips and brow were less lovely, less subtle in their curves; the slender figure became thin, the tresses took on a common black and the neck an ordinary pallor. The soul of Malygris grew sick again with age and despair and the death of his evanescent hope. He could believe no longer in love or youth or beauty; and even the memory of these things was a dubitable mirage, a thing that might or might not have been. There was nothing left but shadow and grayness and dust, nothing but the empty dark and the cold, and a clutching weight of insufferable weariness, of immedicable anguish.

In accents that were thin and quavering, like the ghost of his former voice, he pronounced the incantation that serves to dismiss a summoned phantom. The form of Nylissa melted upon the air like smoke and the lunar gleam that had surrounded her was replaced by the last rays of the sun. Malygris turned to the viper and spoke in a tone of melancholy reproof:

'Why did you not warn me?'

'Would the warning have availed?' was the counter-question. 'All knowledge was yours, Malygris, excepting this one thing; and in no other way could you have learned it.'

'What thing?' queried the magician. 'I have learned nothing except the vanity of wisdom, the impotence of magic, the nullity of love, and the delusiveness of memory... Tell me, why could I not recall to life the same Nylissa whom I knew, or thought I knew?'

'It was indeed Nylissa whom you summoned and saw,' replied the viper. 'Your necromancy was potent up to this point; but no necromantic spell could recall for you your own lost youth or the fervent and guileless heart that loved Nylissa, or the ardent eyes that beheld her then. This, my master, was the thing that you had to learn.'

THE LETTER FROM MOHAUN LOS

Some who read this narrative will no doubt remember the disappearance of the eccentric millionaire Domitian Malgraff and his Chinese servant Li Wong, which provided the newspapers of 1940 with flamboyant headlines and many columns of rumor and speculation.

Reams were written concerning the case; but, stripped of all reportorial embellishments, it can hardly have been said to constitute a story. There were no verifiable motives nor explanatory circumstances, no clues nor traces of any kind. The two men had passed from all mundane knowledge, between one hour and the next, as if they had evaporated like some of the queer volatile chemicals with which Malgraff had been experimenting in his private laboratory. No one knew the use of these chemicals; and no one knew what had happened to Malgraff and Li Wong.

Few, perhaps, will consider that any reliable solution of these problems is now afforded through the publication of the manuscript received by Sylvia Talbot a year ago in the fall of 1941.

Miss Talbot had formerly been affianced to Malgraff, but had broken off the engagement three years prior to his disappearance. She had been fond of him; but his dreamy disposition and impractical leanings had formed a decided barrier from her viewpoint. The youth had seemed to take his dismissal lightly and had afterward plunged into scientific researches whose nature and object he had confided to no one. But neither then nor at any other time had he shown the least inclination to supplement by his own efforts the huge fortune inherited from his father.

Regarding his vanishment, Miss Talbot was as much in the dark as everyone else. After the breaking-off of the engagement she had continued to hear from him at intervals; but his letters had grown more and more infrequent through his absorption in unnamed studies and labors. She was both surprised and shocked by the news of his disappearance.

A world-wide search was made by his lawyers and relations; but without result. Then, in the late summer of 1941, the strange vessel containing the aforesaid manuscript was found floating in the Banda Sea, between Celebes and the Spice Islands, by a Dutch pearler.

The vessel was a sphere of some unknown crystalline substance, with flattened ends. It was eighteen inches in diameter and possessed an interior mechanism of miniature dynamos and induction coils, all of the same clear material, together with an apparatus resembling an hour-glass, which was half-filled with a gray powder. The outer surface was studded with several tiny knobs. In the very center, in a small cylindrical compartment, was a thick roll of greenish-yellow paper on which the name and address of Miss Sylvia Talbot were plainly legible through the various layers of the sphere. The writing had been done with some sort of brush or an extremely heavy pen, in pigment of a rare shade of purple,

Two months later, the thing reached Miss Talbot, who was startled and amazed when she recognized the writing as that of Domitian Malgraff.

After many vain experiments, by manipulating certain of the exterior knobs, the vessel was opened; and it came apart in two hemispheric sections. Miss Talbot found that the roll of paper contained a voluminous letter from Malgraff, written on yard-long sheets. This letter, with the omission of a few intimate paragraphs and sentences, is now offered to the public in obedience to the writer's wish.

Malgraff's incredible tale, of course, is easily enough to be explained on the ground of imaginative fabrication. Such, in the opinion of those who knew him, would be far from incompatible with his character. In his own whimsical and fantastic way, he is said to have been something of a joke. A new search has now been instituted, on the supposition that he may be living somewhere in the Orient; and all the isles adjacent to the Banda Sea will be carefully examined.

However, certain collateral details are quite mysterious and baffling. The material and mechanism of the sphere are unfamiliar to scientists, and are

still unexplained; and the fabric on which the letter was written, as well as the pigment used, have so far defied analysis. The paper, in its chemical composition, seems to present affinities with both vellum and papyrus; and the pigment has no terrestrial analogue.

I. The Letter

Dear Sylvia: You have always considered me a hopeless dreamer; and I am the last person who would endeavor or even wish to dispute your summary. It might be added that I am one of those dreamers who have not been able to content themselves with dreams. Such persons, as a rule, are unfortunate and unhappy, since few of them are capable of realizing, or even approximating, their visionary conceptions.

In my case, the attempted realization has led to a singular result: I am writing this letter from a world that lies faroff in the two fold labyrinth of time and space; a world removed by many million years from the one wherein you live, the one whereto I am native.

As you know, I have never cared greatly for the material things of earth. I have always been irked by the present age, have always been devoured by a sort of nostalgia for other times and places. It has seemed so oddly and capriciously arbitrary that I should be here and not elsewhere, in the infinite, eternal ranges of being; and I have long wondered if it would not be possible to gain control of the laws that determine our temporal or cosmic situation, and pass at will from world to world or from cycle to cycle.

It was after you dismissed me that my speculations along such lines began to take a practical turn. You had told me that my dreamings were no less impossible than useless. Perhaps, among other things, I desired to prove that they were not impossible. Their utility or inutility was not a problem that concerned me, nor one which any man could decide.

I shall not weary you with a full recountal of my labors and researches. I sought to invent a machine by which I could travel in time, could penetrate the past or the future. I started from the theory that movement in the time-

dimension could be controlled, accelerated, or reversed by the action of some special force. By virtue of such regulation, one would be able to remove forward or backward along the aeons.

I shall say only that I succeeded in isolating the theoretic time-force, though without learning its ultimate nature and origin. It is an all-pervading energy, with a shorter wavelength than that of the cosmic rays. Then I invented a compound metal, perfectly transparent and of great toughness, which was peculiarly fitted for use in conducting and concentrating the force.

From this metal I constructed my machine, with dynamos in which I could develop an almost illimitable power. The reversal of the force, compelling a retrograde movement in time, could be secured by passing the current through certain rare volatile chemicals imprisoned in a special device resembling a large hour-glass.

After many months of arduous effort, the mechanism stood completed on the floor of my Chicago laboratory. Its outward form was more or less spherical, with flattened ends like those of a Chinese orange. It was capable of being hermetically sealed, and the machinery included an oxygen-apparatus. Within, there was ample room for three people amid the great tubular dynamos, the array of chronometric dials, and the board of regulative levers and switches. All the parts, being made of the same material, were transparent as glass.

Though I have never loved machinery, I surveyed it with a certain pride. There was a delightful irony in the thought that by using this super-mechanical device I could escape from the machine-ridden era in which I had been born.

My first intention was to explore the future. By traveling far enough in forward time, I expected to find one of two things: men would either have learned to discard their cumbrous and complicated engines, or would have been destroyed by them, giving place to some other and more sensible species in the course of mundane evolution.

However, if the human future failed to inveigle me in any of its phases. I could reverse the working of the time-force and go back into the aeons that were posterior to my own epoch. In these, unless history and fable had lied, the conditions of life would be more congenial to my own tastes. But my most urgent curiosity was concerning the unknown and problematic years of ages to come.

All my labors had been carried on in private, with no other aid than that of Li Wong, my Chinese cook, valet, and housekeeper. And at first I did not confide the purpose of the mechanism even to Li Wong, though I knew him to be the most discreet and intelligent of mortals. People in general would have laughed if they had known what I was trying to do. Also there were cousins and other relations, all enviously watchful of my inherited wealth ... and a country full of lawyers, alienists, and lunatic asylums. I have always had a reputation for eccentricity; and I did not choose to give my dear relatives an opportunity which might have been considered legally sufficient for the well-known process of 'railroading.'

I had fully intended to take the time-voyage alone. But when I had finished building the machine, and all was in readiness for departure, I realized that it would be impossible to go without my factotum, Li Wong. Apart from his usefulness and trustworthiness, the little Chinaman was good company. He was something of a scholar in his own tongue, and did not belong to the coolie class. Though his mastery of English was still imperfect, and my knowledge of Chinese altogether rudimentary, we had often discussed the poetry and philosophy of his own land, as well as certain less erudite topics.

Li Wong received the announcement of our projected journey with the same blandness and aplomb which he would have shown if I had told him we were going into the next state.

'Me go pack,' he said. 'You want plentee shirt?'

Our preparations were soon made. Apart from the changes of raiment suggested by Li Wong, we took with us a ten days' supply of provisions, a medicine kit, and a bottle of brandy, all of which were stored in lockers I

had built for the purpose. Not knowing what we might find, or what might happen by the way, it was well to be prepared for emergencies.

All was now ready. I locked Li Wong and myself within the time-sphere, and then sat down before the instrument-board on which the controlling levers were ranged. I felt the thrill of a new Columbus or a Magellan, about to sail for undiscovered continents. Compared with this, all former human explorations would be as the crawling of emmets and pismires.

Even in the exultation of that moment, though everything had been calculated with mathematical precision, had been worked out to an algebraic degree, I recognized the element of uncertainty and danger. The effect of time-traveling on the human constitution was an unknown quantity. Neither of us might survive the process of acceleration in which lustrums and decades and centuries would be reduced to mere seconds.

I pointed this out to Li Wong. 'Maybe you had better stay behind after all,' I suggested.

He shook his head vigorously. 'You go, I go,' he said with an imperturbable smile.

Making a mental note of the hour, day, and minute of our departure. I pulled a lever and turned on the accelerative force.

I had hardly known what to anticipate in the way of physical reactions and sensations. Among other contingencies, it had even occurred to me that I might become partially or wholly unconscious; and I had clamped myself to the seat to avoid falling in case of this.

However, the real effect was very strange and unforeseen. My first feeling was that of sudden bodily lightness and immateriality. At the same time, the machine seemed to have expanded, its walls, dynamos, and other portions were a dim and shining blur, and appeared to repeat themselves in an endless succession of momentary images. My own person, and that of Li Wong, were multiplied in the same manner. I was incredibly conscious of myself as a mere flickering shadow, from which was projected a series of

other shadows. I tried to speak, and the words became an indefinitely repeated echo.

For a brief interval the sphere seemed to be hanging in a sea of light. Then, incomprehensibly, it began to darken. A great blackness pressed upon it from without; but the outlines of everything within the sphere were still visible through a sort of luminosity that clung to them like a feeble phosphorescence.

I was puzzled by these phenomena and, in particular, by the outside darkness, for which I could not account. Theoretically, the days and nights through which we were passing at such supreme velocity would merge in a sort of greyness.

Centuries, aeons, kalpas of time, were going by in the strange night. Then, mysterious as the darkness, there came a sudden, blinding glare of light, intenser than anything I had yet known which pervaded the sphere, and died away like a lightning-flash. It was followed shortly by two lesser flashes, very close together; and then the outer gloom returned once more.

I reached out, with a hand that became a hundred hands, and succeeded somehow in turning on the light that hung above my instrument board and chronometric dials. One of these dials was designed to register my forward motion in time. It was hard to distinguish the real hands and figures in the ghostly blur by which they were surrounded; but somehow, after much poring, I found that I had gone onward into the future for no less than twenty thousand years!

Surely this would be enough, at least for the initial stage of my flight. I groped for the levers, and turned off the accelerative power.

Instantly my visual sensations became those of a normal three-dimensional being in normal time and space. But the feeling of lightness and immateriality still persisted. It seemed to me that I should have floated in mid-air like a feather, if it had not been for the metal clamps that held me to the seat.

I heard the voice of Li Wong, whom I had practically forgotten for the moment. The voice came from above! Startled, I saw that the Chinese, with his wide sleeves flapping ludicrously, had floated upward and was bobbing about in the air, trying vainly to recover his equilibrium and re-establish his feet on the floor!

'Me fly all same sea-gull,' he tittered, seeming to be amused rather than frightened by his novel predicament.

What on earth had happened? Was the force of gravity non-existent in this future world? I peered out through the glassy walls, trying to determine the geographical features of the terrain in which we had landed.

It must be night, I thought, for all was darkness, shot with a million cold and piercing stars. But why were the stars all around us, as well as above? Even if we were on a mountain-top, we should be surrounded by the vague masses of remote nocturnal horizons.

But there were no horizons anywhere — only the swarming lights of irrecognizable constellations. With growing bewilderment, I looked down at the crystalline floor, and beneath me, as in some awful gulf, there swam the icy fires of unknown galaxies! I saw, with a terrific mental shock, that we were suspended in mid-space. My first thought was that the earth and the solar system had been annihilated. Somewhere during the past twenty thousand years, there had been a cosmic cataclysm; and Li Wong and myself, moving at inconceivable speed in the abstract time-dimension, had somehow managed to escape it.

II: A Bizarre World

Then, like a thunderclap, there came the realization of the truth. The sphere had moved only in time; but, in the interim, the earth and the sun had been traveling away from us in space, even as all stellar and planetary bodies are said to travel. I had never dreamt of such a contingency in all my calculations, thinking that the laws of gravitation would keep us automatically in the same position relative to the earth itself at which we had started. But evidently these laws were non-effective in the ultraspatial

dimension known as time. We had stood still in regard to ordinary space, and were now separated from the earth by twenty thousand years of cosmic drift! Considered as a time-machine, my invention was a pretty fair vehicle for interstellar transit.

To say that I was dumfounded would only prove the inadequacy of human words. The feeling that surged upon me was the most utter and abominable panic that I have ever experienced. The sensations of an explorer lost without a compass amid the eternal, unhorizoned ice of some Arctic desert would have been mild and infantile in comparison. Never before had I understood the true awfulness of intersidereal depth and distance, of the gulf wherein there is neither limitation nor direction. I seemed to whirl like a lost mote on the winds of immeasurable chaos, in a vertigo of the spirit as well as of the body.

I reached out for the lever that would reverse the timeenergy and send the sphere backward to its starting-point. Then in the midst of all my panic, of all my violent fear and topsy-turvy confusion, I felt a reluctance to return. Even in the bleak abyss that yawns unbridgeable between the stars, I was not allured by the thought of the stale commonplace world I had left.

I began to recover something of stability, of mental equipoise. I remembered the bright flashes that had puzzled me. These, I now realized, had marked the passage of an alien sun and planetary system, coinciding in its orbit with the former position of the earth in space. If I went on in abstract time, other bodies would doubtless occupy the same position, in the everlasting drift of the universe. By slowing the movement of the sphere, it might be feasible to land on one of them.

To you, no doubt the sheer folly and madness of such a project will be more than obvious. Indeed, I must have been a little mad, from the physical and psychic strain of my unparalleled experience. Otherwise, the difficulties of the landing which I so coolly proposed to myself — not to mention the dangers — would have been glaringly manifest.

I resumed the time-flight, at a speed reduced by half. This, I calculated, would enable me to sight the next approaching orb in time to prepare for landing.

The darkness about us was unbroken for an interval of many ages. It seemed to me that eternity itself had gone by in the rayless void, ere a brilliant glare of light betokened a nearing sun. It passed us very close, filling half the heavens for an instant. Apparently there were no planets or, at least none that came within sight.

Steadily we went on in time; till I ceased to watch the dial with its blurred and multiplied ciphers. I lived only in a dream of unreal and spectral duration. But somehow, after awhile, I knew that more than a million years had been traveled by the sphere.

Then, suddenly, another solar orb swam up before us. We must have passed through it, for the sphere was briefly surrounded by an incandescent flame, that seemed as if it would annihilate us with its intolerable flare. Then we were out of it, were suspended in black space, and a smaller, gleaming body was hurtling toward us.

This, I knew, would be a planet. I slowed the sphere to a rate of speed that would permit me to examine it. The thing loomed upon us, it whirled beneath us in a riot of massed images. I thought that I could distinguish seas and continents, isles and mountains. It rose still nearer, and appeared to surround us with swirling forms that were suggestive of enormous vegetable growths.

My hand was poised in readiness on the lever that would terminate our flight. As we swung dizzily amid the swirling forest, I brought the machine to a full stop, no doubt risking an instant destruction. I heard a violent crash and the vessel rocked and reeled deliriously. Then it seemed to right itself, and stood still. It was lurching half to one side, and I had nearly been wrenched from my seat, while Li Wong was sprawling in an undignified position on the floor. But nevertheless, we had landed.

Still giddy, and trying to regain my equilibrium, I peered through the crystalline walls on a weird and exuberant tangle of bewildering plant-forms. The time-machine was lodged between the swollen, liver-colored boles of certain of these plants and was hanging four or five feet in air above a pink and marshy soil from which protruded like sinister horns the brownish-purple tips of unknown growths.

Overhead, there were huge, pale, flabby leaves with violet veinings in which I seemed to detect the arterial throb of sluggish pulses. The leaves depended from the bulbous top of each plant like a circle of flattened arms from a headless torso.

There were other vegetable forms, all crowding and looming grotesquely in the green, vaporous air whose density was such as to give almost the appearance of a submarine garden to the odd scene. From every side I received a confused impression of python-like rattans, of poddy, fulsome, coral-tinted fronds and white or vermilion fungoid blossoms large as firkins. Above the jungle-tops, an olivegolden glimmering in the thick atmosphere betokened the meridian rays of a muffled sun.

My first feelings were those of astonishment — the scene before me was a source of giddiness to eye and brain. Then, as I began to distinguish new details in the medley of towering, outlandish shapes, I conceived a super-added emotion of horror, of veritable disgust.

At intervals there were certain immense, bowl-like flowers, supported on strong, hispid stems of a curious tripod sort, and hued with the ghastly greens and purples of putrefying flesh. In these bowls the squat bulks of mammoth insects — or, rather, of what I took to be such at the moment -- were crouching in an evil immobility with strange antennae and other organs or members hanging down over the rims of the bowls.

These monsters appeared to mock the cadaverous coloring of the flowers. They were inexpressibly loathsome, and I shall not endeavor to describe their anatomy with any degree of minuteness. I shall, however, mention the

three snail-like horns, ending in ruby-red eyes, that rose above their bodies and watched the forest around them with a baleful vigilance.

About the base of each of the tripodal stems, I perceived the carcasses of quaint animals, lying in a circle, in varying stages of decomposition. From many of these carrion, new plants of the same type as the bowl-flowers were issuing, with dark, ghoulish buds that had not yet unfolded.

As I studied these plants and their guardians with growing repulsion, a six-legged creature, something between a warthog and an iguana, emerged from the jungle and trotted past within a dozen feet of the time-sphere. It approached one of the bowl-shaped blossoms, and sniffed at the hairy triple stem with a thin ant-eater snout. Then, to my horror, the squatting form in the bowl sprang forth with lightning rapidity and landed on the spine of the hapless animal. I saw the flash of a knife-like sting that was buried in the grotesque body. The victim struggled feebly, and then lay supine, while its assailant proceeded to make use of an organ that resembled the ovipositor of the ichneumon-fly.

All this was highly revolting; and even more repulsive was my discovery that the insect-form was actually a part of the flower in which it had been reposing! It hung by a long, pallid, snaky rope, like a sort of umbilical cord, from the center of the tilted bowl; and after the hideous thing had finished with its victim, the cord began to shorten, drawing the monster back to its lurking-place. There it squatted as before, watching for fresh prey with its ruby eyes. It was damnably obvious that the plant belonged to a semi-faunal genus and was wont to deposit its seeds (or eggs) in animal bodies.

I turned to Li Wong, who was surveying the scene with manifest disapprobation in his almond eyes.

'Me no likee this.' He shook his head gravely as he spoke.

'Can't say that I care much for it, either,' I returned. 'Considered as a landing-place, this particular planet leaves a good deal to be desired. I fear we'll have to go on for a few more million or trillion years, and try our luck elsewhere.'

I peered out once more, wondering if the other plant-types around us were all possessed of some disagreeable and aggressive character or ability, like the bowl-flowers. I was not reassured when I noticed that some of the serpentine rattans were swaying sluggishly toward the time-sphere, and that one of them had already reached it and was creeping along the wall with tiny tendrils that ended in suction-cups.

Then, from amid the curling vapors and crowding growths, a bizarre being appeared and ran toward the time-machine, barely avoiding one of the cord-suspended monsters as it launched itself from a tall blossom. The thing fell short of its intended prey by a mere inch or two, and swung horribly in mid-air like a goblin pendulum before it was retracted by the long, elastic cord.

The aforesaid being was about the height of an average man. He was bipedal, but exhibited four arms, two of which issued from either side of his elongated, pillar-like neck and the other two from positions half way down on his wasp-waisted thorax. His facial features were of elfin delicacy, and a high, fluted comb of ivory rose from his broad and hairless crown.

His nose, or what appeared to be such, was equipped with mobile feelers that hung down beside his tiny puckered mouth like Oriental mustaches; and his round, discord ears were furnished with fluttering, streamer-like diaphanous membranes, thin as strips of parchment, on which were curious hieroglyphic markings.

His small, sapphire-brilliant eyes were set far apart beneath ebon semi-circles that seemed to have been drawn with pigment on his pearly skin. A short cape of some flossy vermilion fabric served to cover his upper body; .but, apart from this, there was nothing that one could distinguish as artificial raiment.

Avoiding several more of the plant-monsters, who lunged viciously, he neared the time machine. Plainly he had seen us; and it seemed to me that his sapphire eyes implored us for succor and refuge.

I pressed a button which served to unlock and open the door of the sphere. As the door swung outward, Li Wong and I were assailed by numerous unearthly smells, many of which were far from pleasant. We breathed the surge of an air that was heavy with oxygen and was also laden with the vapors of unfamiliar chemical elements.

With a long, flying leap, the strange entity sprang in air and gained the crystal sill of the open machine. I caught the flexible three-fingered hands of his lower arms and drew him to safety. Then I closed the door, just as one of the cord-hung monsters hurtled against it, breaking its keen, steely-looking sting and staining the clear metal with a rill of amber-yellow venom.

'Welcome, stranger,' I said.

Our guest was breathing heavily; and his facial feelers trembled and swayed with the palpitation of his fine, membranous nostrils. Apparently he was too breathless for speech; but he made a series of profound inclinations with his crested head, and moved his tenuous fingers with fluttering gestures that were somehow expressive of regard and gratitude.

When he had recovered his breath, and had composed himself a little, he began to talk in a voice of unearthly pitch, with sharp cadences and slowly rising intonations which I can compare only to the notes of certain tropic birds. Of course, Li Wong and I could only guess at his meaning, since the words, wherever distinguishable as such, were totally different from those of any human tongue or dialect.

We surmised, however, that he was thanking us and was also offering us an explanation of the perils from which we had rescued him. He seemed to be telling us a lengthy tale, accompanied with many dramatic gestures of an odd but eloquent sort. From certain of these, we gathered that his presence in that evil jungle was involuntary; that he had been abandoned there by enemies, in the hope that he would never escape from the wilderness of monstrous plants.

By signs, he told us that the jungle was of enormous extent, and was filled with growths that were even more dreadful than the bowl-flowers,

Afterwards, when we had learned to understand the language of this quaint being, we found that our surmises had been correct; but the narrative, in its entirety, was even stranger and more fantastical than we had imagined.

As I listened to our guest, and watched the swiftly weaving movements of his four hands, I became aware that a shadow had fallen upon us, intercepting the green, watery light of the blurred heavens. Looking up, I saw that a small air-vessel, of discoid form, surrounded with turning wheels and pointed wings that whirred like the sails of a windmill, was descending toward us and was hovering just above the time-machine.

Our guest perceived it also, and broke off abruptly in his story-telling. I could see that he was greatly alarmed and agitated. I inferred that the air-vessel belonged, perhaps, to his enemies, to the very beings who had left him to a cruel doom in that fearsome terrain. No doubt they had returned to make sure of his fate; or else their attention had in some manner been attracted by the appearance of the timesphere.

The alien ship was now hanging near the tops of the giant plants between whose boles the sphere had become lodged in landing. Through the silvery whirl of its wings and rotating wheels, I saw the faces of several entities who bore a general likeness to our guest, and were plainly of the same racial type. One of these beings was holding a many-mouthed instrument with a far-of resemblance to the Gatling gun, or mitrailleuse, and was aiming it at the timemachine.

Our passenger gave a piercing cry, and clutched my arm with two of his hands while he pointed upward with the others. I required no interpreter, and no lengthy process of reasoning, to understand that we were in grave danger from the foreign vessel and its occupants. I sprang immediately to the instrument board, and released the lever that would send us onward in time at the utmost speed of which the machine was capable.

III: The Flight Through Time

Even as I pulled the lever, there came from the ship a flash of cold and violescent light that seemed to envelop the time-sphere. Then all things in the world without were resolved into a flying riot of formless, evanescent images, and around us once more, after a brief interval, was the ebon darkness of interstellar space. Again the ship was filled with momentary, repeated phantoms, to which were added those of our curious guest. Again the dials, the levers and the dynamos multiplied themselves in a dim, phosphorescent glow.

Later, I learned that our flight into forward aeons had saved us from utter annihilation only by the fraction of a second. The force emitted by the many-mouthed weapon on the air-vessel would have turned the sphere into vanishing vapor if we had sustained it for more than a moment. Somehow, I managed to clamp myself into the seat once more, and sat watching the weirdly manifolded hands and ciphers that registered our progress in universal time. Fifty thousand years — a hundred thousand — a million — and still we floated alone in the awesome gulf of the everlasting cosmic midnight. If any suns or planets had passed us during the interim, they had gone by at a distance which rendered them invisible.

Li Wong and the new passenger had clutched at the handles of the lockers in which our provisions were stored, to keep themselves from drifting aimlessly about in mid-air. I heard the babble of their voices, whose every tone and syllable was subdivided into a million echoes.

A peculiar faintness came upon me, and a dream-like sense of the unreal and irrational attached itself to all my impressions and ideas. I seemed to have gone beyond all that was conceivable or comprehensible, to have overpassed the very boundaries of creation. The black chaos in which I wandered was infinitely lost from all direction and orientation, was beyond life itself or the memory of life; and my consciousness seemed to flicker and drown in the dark multitude of an incommensurable void.

Still we went on along the ages. On the far-off, receding earth, as well as on other planets, whole civilizations had evolved and elapsed and been

forgotten, and many historical epochs and geological eras had gone by. Moons and worlds and even great suns had been destroyed. Traveling down their eternal orbits, the very constellations had all shifted their stances amid the infinite. These were inconceivable thoughts; and my brain was overwhelmed by the mere effort to visualize and comprehend their awfulness.

Strangest of all was the thought that the world I had known was lost not only in sidereal immensity, but in the rayless night of a remote antiquity!

With more than the longing of a derelict sailor, adrift on chartless seas, I desired to feel underfoot once more the stable soil of terra firma — no matter where, or what. We had already made one landing in the dizzy labyrinth of time and space; and somewhere, somehow, among the aeons through which we were passing, another cosmic body might offer itself, intersecting in its spatial path our own position in abstract time.

Again, as before our initial landing, I slowed our progress to a rate that would allow inspection of any sun or world we might happen to approach.

There was a long, dreary interval of waiting, in which it seemed that the whole universe, with all its systems and galaxies, must have gone by us and left us hanging alone in the void that lies beyond organized matter. Then I became aware of a growing light; and, retarding the time-machine still further, I saw that a planet was nearing us; and beyond the planet were two larger fiery bodies that I took for a binary system of suns.

Now was our opportunity, and I determined to seize it. The new planet whirled beneath us, it rolled upon us again, as we still moved in time at a rate whereby whole days were reduced to minutes. A moment more, and it rose from the gulf like some gigantically swelling bubble to surround us with a maze of half-cognizable imageries. There were Atlantean mountain-tops through which we seemed to pass, and seas or level deserts above which we appeared to hover in the midst of broken cloud-strata. Now, for an instant, we were among buildings, or what I assumed to be such; then we were hurled onward to a broad, open space. I caught a confused glittering of

many-pointed lights and unidentifiable, thronging forms, as I reached out and brought the sphere to a sudden halt.

As I have said before, it was a perilous thing to stop thus in accelerated time above a moving planet. There might well have been a collision that would have destroyed the machines; or we might have found ourselves embedded beneath fathoms of soil or stones. Indeed, there were any number of undesirable possibilities; and the only wonder is that we escaped annihilation.

As it was, we must have come to a halt in mid-air, perhaps fifteen or twenty feet above the ground. Of course, we were seized immediately by the gravitational influence of the new world. Even as my sense-impressions cleared with the cessation of the time-flight, we fell with a terrible, earsplitting crash, and the sphere almost seemed to rebound and then rolled over, careening on its side. I was torn from my seat by the shock of impact, and Li Wong and our passenger were hurled to the floor beside me. The stranger and myself, though sorely bruised and shaken, contrived to retain consciousness; but I saw that Li Wong had been stunned by the fall.

Giddily, with swaying limbs and reeling senses, I tried to stand up, and somehow succeeded. My first thought was for Li Wong, who was lying inert against the tilted dynamos. A hasty examination showed me that he was uninjured. My second thought was for the time-machine, whose tough metal revealed no visible damage. Then, inevitably, the world into which we had fallen in a manner so precipitate was forced upon my attention.

We had come down in the very center of what appeared to be an active battlefield! All around us was a formidable array of chariot-like vehicles, high-wheeled and highbodied, drawn by quaint monsters that recalled the dragons of heraldry, and driven by beings of an unearthly kind who were little more than pygmies.

There were many foot-soldiers, too, and all were armed with weapons such as have never been used in human history. There were spears that ended in curving, saw-toothed blades, and swords whose hilts were in the middle,

and spiked balls at the end of long, leathern thongs, which were hurled at the enemy and then drawn back by their owners. Also, each of the chariots was fitted with a catapult, from which similar balls were flung.

The users of these weapons had paused in the midst of what was plainly a ferocious battle, and were all staring at the time-machine. Some, I saw, had been crushed beneath the heavy sphere. as it plunged among them. Others had drawn back, and were eyeing us doubtfully.

Even as I surveyed this singular scene, with bewilderment that permitted no more than a partial cognizance of its baffling details, I saw that the interrupted combat was being resumed. The monster-drawn chariots swayed back and forth, and the air was thick with flying missiles, some of which hurtled against the walls of the sphere. It seemed, perhaps, that our presence was having an effect on the morale of these fantastic warriors. Many of those who were nearest to the sphere began to retreat, while others pressed forward; and I was able for the first time to distinguish the members of the two factions, who obviously belonged to different races.

Those of one faction, who were all foot-soldiers armed with spears and swords, were seemingly a rude barbaric type. They outnumbered the others greatly. Their fearsome, uncouth features were like graven masks of fury and malignity; and they fought with a savage desperation.

Their opponents, who comprised all the chariot-drivers, as well as a smaller body of foot soldiers, were more delicate and civilized in appearance, with slighter limbs and anatomies. They made a skillful use of their catapults; and the tide of the battle seemed to be turning in their favor. When I perceived that all those who had been struck down by the time-machine belonged to the more barbarous type, I inferred that possibly our apparition had been construed as favorable to one faction and inimical to the other. The catapult-users were gaining courage; and the spear and sword bearers were becoming visibly demoralized.

The combat turned to an ever-growing rout. The corps of chariots gathered in a crushing mass about the time-sphere and drove the enemy swiftly back,

while, in the heat of conflict. a barrage of singular weapons continued to assail our hyaline walls.

Ferocious-looking as they were, the dragons seemed to take no active part in the struggle, and were plainly mere beasts of draught or burden. But the slaughter was terrific; and crushed or trodden bodies were lying everywhere. The role of *deus ex machina* which I appeared to be playing in this outlandish battle was not one that I should have chosen of my own accord; and I soon decided that it would be better to fare even further afield in universal time. I pulled the starting-lever; but to my confoundment and consternation, there was no result. The mechanism in some manner had been jarred or disconnected by the violence of our fall, though I could not locate the precise difficulty at that moment. Afterward, I found that the connection between the instrument-board and the dynamos had been broken, thus rendering the force inoperative.

Li Wong had now recovered consciousness. Rubbing his head, he sat up and appeared to be pondering our remarkable milieu with all the gravity of an Oriental philosopher. Our passenger was peering out with his brilliant sapphire eyes on this world to which he was no less alien than Li Wong and myself. He seemed to be eyeing the odd warriors and their dragon-teams with a cool scientific interest.

The more civilized of the two factions was now driving its enemies from the field in a tide of carnage. Our soundproof walls prevented us from hearing the clash and rumble of chariot-wheels, the clangor of clashing weapons, and the cries that were doubtless being emitted by the warriors.

Since nothing could be done at the moment to repair our machinery, I resigned myself, not without misgivings, to an indefinite sojourn in the world whereon we had landed so fortuitously.

In perhaps ten minutes the raging battle was over, the unslain remnant of the barbarians was in full flight, and the conquerors, who had poured past us in an irresistible torrent, were returning and massing about the sphere at a little distance.

Several, whom I took for commanding officers, descended from their cars and approached us. They prostrated themselves before the machine in the universal posture of reverence.

For the first time, I was able to form an exact impression of the appearance of these beings. The tallest of them was barely four feet in height, and their limbs, which were normal in number according to human ideas, were slender as those of elves or leprechauns. Their movements were very swift and graceful, and were seemingly aided by a pair of small wings or erigible membranes attached to their sloping shoulders.

Their faces were marked by a most elaborate development of the nostrils and eyes; and the ears and mouths were little more than vestigial by contrast. The nasal apparatus was convoluted like that of certain bats, with mobile valves arranged in rosettes, and a nether appendage that recalled the petals of a butterfly orchid. The eyes were proportionately enormous and were set obliquely.

They were furnished with vertical lids and possessed a power of semicircular rotation and also of protrusion and retraction in their deep orbits. This power, we learned later, enabled them to magnify or reduce any visual image at will, and also to alter or invert the perspective in which it was seen.

These peculiar beings were equipped with body-armor of red metal marked off in ovoid scales. Their light-brown arms and legs were bare. Somehow their whole aspect was very gentle and un-warlike. I marvelled at the prowess and bravery which they had shown in the late battle.

They continued their obeisances before the timemachine, rising and prostrating themselves anew, in an alternation like a set ritual with gestures and genuflections of hieratic significance. I conceived the idea that they regarded the machine itself as a conscious, intelligent and perhaps supernal entity; and that we the occupants, if perceived at all, were considered as internal and integral parts of the mechanism.

Li Wong and I began to debate the advisability of opening the doors and revealing ourselves to these fantastic devotees. Unluckily, I had neglected to provide the sphere with any device for determining the chemical composition of other-world atmospheres; and I was not sure that the outside air would prove wholly suitable for human respiration. It was this consideration, rather than any actual fear of the mild, quaint warriors, that caused me to hesitate.

I decided to defer our epiphany; and I was about to resume my examination of the deranged machinery, when I noticed an ebullition in the massed ranks of soldiers that were drawn up around us at some little distance. The ranks parted with a swift, flowing motion, leaving a wide lane through which, presently a remarkable vehicle advanced.

The vehicle was a sort of open platform mounted on numerous low, squat wheels, and drawn by a dozen of the dragon-creatures, arranged in teams of four. The platform was rectangular, and the small, castor-like wheels served to elevate it little more than a foot above the ground. I could not determine its material, which was copperish in color and suggested a heavy metallic stone rather than a pure, smelted metal. It was without furnishings or superstructure, aside from a low breastwork at the front, behind which three drivers stood, each holding the separate reins of a tandem of monsters. At the rear, a strange outward-curving arm or crane of some black, lustrous material ending in a thick disk, rose high in the air. One of the elfin people stood beside this crane.

With exquisite and admirable skill, the drivers brought their unwieldy conveyance forward in a sweeping arc through the empty space between the time-vessel and the surrounding army. The devotees of the sphere, who must have been commanding officers, retired to one side; and the monster-hauled vehicle, passing us closely, was adroitly maneuvered and drawn about till it came to a halt with its rear end opposite the sphere and the black arm inclining above our very heads with its heavy horizontal disk.

The being who stood beside the curving arm began to manipulate an oddly shaped and movable projection (which must have been a sort of lever or

control) in its dark surface. Watching him curiously, I became aware of a sudden and increasing glare of light overhead; and looking up, I saw that a lid-like cover was sliding back from the disk at the arm's end, revealing a fire-bright substance that dazzled the eye.

Simultaneously, I felt a sensation of corporeal lightness, of growing weightlessness. I reeled with vertigo, and reaching toward the wall in an effort to steady myself, I floated buoyantly from the Aoor and drifted in mid-air. Li Wong and the stranger, I perceived, were floundering eerily and helplessly about amid the machinery,

Perplexed by this phenomenon of degravitation, I did not realize at first that there had been a similar levitation of the time-sphere itself. Then, as I turned in my aerial tumbling, I saw that the sphere had risen from the ground and was now on a level with the floor of the strange conveyance. It occurred to me that an unknown magnetic force was being emitted by the brisk disk above our heads.

No sooner had I conceived this idea than the outward curving arm began to rotate, swinging back upon the vehicle of which it formed a part; and the time-machine, as if suspended by invisible chains, swung with it, maintaining a vertical position beneath the moving disk. In a trice, it was gently deposited on the platform. Then, like the switching off of a light, the glaring disk was covered again by its dark lid, and the properties of normal weight returned to my companions and to me.

IV: The Great Battle

The whole process of loading the sphere upon the platform had been accomplished with remarkable celerity and efficiency. As soon as it was completed the three drivers, in perfect concert, reined their animals about in a long semicircle; and started off on the route by which they had come. Moving at considerable speed, we rolled easily along the wide lane that had been opened through the quaint army. The chariots and foot-soldiers closed behind us as we went; and looking back, I saw them wheel about and reform, with the chariots in the van. Passing through the outermost ranks,

we took the lead, and the whole army followed us in martial order across a low plain.

I was struck by the seeming discrepancy between the preter-human control of gravitation possessed by this curious people, and their somewhat primitive modes of warfare and conveyance. Judging them, as I did, by terrestrial standards. I could not reconcile these things; and the true explanation was too bizarre and fantastic for me to have imagined it beforehand.

We proceeded toward our unknown destination, with the dragons trotting at a leisurely pace that covered more ground than one would have expected. I began to observe the surrounding milieu and to take note of much that had escaped me heretofore.

The plain, I saw, was treeless, with low hummocks and intervals of winding mounds, and was wholly covered with a short, lichenous growth that formed a kind of yellow-green turf. One of the two suns was hanging at meridian; and the other was either just rising or setting, for it hovered close to a far-off horizon of glaucous hills. The sky was tinted with deep green, and I saw that this color was due to the combined light of the suns, one of which was azure blue and the other verging upon amber.

After we had gone on for several miles and had passed a row of intervening hummocks, I beheld a strange city in the near distance, with low mushroom domes and peristyles of massive pillars that gleamed like rosy marble in the sunlight amid plots of orange and indigo and violet vegetation.

This city proved to be our objective. It was thronged with people, among whom we passed on the dragon-drawn platform, borne like the trophies of a triumph. The buildings were roomy and well-spaced and were characterized by deep porticoes with swelling, bulbous columns. We learned subsequently that the material used in their construction was a sort of petrified wood, belonging to a genus of giant pre-historic trees, that had been quarried in enormous blocks.

After passing through many streets, we neared, in what was apparently the centre of the town, a huge circular edifice. It consisted of a single dome upborne on rows of open, colossal pillars, with an entrance broad and high enough to admit with ease the vehicle on which the time-sphere was being carried. We rolled smoothly through the portals and along a level pavement beneath the vast dome.

The place was illumed by the horizontal rays of the sinking yellow sun, which fell on the ruddy floor in broad shafts between the massy pillars. I received an impression of immense empty space, of rosy-golden air and light. Then, in the center, as we went forward, I saw a sort of dais on which stood an extraordinary machine or contrivance of parti-colored metals, towering alone like an idol in some pagan fane.

The dais, like the building, was circular, and rose four or five feet above the main pavement. It was perhaps sixty feet in diameter, and there were several stairs, graduated to the steps of the pygmy people, that gave access to it. Around the dais, in semi-circles on the pavement, with ample space between, there stood many low tables, supported on carven cubes and with benches about them, all of the same material as the edifice itself. The tables were set with numerous black pots, deep and shallow and multiform, in which grew flowers of opulent orange and cassava colors, together with others of delicate white, of frail pink, and silvery green.

These details I perceived hastily and confusedly as our conveyance moved on toward the central dais without endangering any of the tablets. A sprinkling of people, who gave the impression of menials, were hurrying about the place, bringing new flower-pots or re-arranging certain of the ones that had already been disposed. Many of the elfin warriors, dismounting from their chariots, had followed us through the great portals.

Now the vehicle had drawn up beside the dais. By the operation of the black arm with its magnetic disk, the timemachine was lifted from the platform and deposited on the dais not far from the tall contrivance of multi-colored metals. Then, circling the dais, the vehicle withdrew with its dragon-team and vanished through the open entrance.

Whether the place was a temple or merely a public hall, I could not decide. It was like the phantasmagoria of some bewildering dream, and the mystery of it all was not solved when I noticed that hundreds of the faery people were seating themselves at the flower-laden tables and were bending toward the blossoms with a regular contraction and expansion of their voluted nostrils, as if they were inhaling delicious perfumes. To complicate my bewilderment still further, I could distinguish nothing on any of the tables in the form of food, nourishment or even drink, such as these heroic warriors might well be expected to require after an arduous battle.

Dismissing temporarily the baffling enigma, I turned my attention to the peculiar mechanism which occupied the dais together with the time-sphere. Here, too, I found myself at a loss, for I could not even surmise its nature and purpose. I had never seen anything like it among the most ingenious, pernicious, and grotesque inventions of terrene mechanics.

The thing was quite gigantic, with a bristling, serried and fearsome array of highly polished rods and pistons. It had long, spiral bands and abrupt, angular flanges, behind which I made out the half-hidden outlines of a squat cylindrical body, mounted on at least seven or eight ponderous legs that terminated in huge pads like the feet of hippopotami.

Above the complicated mass there towered a sort of triple head, or superstructure of three globes, one above the other on a long metal neck. The heads were fitted with rows of eye-like facets, cold and bright as diamonds, and possessed numerous antennae and queer, unnameable appendages, some of great length. The whole apparatus had the air of some mysterious living entity — a super-machine endowed with sentience and with intellect; and the three-tiered head with its chill eyes appeared to watch us malignly and inscrutably like a metal Argus.

The thing was a miracle of machinery; and it gleamed with hues of gold and steel, of copper and malachite, of silver and azurite and cinnabar. But more and more I was impressed by an evil and brooding intentness, an aura of the sinister and the inimical. The monstrosity was motionless — but intelligent. Then, as I continued my inspection, I saw a movement of the foremost legs,

and became aware that the machine was advancing stiffly on its massive pads toward the time-vessel.

It paused at an interval of five or six feet, and put out a long, thin, supple, many-jointed tentacle from the mass of appendages that adorned its topmost head. With this tentacle, like a raised whip, it struck smartly several times at the curving wall of the sphere.

I could not help feeling somewhat alarmed as well as puzzled; for the action was unmistakably hostile. The blows of the tentacle were somehow like a challenge — the equivalent, so to speak, of an actual slap in the face. And the wary movement with which the machine stepped back and stood facing us, after delivering the whip-sharp blows, was curiously like the manoeuvre of a fighter, squaring himself for combat. The thing seemed almost to crouch on its elephantine metal legs and pads; and there was an air of covert menace in its poised array of mysterious, deadly-looking parts and appendages.

At this moment there occurred a singular interruption which in all likelihood, was the means of averting our death and the destruction of the time-globe. A group of the elfin people, four in number, ascended the stairs of the dais and approached us, bearing among them a large vessel, like an open shallow urn or deep basin, which was filled to the brim with a sluggish, hueless liquid, suggesting immediately some sort of mineral oil. Behind this group there came a second, carrying another vessel full of the same oleaginous fluid.

The two delegations, moving forward in perfect unison, deposited their burdens at the same instant, with the same peculiar genuflections, setting one of the basins before the time-sphere and the other at the feet of the belligerent alien mechanism. Afterwards they retired discreetly as they had come. The whole performance had the air of a religious rite -- a sacrificial offering, intended to appease doubtful or angry deities.

Not without inward amusement, I wondered what use the time-sphere was supposed to make of the oily liquid. It seemed probable that we and our

conveyance were regarded as a single mechanism, active and intelligent, and perhaps similar in kind to the curious robot we had found occupying the dais.

The latter machine, however, was manifestly familiar with such offerings; for, without acknowledgement or ceremony, it proceeded to stoop over and dip certain of its metal proboscides in the oil. These organs, I perceived, were hollow at the ends, like the trunks of elephants; and I saw that the liquid in the basin was diminishing rapidly, as if it were being sucked up,

When the vessel was half empty, the monster withdrew its proboscides; and then, by the simultaneous use of these members, turning and coiling with great suppleness in different directions, it began to oil the innumerable joints and flanges of its intricate machinery. Several times it suspended this remarkable process, eyeing the time-sphere balefully as if watching for a hostile movement. The whole performance was inconceivably grotesque and ludicrous — and sinister.

The main floor of the huge pillared hall, I now saw, had filled with the pygmy warriors, who were seated about the flower-burdened tables. All of them seemed to be inhaling the odors of these flowers in a manner that resembled actual ingestion; and I conceived the idea that they were regaling themselves with a feast of perfumes and perhaps required no other nutriment.

Turning from this quaint spectacle, to which I had given only a cursory glance, I perceived that the metal monster had apparently finished the anointing of its complex machinery and was again posting itself in an attitude preparatory for battle. There was a stealthy turning of half-hidden wheels and cogs, a covert throbbing of well-oiled pistons, as the mechanism faced us; and certain of its tentacles were poised in air like lifted weapons.

What would have happened next, in the normal course of events, I am not altogether sure; but the probabilities are that we would have been blotted out of existence very promptly, efficiently, and summarily. Again, by a

singular intervention, the time-vessel was saved from the anger of its strange antagonist.

Without warning, there came a flash of brilliant blinding flame, as if a thunderbolt had issued from mid-air between the dais and the dome. There was a crashing, shivering noise that shook and penetrated our virtually sound-proof walls; and everything about us seemed to rock with the convulsions of a violent earthquake. The concussion hurled us back upon our dynamos; and I thought for an instant that the sphere would be flung from the dais. Recovering myself, I saw that a third machine had materialized on the dais, opposite the time-sphere and its opponent!

This machine differed as much from the hostile robot as the latter, in its turn, differed from the time-globe. It was a sort of immense polyhedron, with an arrangement of numberless facets alternately opaque and transparent. Through some of the facets, clearer than glass, I was horrified and astonished to behold the thronging faces of entities similar to, or perhaps identical with, the beings who had threatened us from the air-vessel in that far-off world where we had picked up our unusual passenger.

There could be only one explanation: we had been pursued through the cosmic continuum by these vengeful and pertinacious creatures, who had evidently employed a time-space vehicle of their own. They must have possessed unique instruments of incredible range and delicacy by which to detect and follow our course in the labyrinth of stellar gulfs and ages! Turning to our passenger, I saw by his troubled air and frantic gestures that he too had recognized the pursuers. Since I had not yet been able to repair our machinery, the position in which we now stood was a serious dilemma. We were without weapons of any kind, for it had not even occurred to me to bring along a revolver. I began to wish that I had fitted the time-machine with the arsenal of an American racketeer.

However, there was little time for either regret or apprehension. The course of events was now taking an unforeseen and incalculable turn. The formidable robot, diverted from its war-like designs upon us by the appearance of the newcomer, had immediately squared itself around to face

the polyhedron, with its metal members raised in a flailing gesture of menace.

The occupants of the polyhedron, on their part, seemed to disregard the robot. Several of the opaque facets began to slide back in the manner of ports, and revealed the yawning mouths of tubular weapons, all of which were levelled at the time-sphere. It appeared that these people were intent only on destroying us, after having followed us with fantastical vindictiveness through many aeons.

The robot, it would seem, construed the opening of the ports as an act inimical to itself. Or perhaps it did not wish to yield its legitimate prey, the time-sphere, to another and foreign mechanism. At any rate, it bristled forward, winnowing the air with all its tentacles and proboscides, and tramping heavily on the dais with its myriad pads, till it stood within grappling-distance of the polyhedron.

Coils of grayish vapor were beginning to issue from valves in its cylindrical body and pipe-like throat; and raising one of its hollow proboscides, it snorted forth a sudden jet of crimson flame — a briefly flaring tongue that struck an upper facet of the polyhedron, causing it to melt and collapse inward like so much solder.

The occupants of the alien time-machine were now slewing their tube-weapons around to face the robot. A violent fire leaped from one of the tubes, spreading like a fan, and severing cleanly an upraised tentacle of the monster.

At this, the angry mechanism seemed to go mad, and hurled itself at the polyhedron like some enormous octopus of metal. Jets of scarlet fire were issuing from several of its trunk-shaped organs, and great ruinous rents appeared in the facets of the polyhedron beneath their incessant playing.

Undismayed by this, the wielders of the tube-weapons concentrated their violet beams on the robot, inflicting terrific damage. The uppermost of the three globular heads was partly shot away, and metal filaments trailed from its broken rim like a shredded brain. The serried array of tossing members

was torn and lopped like a flame-swept forest. Rods, cogs, pistons, and other parts dripped on the dais in a molten rain. Two of the foremost legs crumpled in shapeless ruin — but still the monster fought on; and the polyhedron became a twisted wreck beneath the focussing of the red fires.

Soon several of the violet beams were extinguished, and their wielders had dissolved into vapor and ashes. But others were still in action; and one of them struck the central cylinder of the robot, after demolishing the outer machinery, and bored into it steadily like an acetylene torch. The beam must have penetrated a vital part, for suddenly there was a tremendous, all-engulfing flare, a cataclysmic explosion.

The immense dome appeared to totter on its trembling columns, and the dais shook like a stormy sea. Then, an instant later, there fell from a dark cloud of swelling steam, a rain of metal fragments, glancing along our crystalline sides and strewing the dais and the main floor for some distance around. The monster, in its explosion, had involved the alien time-vessel, which was wholly riven asunder; and nothing remained of our pursuers but a few blackened cinders.

Apart from this mutual and highly providential destruction of the inimical mechanisms, no serious damage had been done; for the main building, I now perceived for the first time, was deserted — the pygmies had abandoned their feast of odors and had retired discreetly, perhaps at the very onset of the battle. The time-sphere, though it had taken no part in the combat, was left by a singular and ironic fortuity in sole possession of the field.

I decided that fortune, being so favorably disposed toward us, might be tempted even further with impunity. So I opened the door of the vessel, and found that the atmosphere of the world outside was perfectly breathable, though laden with an odd mixture of metallic fumes that lingered from the late explosion, and fruity and luscious fragrances from the potted blossoms.

V: The World of Mohaun Los

Li Wong and the passenger and I emerged on the dais. The yellow sun had gone down, and the place swam with the blue, religious light of its ascendant binary. We were examining the littered ruins of the strange machines when a large delegation of elfin warriors re-entered and approached us. We could not divine their thoughts and emotions; but it seemed to me that their genuflections were even more expressive of profound reverence and gratitude than those with which the time-sphere had been hailed after the routing of the barbarian army. I received an almost telepathic impression that they were thanking us for a supposed act of deliverance at which we had been merely the onlookers.

In time, this impression was to be fully confirmed. The metal monster, it seemed, had come originally, like ourselves, from the outside universe, and had settled itself among this perfume-eating people. They had treated it with all due respect, had housed it in their public hall of assembly and had supplied it liberally with certain mineral lubricants which it required. The machine, in exchange, had deigned to instruct them regarding a few scientific and mechanical secrets such as that of degravitation by means of a reverse magnetic force; but the people, being somewhat non-inventive and non-mechanical by nature, had made little use of this robot-imparted knowledge.

The metal monster, in time, had become disagreeably exacting and tyrannical; and moreover, it had refused flatly to help the pygmies in their war with another people when need arose. Therefore they were glad to be rid of it; and they seemed to take it for granted that we had made away with the monster as well as with the invading time-machine. So far, I have not thought it worth while to disillusion them.

No less than seven terrestrial months have now gone by since the landing of the sphere, My companions and I are still sojourning among the perfume-eaters; and we have no reason to complain of our lot, and no cause to lament the worlds we have left so far behind us in time and space.

In the interim, we have learned many things, and are now able to hold converse with our hosts, having familiarized ourselves by slow degrees with

the peculiar phonetics of their speech.

The name of the world, as well as I can render it in human spelling, is Mohaun Los. Being subject to the gravitational pull of two solar bodies, it follows a somewhat eccentric and prolonged annual orbit. Nevertheless, the climate is equable and salubrious; though marked by meteoric phenomena of an unearthly sort.

The people among whom we are dwelling call themselves the Psounas. They are a fine and estimable race, though bizarre from a human standpoint as any of the mythic tribes whose anatomy and customs were described by Herodotus. They are the ruling race of the planet, and are inconceivably more advanced in many ways than their rude weapons and methods of warfare would lead one to imagine. Astronomy and mathematics, in particular, have been developed by them to a degree that is far beyond the achievement of human savants.

Their food consists of nothing grosser than perfumes; and at first, it was not easy to convince them that we required a more material nomishment. However, once they had grasped the idea, they supplied us abundantly with the meaty fruits in which Mohaun Los abounds; and they did not seem to be shocked or scandalized by our base appetites — even though fruits and other non-atomizable matters are eaten only by animals and the more aboriginal races of this world. The Psounas, indeed, have shown toward us at all times a spirit of urbane tolerance and *laissez faire*.

They are a peaceful race, and during their whole former history have had little need to acquire the martial arts. But the recent evolutionary development of a half-bestial tribe, the Gholpos, who have now learned to organize themselves and to make weapons, and have become quite aggressive as a consequence, has compelled the Psounas to take the field in self-defense.

The descent of the time-machine, falling upon their enemies during a crucial battle, was a most fortunate happening; for these ignorant savages, the Gholpos, regarded it as a manifestation of some divine or demoniac

power in league with the Psounas, and were henceforward altogether broken and cowed.

The Psounas, it seems, were prone even from the first to a more naturalistic supposition regarding the character and origin of the time-sphere. Their long familiarity with the strange ultra-stellar robot may have helped to disabuse them of any belief in the supernaturalism of mere machinery. I have had no difficulty in explaining to them the mechanism of our vessel and the voyage we have made along the aeons.

My efforts, however, to tell them something of my own world, of its peoples and customs, have so far met with polite incredulity or sheer incomprehension. Such a world, they say, is quite unheard-of; and if they were not so courteous, probably they would tell me that it could not even be imagined by any rational being.

Li Wong and I, as well as the Psounas, have learned to talk with the singular entity whom I rescued from the diabolic living flowers on a world midway between the earth and Mohaun Los. This person calls himself Tuoquan, and he is a most erudite savant. His ideas and discoveries, being somewhat at variance with the notions that prevail in his own world, had caused him to be regarded with suspicion and hatred by his fellows; and, as I surmised, he had been abandoned by them, after due process of law, to a cruel doom in the jungle.

The time-machine in which they had followed us to Mohaun Los was, he believed, the only vessel of the kind that had so far been invented by this people. Their zealous and fanatic devotion to legality and law-enforcement would have led them to pursue us beyond the boundaries of the universal continuum. Fortunately, there was small likelihood that they would ever dispatch another time-machine on our trail: for the lingering etheric vibrations that had enabled them to follow us, as dogs follow the scent of their quarry, would die out long before they could construct a duplicate of the unreturning polyhedron.

With the aid of the Psounas, who have supplied me with the necessary metallic elements, I have repaired the broken connection in the time-sphere. I have also made a miniature duplicate of the mechanism, in which I am planning to enclose this letter and send it backward through time, in the seemingly far-fetched and fantastic hope that it may somehow reach the earth and be received by you.

The astronomers of the Psounas have helped me to make the needful computations and adjustments which, indeed, would be utterly beyond my own skill or the mathematical knowledge of any human being. By combining in these calculations the chronometric records of the dials in the timesphere with the ephemerides of Mohaun Los during the past seven months, and allowing for the pauses and changes of speed which we made during our journey, it has been possible to chart the incredibly complicated course which the mechanism must follow in time and space.

If the calculations are correct to the most infinitesimal degree, and the movement of the device is perfectly synchronized, the thing will stop at the very moment and in the very same place from which I left the earth in retrograde time. But of course it will be a miracle if it reaches the earth at all. The Psounas have pointed out to me a ninthmagnitude star which they think is the solar orb of the system in which I was born.

If the letter should ever reach you, I have no reason to think that you will believe my tale.

Nevertheless, I am going to ask you to publish it, even though the world in general will regard it as the fantasy of a madman or a practical joker. It pleases an obscure sense of irony in my mental makeup, to know that the truth will be heard by those among whom it must pass for a fantastic lie. Such an eventuation, perhaps, will be far from novel or unprecedented.

As I have said before, I am well enough contented with life in Mohaun Los. Even death, I am told, is a pleasant thing in this world, for when the Psounas wax old and weary, they repair to a hidden valley in which they are overcome by the lethal and voluptuous perfumes of narcotic flowers.

However, it may be that the nostalgia of new ages and new planets will seize me anon, and I shall feel impelled to continue my journey among future cycles. Li Wong, it goes without saying, will accompany me in any such venture: though he is quite happily engaged at present in translating the Odes of Confucius and other Chinese classics for the benefit of the people of Mohaun Los. (This poetry, I might add, is meeting with a better reception than my tales regarding Occidental civilization.)

Tuoquan, who is teaching the Psounas to make the fearfully destructive weapons of his own world, may decide to go with us; for he is full of intellectual curiosities. Perhaps we shall follow the great circle of time, till the years and aeons without number have returned upon themselves once more, and the past is made a sequel to the future! Yours ever,

DOMITIAN MALGRAFF

THE LIGHT FROM BEYOND

It will be said, by nearly all who peruse this narrative, that I must have been mad from the beginning; that even the first of the phenomena related herein as a sensory hallucination betokening some grave disorder. It is possible that I am mad now, at those times when the gulfwardsliding tide of memory sweeps me away; those times when I am lost anew in the tracts of dreadful light and unknown entity that were opened before me by the last phase of my experience. But I was sane at the outset, and I am still sane enough to write down a sober and lucid account of all that occurred.

My solitary habit of life, as well as my reputation for eccentricity and extravagance, will no doubt be urged against me by many, to support the theory of mental unsoundness. Those who are unconventional enough to credit me with rationality will smile at my story and deem that I have forsaken the province of bizarre pictorial art (in which I have achieved a certain eminence) to invade that of superscientific fiction.

However, if I wished, I could bring forward much corroborative evidence of the strange visitations. Some of the phenomena were remarked by other people in the locality; though I did not know this at the time, owing to my thorough isolation. One or two brief and obscure notices, giving a somewhat commonplace meteoric explanation, appeared shortly afterwards in metropolitan journals, and were reprinted even more briefly and obscurely in scientific gazettes. I shall not quote them here, since to do so would involve a repetition of details which, in themselves, are more or less doubtful and inconclusive.

I am Dorian Wiermoth. My series of illustrative paintings, based on the poems of Poe, will perhaps be familiar to some of my readers.

For a number of reasons, some of which it is needless to mention, I had decided to spend a whole year in the high Sierras. On the shore of a tiny sapphire tarn, in a valley sheltered by hemlocks and granite crags, I had

built a rough cabin and had stocked it plentifully with provisions, books, and the materials of my art. For the time being, I was independent of a world whose charms and enchantments were, to say the least, no longer irresistible.

The region possessed, however, other allurements than those of seclusion. Everywhere, in the stark mountain masses and pinnacles, the juniper-studded cliffs, the glacier-moulded sheets of rock, there was a mingling of grandeur and grotesquery that appealed most intimately to my imagination. Though my drawings and paintings were never, in any sense, literal transcriptions of nature, and were often avowedly fantastic, I had made at all times a careful study of natural forms. I realized that the wildest evocations of the unknown are merely, at bottom, recombinations of known shapes and colors, even as the farthest worlds are compositions of elements familiar to terrene chemistry.

Therefore, I found much that was suggestive in this scenery; much that I could interweave with the arabesques of weirdly imaginative designs; or could render more directly, as pure landscape, in a semi-Japanese style with which I was then experimenting.

The place in which I had settled was remote from the state highway, the railroad, and the path of airplanes. My only near neighbors were the mountain crows and jays and chipmunks. Occasionally, in my rambles, I met a fisherman or hunter; but the region was miraculously free of tourists. I began a serene regimen of work and study, which was interrupted by no human agency. The thing that ended my stay so prematurely, came, I am sure, from a sphere that is not mapped by geographers, nor listed by astronomers.

The mystery began, without forewarning or prescience, on a quiet evening in July, after the scimitar-shaped moon had sheathed itself in the hemlocks. I was sitting in my cabin, reading, for relaxation, a detective story whose title I have since forgotten. The day had been quite warm; there was no wind in that sequestered valley; and the oil lamp was burning steadily between the half-open door and the wide windows.

Then, on the still air, there came a sudden aromatic perfume that filled the cabin like a flooding wave. It was not the resinous odor of the conifers, but a rich and everdeepening spice that was wholly exotic to the region -- perhaps alien to the Earth. It made me think of myrrh and sandal and incense; and yet it was none of these, but a stranger thing, whose very richness was pure and supernal as the odors that were said to attend the apparition of the Holy Grail.

Even as I inhaled it, startled, and wondering if I were the victim of some hallucination, I heard a faint music that was somehow allied to the perfume and inseparable from it. The sound, like a breathing of fairy flutes, ethereally sweet, thrilling, eldritch, was all about me in the room; and I seemed to hear it in my inmost brain, as one hears the seawhisper in a shell.

I ran to the door, I flung it wide open, and stepped out into the azure-green evening. The perfume was everywhere, it arose before me, like the frankincense of veiled altars, from the tarn and the hemlocks, and it seemed to fall from the stilly burning stars above the Gothic trees and granite walls, to the north. Then, turning eastward, I saw the mysterious light that palpitated and revolved in a fan of broad beams upon the hill.

The light was soft, rather than brilliant, and I knew that it could be neither aurora nor airplane beacon. It was hueless — and yet somehow it seemed to include the intimation of a hundred colors lying beyond the familiar spectrum. The rays were like the spokes of a half-hidden wheel that turned slowly and more slowly, but did not change their position. Their center, or hub, was behind the hill. Presently they became stationary, except for a slight trembling. Against them, I saw the bowed masses of several mighty junipers.

I must have stood there for a long while, gaping and staring like any yokel who beholds a marvel beyond his comprehension. I still breathed the unearthly odor, but the music had grown fainter with the slackening of the wheel of light, and had fallen to a sub-auditory sighing — the suspicion of a murmur far away in some undiscovered world. Implicitly, though perhaps illogically, I connected the sound and the scent with that unexplained

luminescence. Whether the wheel was just beyond the junipers, on the craggy hilltop, or a billion miles away in astronomic space, I could not decide; and it did not even occur to me that I could climb the hill and ascertain this particular for myself.

My main emotion was a sort of half-mystic wonder, a dreamy curiosity that did not prompt me to action. Idly I waited, with no clear awareness of the passing of time, till the wheel of rays began once more to revolve slowly. It swiftened, and presently I could no longer distinguish the separate beams. All I could see was a whirling disk, like a moon that spun dizzily but maintained the same position relative to the rocks and junipers. Then, without apparent recession, it grew dim and faded on the sapphire darkness. I heard no longer the remote and flute-like murmur; and the perfume ebbed from the valley like an outgoing tide, leaving but elusive wraiths of its unknown spicery.

My sense of wonder sharpened with the passing of these phenomena; but I could form no conclusion as to their origin. My knowledge of natural science, which was far from extensive, seemed to afford no plausible clue. I felt, with a wild thrilling, half-fearful, half-exultant, that the thing I had witnessed was not to be found in the catalogues compiled by human observers.

The visitation, whatever it was, had left me in a state of profound nervous excitement. Sleep, when it came, was intermittent; and the problematic light, perfume, and melody recurred again and again in my dreams with a singular vividness, as if they had stamped themselves upon my brain with more than the force of normal sensory impressions.

I awoke at earliest dawn, filled with a well-nigh feverish conviction that I must visit the eastern hill immediately and learn if any tangible sign had been left by the agency of the turning beams. After a hasty and half-eaten breakfast, I made the ascent, armed with my drawing-pad and pencils. It was a short climb among over-beetling boulders, sturdy tamaracks, and dwarf oaks that took the form of low-growing bushes.

The hill-top itself comprised an area of several hundred yards, roughly elliptic. It fell gently away toward the east, and ended on two sides in sheerly riven cliffs and jagged scarps. There were patches of soil amid the enormous granite folds and out-croppings; but these patches were bare, except for a few alpine flowers and grasses; and the place was given mainly to a number of gnarled and massive junipers, which had rooted themselves by preference in the solid rock. From the beginning, it had been one of my favorite haunts. I had made many sketches of the mightily mortised junipers, some of which, I verily believe, were more ancient than the famed sequoias, or the cedars of Lebanon.

Surveying the scene with eager eyes in the cloudless morning light, I saw nothing untoward at first. As usual, there were deer-tracks in the basins of friable soil; but apart from these, and my own former footprints, there was no token of any visitor. Somewhat disappointed, I began to think that the luminous, turning wheel had been far-off in space, beyond the hill.

Then, wandering on toward the lamer levels of the crest, I found, in a sheltered spot, the thing that had previously been hidden from my view by the trees and out-croppings. It was a cairn of granite fragments — but a cairn such as I had never beheld in all my mountain explorations. Built in the unmistakable form of a star with five blunt angles, it rose waist-high from the middle of a plot of intersifting loam and sand. About it grew a few plants of mountain phlox. On one side were the charred remnants of a tree that had been destroyed by lightning in recent years. On two other sides, forming a right angle, were high walls to which several junipers clung like coiling dragons with tenacious claws, embedded in the riven rock.

On the summit of the strange pile, in the center, I perceived a pale and coldly shining stone with star-like points that duplicated and followed the five angles. This stone, I thought, had been shaped by artificial means. I did not recognize its material; and I felt sure that it was nothing native to the region.

I felt the elation of a discoverer, deeming that I had stumbled on the proof of some alien mystery. The cairn, whatever its purpose, whoever its

builders, had been reared during the night; for I had visited this very spot on the previous afternoon, a little before sunset, and would have seen the structure if it had been there at that time.

Somehow, I dismissed immediately and forever all idea of human agency. There occurred to me the bizarre thought that voyagers from some foreign world had paused on the hill and had left that enigmatic pile as a sign of their visit. In this manner, the queer nocturnal manifestations were accounted for, even if not fully explained.

Arrested by the weird enigma of it all, I had paused on the verge of the loamy basin, at a distance of perhaps twelve feet from the cairn itself. Now, my brain on fire with fantastical surmise, I stepped forward to examine the cairn more closely. To my utter dumfounding, it appeared to recede before me, preserving the same interval, as I went toward it. Pace after pace I took, but the ground flowed forward beneath me like a treadmill; my moving feet descended in their former tracks; and I was unable to make the least progress toward the goal that was apparently so near at hand! My movements were in no sense impeded, but I felt a growing giddiness, that soon verged upon nausea.

My disconcertment can more readily be imagined than expressed. It seemed obvious that either I or nature had gone suddenly mad. The thing was absurd, impossible — it belied the most elementary laws of dimension. By some incalculable means, a new and arcanic property had been introduced into the space about the cairn.

To test further the presence of this hypothetical property, I abandoned my effort at direct approach, and began to circle the basin, resuming the attempt from other angles. The pile, I found, was equally unapproachable from all sides: at a distance of twelve feet, the soil began its uncanny treadmill movement when I tried to encroach upon it. The cairn, to all intents and purposes, might have been a million miles away, in the gulf between the worlds!

After a while, I gave up my weird and futile experiments, and sat down beneath one of the overhanging junipers. The mystery maddened me, it induced a sort of mental vertigo as I pondered it. But also, it brought into the familiar order of things the exhilaration of a novel and perhaps supernatural element. It spoke of the veiled infinitudes I had vainly longed to explore; it goaded my feverish fantasy to ungovernable flights.

Recalling myself from such conjectures, I studied with sedulous care the stellar pile and the soil around it. Surely the beings who had built it would have left their footprints. However, there were no discernible marks of any kind; and I could learn nothing from the arrangement of the stones, which had been piled with impeccable neatness and symmetry. I was still baffled by the five-pointed object on the summit, for I could recall no terrene mineral that resembled its substance very closely. It was too opaque for moonstone or crystal, too lucid and brilliant for alabaster.

Meanwhile, as I continued to sit there, I was visited by an evanescent whiff of the spicy perfume that had flooded my cabin on the previous night. It came and went like a dying phantom, and I was never quite sure of its presence.

At length I roused myself and made a thorough search of the hill-top, to learn if any other trace had been left by the problematic visitors. In one of the sandy patches of soil, near the northern verge, I saw a curious indentation, like the slender, three-toed footmark of some impossibly gigantic bird.

Close at hand was the small hollow from which a loose fragment of stone, doubtless employed in the building of the cairn, had been removed. The three-pointed mark was very faint, as if the maker had trodden there with an airy lightness. But apart from the finding of this doubtful vestige, my search was wholly without result.

II: The Mystery Deepens

During the weeks that ensued, the unearthly riddle upon which I had fallen preoccupied me almost to the point of mania. Perhaps, if there had been

anyone with whom I could have discussed it, anyone who could have thrown upon it the calm and sober light of technical knowledge, I might have rid myself of the obsession to some extent. But I was entirely alone; and, to the best of my belief, the neighborhood of the cairn was visited by no other human being at that time. On several occasions, I renewed my efforts to approach the cairn; but the unheard-of, incredible property of a concealed extension, a treadmill flowing, still inhered, in the space about it, as if established there to guard it from all intrusion. Faced with this abrogation of known geometry, I felt the delirious horror of one for whom the infinite has declared its yawning gulf amid the supposed solidity of finite things.

I made a pencil drawing of the long, light footmark before it was erased by the Sierran winds; and from that one vestige, like a paleontologist who builds up some prediluvian monster from a single bone, I tried to reconstruct in my imagination the being that had left it there. The cairn itself was the theme of numerous sketches; and I believe that I formed and debated in turn almost every conceivable theory as to its purpose and the identity of its builders.

Was it a monument that marked the grave of some intercosmic voyager from Algol or Aldebaran? Had it been reared as a token of discovery and possession by a Columbus of Achernar, landing on our planet? Did it indicate the site of a mysterious cache, to which the makers would return at some future time? Was it a landmark between dimensions? a hieroglyphic milepost? a signal for the guidance of other travelers who might pass among the worlds, going from deep to deep?

All conjectures were equally valid — and worthless. Before the wildering mystery of it all, my human ignorance drove me to veritable frenzy.

A fortnight had gone by, and the midsummer month was drawing to its close, when I began to notice certain new phenomena. I have mentioned, I think, that there were a few tiny patches of alpine phlox within the circle of occultly altered space around the cairn. One day, with a startlement that amounted to actual shock, I saw that an extraordinary change had occurred

in their pale blossoms. The petals had doubled in number, they were now of abnormal size and heaviness, and were tinged with ardent purple and lambent ruby. Perhaps the change had been going on for some time without my perception; perhaps it had developed overnight. At any rate, the modest little flowers had taken on the splendor of asphodels from some mythologic land!

Beyond all mortal trespass, they flamed in that enchanted area, moated with unseen immensities. Day after day I returned, smitten with the awe of one who witnesses a miracle, and saw them there, ever larger and brighter, as if they were fed by other elements than the known air and earth.

Then, presently, in the berries of a great juniper bough that overhung the ring, I perceived a corresponding change. The tiny, dull-blue globes had enlarged enormously, and were colored with a lucent crimson, like the fiery apples of some exotic paradise. At the same time, the foliage of the bough brightened to a tropic verdancy. But on the main portion of the tree, outside the cryptic circle, the leaves and berries were unaltered.

It was as if something of another world had been intercalated with ours... More and more, I began to feel that the star of lucent, nameless stone that topped the cairn was in some manner of source or key of these unique phenomena. But I could prove nothing, could learn nothing. I could feel sure of only one thing: I was witnessing the action of forces that had never intruded heretofore upon human observation. These forces were obedient to their own laws -which, it appeared, were not altogether synonymous with the laws that man in his presumption has laid down for the workings of nature. The meaning of it all was a secret told in some alien, keyless cipher.

I have forgotten the exact date of those final occurrences, in whose aftermath I was carried beyond the imaginable confines of time and space. Indeed, it seems to me that it would be impossible to date them in terms of terrene chronology. Sometimes I feel that they belong only to the cycles of another world; sometimes, that they never happened; sometimes, that they are still happening — or yet to happen.

I remember, though, that there was a half-moon above the crags and firs on that fatal evening. The air had turned sharp with a prescience of the coming autumn, and I had closed the door and windows and had kindled a fire of dead juniper-wood that was perfuming the cabin with its subtle incense. I heard the southing of a wind in the higher hemlocks, as I sat before my table, looking over the recent sketches I had made of the cairn and its surroundings, and wondering for perhaps the millionth time if I, or anyone, would ever solve the unearthly riddle.

This time, I began to hear the faint, aerial music, as if in the inmost convolutions of my brain, before I caught the mystic odor. At first, it was little more than the memory of a sound; but it seemed to rise and flow and pour outward, slowly, tortuously, as if through the windings of some immeasurable conch. till it was all about me with its labyrinthine murmuring. The cabin — the world outside — the very heavens — were filled with tenuous horns and flutes that told the incommunicable dreams of a lost elfland.

Then, above the redolence of the clearly burning, smokeless wood, I smelt that other perfume, rich and ethereal, and no less pervasive than on the former occasion. It seemed that the closed doors and windows were no barrier to its advent: it came as if through another medium than the air, another avenue than the space in which we move and have our being.

In a fever of exalted wonder and curiosity, I threw the door open and went out into the sea of unearthly fragrance and melody that overlowed the world. On the eastern hill, as I had expected, the turning wheel of light was slowing in a stationary position beyond the tower-like junipers. The rays were soft and hueless, as before, but their luster was not diminished by the moon.

This time, I felt an imperative desire to solve the enigma of that visitation: a desire that drew me, stumbling and racing upward among the craggy boulders and low-grown bushes. The music ebbed to a far, faint whisper, the wheel revolved more gradually, as I neared the summit.

A rudiment of that caution which humanity has always felt in the presence of unknown things, impelled me to slacken my reckless pace. Several immense trees and granite outcroppings, however, still intervened betwixt myself and the source of those trembling beams. I stole forward, seeing with an inexpressible thrill, as of some mystic confirmation, that the beams emanated from the site of the stelliform cairn.

It was an easy matter to climb the massive folds of rock and reach a vantage from which I could look directly down on that mysterious area. Crawling flat on my stomach, in a line with the mightiest of the over jutting junipers, I attained my objective, and could peer from behind a heavy bough that grew horizontally along the rock; at the wall's edge. The loamy basin in which the cairn had been reared was beneath me. Poised in mid-air, level and motionless, and a little to one side of the cairn, there hung a singular vessel that I can liken only to a great open barge with upward curving prow and stern. In its center, above the bulwarks, arose a short mast or slender pillar, topped with a fiery, dazzling disk from which the wheel of beams, as if from a hub, poured vertically and transversely. The whole vessel was made of some highly translucent material, for I could see the dim outlines of the landscape beyond it: and the beams poured earthward through its bottom with little diminution of their radiance. The disk, as well as I could tell from the sharply foreshortened position in which I viewed the barge, was the only semblance of mechanism.

It was as if a crescent moon of milky crystal had come down to flood that shadowy nook with its alien light. And the prow of this moon was no more than six or seven feet from the granite wall that formed my place of vantage!

Four beings, whom I can compare to no earthly creatures, were hovering in the air about the cairn, without wings or other palpable support, as if they, like the barge, were independent of terrene gravity. Though little less in stature than men, their whole aspect was slight and imponderable to a degree that is found only in birds or insects. Their bodily plasm was almost diaphanous, with its intricate nerves and veinings dimly visible, like iridescent threads through a gauzy fabric of pearl and faint rose.

One of them, hanging aloft before the wheel of beams, with his head averted from my view, was holding in his long, frail hands the cold and lucent star that had topped the cairn. The others, stooping airily, were lifting and throwing aside the fragments that had been piled with such impeccable symmetry.

The faces of two were wholly hidden; but the third presented a strange profile, slightly resembling the beak and eye of an owl beneath an earless cranium that rose to a lofty ridge aigretted with nodding tassels like the top-knot of a quail.

The tearing-down of the pile was accomplished with remarkable deftness and speed; and it seemed that the pipy arms of these creatures were far stronger than one would have imagined. During the process of demolition, they stooped lower and lower, till they floated almost horizontally, just above the ground. Soon all the fragments were removed; and the entities began to scoop away with their fingers the soil beneath, whose looseness appeared to evince a previous digging at some recent date.

Breathless and awed before the cryptic vision, I bent forward from my eyrie, wondering what inconceivable treasure, what cache of unguessed glory and mystery, was about to be exhumed by these otherworld explorers.

Finally, from the deep hollow they had made in the loamy soil, one of the beings withdrew his hand, holding aloft a small and colorless object. Apparently it was the thing for which they had been searching, for the creatures abandoned their delving, and all four of them swam upward toward the barge as if wafted by invisible wings. Two of them took their stations in the rear part of the vessel, standing behind the mast-like pillar and its wheel of rays. The one who bore the shining, star-shaped stone, and the carrier of the dull, unknown object, posted themselves in the prow, at a distance of no more than nine or ten feet from the crag on which I crouched.

For the first time, I beheld their faces in front view, peering straight toward me with glowing, pale-gold eyes of inscrutable strangeness. Whether or not they saw me, I have never been sure: they seemed to gaze through me and

beyond — illimitably beyond — into occulted gulfs, and upon worlds forever sealed to the sight of man.

I discerned more clearly now, in the fingers of the foremost being, the nameless object they had dug from beneath the dismantled cairn. It was smooth, drab, oval, and about the size of a falcon's egg. I might have deemed it no more than a common pebble, aside from one peculiar circumstance: a crack in the larger end, from which issued several short, luminous filaments. Somehow, the thing reminded me of a riven seed with sprouting roots.

Heedless of any possible peril, I had risen to my feet and staring raptly at the barge and its occupants. After a few moments. I became aware that the wheel of beams had begun to turn gradually, as if in response to an unperceived mechanism. At the same time, I heard the eerie whispering of a million flutes, I breathed a rushing gale of Edenic spices. Faster and faster the rays revolved, sweeping the ground and the air with their phantom spokes, till I saw only a spinning moon that divided the crescent vessel and seemed to cleave asunder the very earth and rocks.

My senses reeled with the dizzy radiance, the everpouring music and perfume. An indescribable sickness mounted through all my being, the solid granite seemed to turn and pitch under my feet like a drunken world, and the heavily buttressed junipers tossed about me against the overturning heavens.

Very swiftly, the wheel, the vessel and its occupants took on a filmy dimness, fading in a manner that is hard to convey, as if, without apparent diminishment of perspective, they were receding into some ultra-geometric space. Their outlines were still before me — and yet they were immeasurably distant. Coincidentally, I felt a terrific suction, an unseen current more powerful than cataracting waters, that seized me as I stood leaning forward from the rock, and swept me past the violently threshing boughs.

I did not fall toward the ground beneath — for there was no longer any ground. With the sensation of being wrenched asunder in the ruin of worlds that had returned to chaos, I plunged into gray and frigid space, that included neither air, earth, stars nor heaven; void, uncreated space, through which the phantom crescent of the strange vessel fell away beneath me, bearing a ghostly moon.

As well as I can recollect, there was no total loss of consciousness at any time during my fall; but, toward the end, there was an increasing numbness, a great dubiety, and a dim perception of enormous arabesques of color that had risen before me, as if created from the gray nothing.

All was misty and two-dimensional, as if this new-made world had not yet acquired the attribute of depth. I seemed to pass obliquely over painted labyrinths. At length, amid soft opals and azures, I came to a winding area of rosy light, and settled into it till the rosiness was all about me.

My numbness gave way to a sharp and painful tingling as of frost-bite, accompanied by a revival of all my senses. I felt a firm grasp about my shoulders, and knew that my head and upper body had emerged from the rosiness.

III: The Infinite World

For an instant, I thought that I was leaning horizontally from a slowly plunging cataract of some occult element, neither water, air nor flame, but somehow analogous to all three. It was more tangible than air, but there was no feeling of wetness; it flowed with the soft fluttering of fire, but it did not burn.

Two of the strange, ethereal entities were drawing me out on a luminous golden cliff, from which an airy vegetation, hued as with the rainbows of towering fountains, projected its lightly arching masses into a gold-green abyss. The crescent barge and its wheel of beams, now stationary, were hovering close at hand in a semi-capsized position. Farther away, beyond the delicate trees, I saw the jutting of horizontal towers. Five suns, drowning in their own glory, were suspended at wide intervals in the gulf.

I wondered at the weird inversion of gravity that my position evinced; and then, as if through a normalizing of equilibrium, I saw that the great cliff was really a level plain, and the cataract a gentle stream.

Now I was standing on the shore, with the people of the barge beside me. They were no longer supporting me with their frail, firm hands. I could not guess their attitude, and my brain awoke with a keen electric shock to the eerie terror and wildering strangeness of it all. Surely the world about me was no part of the known cosmos! The very soil beneath me thrilled and throbbed with unnameable energies. All things, it seemed, were composed of a range of elements nearer to pure force than to common matter. The trees were like fountains of supernal pyrotechnics, arrested and made permanent in mid-air. The structures that soared at far intervals, like celestial minarets, were built as of moulded morning cloud and luminescence. I breathed an air that was more intoxicating than the air of alpine heights.

Out of this world of marvel, I saw the gathering of many people similar to the entities beside me. Amid the trees and towers, from the shimmering vistas, they came as if summoned by magic. Their movements were swift and silent as the gliding of phantoms, and they seemed to tread the air rather than the ground. I could not hear even the least whispering among them, but I had the feeling of inaudible converse all about me — the vibrant thrilling of overtones too high for the human ear.

Their eyes of pale gold regarded me with unsearchable intentness. I noted their softly curving mouths, which appeared to express an alien sadness, but perhaps were not sad at all. Beneath their gaze, I felt a queer embarrassment, followed quickly by something that I can describe only as an inward illumination. This illumination did not seem to be telepathic: it was merely as if my mind had acquired, as a concomitant of the new existence into which I had fallen, a higher faculty or comprehension impossible in its normal state. This faculty was something that I drew in from the strange soil and air, the presence of the strange multitude. Even

then, my understanding was only partial, and I knew there was much that still eluded me through certain insuperable limitations of my brain.

The beings, I thought, were benignantly disposed, but were somewhat puzzled as to what should be done with me. Inadvertently, in a way without parallel, I had trespassed upon another cosmos than my own. Caught in the pull of some transdimensional vortex wrought by the crescent vessel as it departed from earth, I had followed the vessel to its own world, which adjoined ours in transcendental space.

This much I understood, but the mechanics of my entrance into the supernal realm were somewhat obscure to me. Apparently my fall into the rosy river had been providential, for the stream had revived me with its supraaqueous element, and had perhaps served to prevent a sort of frostbite that would otherwise have been incurred by my plunge through an interspatial vacuum.

The purpose of the granite cairn, and the visits made by its builders to earth, were things that I could apprehend but dimly. Something had been planted beneath the cairn, and had been left there for a stated interval, as if to absorb from the grosser mundane soil certain elements or virtues lacking in the soil of this ethereal world. The whole process was based on the findings of an arcanic but severely ordered science; and the experiment was one that had been made before. The lucent stone on the cairn, in some way that I could not grasp, had established around it the guarding zone of fluent treadmill space, on which no earthly denizen could intrude. The earthly changes of the vegetation within this zone were due to certain mystic emanations from the planted seed.

The nature of the seed eluded me; but I knew that it possessed an enormous and vital importance. And the time for its transplanting to the otherworld soil was now at hand. My eyes were drawn to the fingers of the entity who carried it, and I saw that the seed had swollen visibly, that the shining rootlets had lengthened from its riven end.

More and more of the people had gathered, lining the shore of that rosy river, and the intervals of the airy boskage, in silent multitude. Some, I

perceived, were thin and languid as wasting specters; and their bodily plasm, as if clouded by illness, was dull and opaque, or displayed unhealthy mottlings of shadow amid the semi-translucence that was plainly a normal attribute.

In a clear area, beside the hovering vessel, a hole had been dug in that Edenic soil. Amid the bewildering flux of my impressions, I had not noticed it heretofore. Now it assumed a momentous import, as the bearer of the seed went forward to deposit his charge in that shallow pit, and bury it with a curious oval spade of crystalline metal beneath the golden element that was like a mixture of loam and sunset glory.

The crowd had drawn back, leaving a vacant field about the planted seed. There was a sense of awful and solemn, ceremonial expectation in the stillness of that waiting people. Dim, sublime, ungraspable images hovered upon the horizon of my thought like unborn suns; and I trembled with the nearness of some tremendous thaumaturgy. But the purpose of it all was still beyond my comprehension.

Darkly I felt the anticipation of the alien throng ... and somewhere — in myself or in those about me — a great need and a crying hunger that I could not name.

It seemed that whole months and seasons went by; that the five suns revolved about us in altered ecliptics, ere the end of the interim of waiting... But time and its passing were perhaps obedient to unknown laws, like all else in that other sphere, and were not as the hours and seasons of earthly time.

There came at last the awaited miracle: the pushing of a pale shoot from the golden sod. Visibly, dynamically it grew, as if fed with the sap of accelerating years that had turned to mere minutes. From it, there burst a multitude of scions, budding in their turn with irised leafage. The thing was a fountain of unsealed glories, an upward-rushing geyser of emerald and opal that took the form of a tree.

The rate of growth was beyond belief, it was like a legerdemain of gods. From moment to moment the boughs multiplied and lengthened with the leaping of wind wrought flames. The foliage spread like a blown spray of jewels. The plant became colossal, it towered with a pillar-thick stem, and its leafage meshed the five suns, and drooped down toward the river and above the barge, the crowd, and the lesser vegetation.

Still the tree grew, and its boughs came down in glorious arches and festoons, laden with starlike blossoms. I beheld the faces of those about me in a soft umbrage, along arboreal arcades, as if beneath some paradisaical banyan. Then, as the festoons hung nearer, I saw the fruiting of the tree: the small globules, formed as of blood and light, that were left by the sudden withering of the starry blossoms. Swiftly they swelled, attaining the size of pears, and descending till they grew well within my reach — and within the reach of that embowered throning.

It seemed that the marvellous growth had attained its culmination, and was now quiescent. We were domed as if by some fabulous Tree of Life that had sprung from the mated energies of Earth and the celestial Otherworld.

Suddenly I knew the purpose of it all, when I saw that some of the people about me were plucking and devouring the fruit. Many others abstained, however, and I perceived that the sanguine-colored pears were eaten only by the languid, sickly beings I have mentioned before. It seemed that the fruit was a sovereign curative for their illness: even as they devoured it, their bodies brightened, the mottlings of shadow disappeared, and they began to assume the normal aspect of their fellows.

I watched them — and upon me there came a kindred hunger, a profound and mystic craving, together with the reckless vertigo of one who is lost in a world too far and high for human tread. There were doubts that woke within me, but I forgot them even as they woke. There were hands that reached out as if to warn and restrain me, but I disregarded them. One of the luscious, glowing pears hung close before me — and I plucked it.

The thing filled my fingers with a sharp, electric tingling, followed by a coolness that I can compare only to snow beneath a summer sun. It was not formed of anything that we know as matter — and yet it was firm and solid to the touch, and it yielded a winy juice, an ambrosial pulp, between my teeth. I devoured it avidly, and a high, divine elation coursed like a golden lightning through all my nerves and fibers.

I have forgotten much of the delirium (if delirium it was) that ensued... There were things too vast for memory to retain. And much that I remember could be told only in the language of Olympus.

I recall, however, the colossal expansion of all my senses, the flowering of thought into stars and worlds, as if my consciousness had towered above its mortal tenement with more than the thaumaturgic spreading of the Tree. It seemed that the life of the strange people had become a province of my being, that I knew from all time the arcana of their wisdom, the preterhuman scale of their raptures and sorrows, of their triumphs and disasters.

Holding all this as an appanage. I rose into spheres ulterior and superior. Infinities were laid before me, I conned them as one cons an unrolled map. I peered down upon the utmost heavens, and the hells that lie contiguous to the heavens; and I saw the perennial process of their fiery transmutation and interchange.

I possessed a million eyes and ears; my nerves were lengthened into nether gulfs, were spun out beyond the suns. I was the master of strange senses, that were posted to oversee the activities of unlit stars and blind planets.

All this I beheld and comprehended with the exultation of a drunken demiurge; and all was familiar to me, as if I had seen it in other cycles.

Then, quickly and terribly, there came the sense of division, the feeling that part of myself no longer shared this empire of cosmic immensitude and glory. My delirium shrank like a broken bubble, and I seemed to lose and leave behind me the colossal, shadowy god that still towered above the stars. I was standing again beneath the Tree, with the transdimensional

people about me, and the ruddy fruit still burning in the far-flung arches of leafage.

Here, also, the inexorable doom of division pursued me, and I was no longer one, but two. Distinctly I saw myself, my body and features touched with the ethereal radiance of the beings who were native to that world; but I, who beheld that alter ego. was aware of a dark and iron weight, as if some grosser gravity had claimed me. It seemed that the golden soil was yielding under me like a floor of sunset cloud, and I was plunging and falling through nether emptiness, while that other self remained beneath the Tree.

I awoke with the sultry beams of the midday sun upon my face. The loamy ground on which I lay, the scattered fragments of the cairn beside me, and the rocks and junipers, were irre recognizable as if they had belonged to some other planet than ours. I could not remember them for a long while; and the things I have detailed in this narrative came back to me very tardily, in a broken and disordered sequence.

The manner of my return to Earth is still a mystery. Sometimes I think that the supernal people brought me back in that shining vessel whose mechanism I have never understood. Sometimes, when the madness is upon me, I think that I — or part of myself — was precipitated hither as an aftermath of the eating of the Fruit. The energies to whose operation I exposed myself by that act were wholly incalculable. Perhaps, in accord with the laws of a transdimensional chemistry, there was a partial revibration, and an actual separation of the elements of my body, by which I became two persons, in different worlds. No doubt the physicists will laugh at such ideas...

There were no corporeal ill effects from my experience, apart from a minor degree of what appeared to be frostbite, and a curious burning of the skin, mild rather than severe, that might have resulted from a temporary exposure to radioactive matters. But in all other senses, I was, and still am, a mere remnant of my former self... Among other things, I soon found that my artistic abilities had deserted me; and they have not returned after an interim

of months. Some higher essence, it would seem, has departed wholly and forever.

I have become as it were, a clod. But often, to that clod, the infinite spheres descend in their terror and marvel. I have left the lonely Sierras and have sought the refuge of human nearness. But the streets yawn with uncharted abysms, and Powers unsuspected by others move for me amid the crowd. Sometimes I am no longer here among my fellows, but am standing with the eaters of the fruit, beneath the Tree, in that mystic otherworld.

THE LIGHT FROM THE POLE

Pharazyn the prophet abode in a tall house of granite built on the cliffy heights above a small fishing-village on the northernmost coasts of Zabdamar, whose rock-bestrewn shores are unceasingly washed by the cold black waters of the polar main. It was quite early in the, reign of the Emperor Charnametros, in the year known to the chroniclers, as the Year of the Green Spider, that Pharazyn first became aware of the imminence of his singular and ineluctable doom by certain small signs and presagings. His dreams were perturbed by malign and shadowy shapes, which ever remained half-glimpsed; cold auroras flamed and flickered unseasonably in the nocturnal heavens, although the season was midsummer; and always, in the loud wind and crying surf, it seemed to Pharazyn that he harkened to the weird whisper of voices from realms of perennial winter.

Now, from atop the granite towers of his high house, it was the wont of Pharazyn to observe the wheeling constellations overhead and to pursue those starry omens which appertain to events yet unborn in the dark womb of time. Of late, these nocturnal portents had been strangely ominous, as well, and yet imprecise: it was as if they prefigured, the encroachment of some curious manner of doom so unique as to stand without precedent in the annals of the astrologic science, which could thus be only hinted at in vague, ambiguous terms. This, as well, was troubling to the serenity of Pharazyn,

As to the relevance of the approaching event, it seemed in some wise to bear upon the destiny of the prophet himself; for the stellar omens were occultly consonant to his own natal house, wherein Fomalhaut was ascendant; and also to that zodiacal sign the astromancers of this epoch termed The Basilisk. But in no degree could the prophet discern with precision or clarity the lineaments of the impending event which would seem to impinge so particularly upon his own personal fate.

And this was the cause of increasing perturbation and unrest within the heart of Pharazyn: that, strive as he might, he could acquire no certain foreknowledge of that which would soon eventuate, nor even an inkling thereunto. Being a past-master of all magic and divination, and a seer of remote and future things, he made use of his arts in an effort to divine their meaning. But a cloud was upon his eye, through the diurnal hours, and a darkness thwarted his vision when he sought illumination in dreams. His horoscopes were put to naught; his familiars were silent or answered him equivocally; and confusion was amidst all his geomancies and hydromancies and haruspications. And it seemed to Pharazyn that an unknown power worked against him, mocking and rendering impotent in such fashion the sorcery that none had defeated heretofore. And Pharazyn knew, by certain tokens perceptible to wizards, that the power was an evil power, and its boding was of bale to man.

Through the middle summer the fisher-folk who dwelt in wattle huts below the tall towers of Pharazyn went forth daily in their coracles of hide and willow and cast their nets in the accustomed manner of their trade. But all that, they gathered from the sea was dead and withered as if in the blast of great coldness such as would emanate from trans-Arctic ice. And they drew forth from their seines living monsters as well, such as their eldest captains had never beheld: things triple-headed and tailed and finned with horror; black, shapeless things that turned to liquid foulness and ran from the net like a vile ichor; or headless shapes like bloated moons with green, frozen rays about them; or things leprous-eyed and bearded with stiffly-oozing slime; It was as if some trans-dimensional and long-blocked channel beneath the known, familiar seas of Earth had opened suddenly into the strange waters of ultra-mundane oceans teeming with repulsive and malformed life.

In awe and wonder at what had come out of the sea-horized north, the fisher-folk withdrew into their huts, abandoning their wonted pursuits of the season; their boats, which fared no longer to sea, were drawn up on the sands below the tall towers of Pharazyn on the cliff. And Pharazyn himself, descending later, also beheld the rotting and unwholesome monsters drawn dripping from the tainted waters, and pondered much concerning the import

of this prodigy. For this ill miracle was, he knew, in sooth a sure prodigy of evil.

Thereafter, for the span of seven days each time, the timid folk would emerge from their huts and sail forth to draw provender from the waves, naught filled their nets but unnatural malignancies. At length, and all aghast, they tarried not but fled swiftly to the uppermost rocks and thence to an inland village which lay hard by, wherein the greater number of them could find haven and refuge from these grisly marvels among their kin. There remained with Pharazyn only his two servants, the boy Ratha and the crone Ahilidis, who had both witnessed many of his conjurations and were thus well inured to sights of magic. And with these two beside him, the prophet felt less alone against whatever the night would bring.

Reascending to his towering abode, he ignited before every portal such suffumigations as are singularly repulsive to the boreal demons; and at each angle of the house where a malign spirit might enter, he posted one of his familiars to guard against all intrusion. Thenceafter, while Ratha and Ahilidis slept, he studied with sedulous care the parchments of Pnom, wherein are collated many strong and potent exorcism. He bethought him that a dire spell had been laid upon the land of Zabdamar: an ensorcelling such as the wan polar demons might weave, or the chill witches of the moon might devise in their caverns of snow. And he deemed it well to retire for a time, lest the spell should now take effect upon others than the clammy denizens of the oozy-bottomed sea.

But albeit the exorcisms of Pnom were many and mighty, and stood strong against those entities sinister and malign, such as might yearn to work evil upon the life of Pharazyn, he derived little easement of heart from their perusal. For ever and anon, as he read again for his comfort the old rubrics, he remembered ominously the saying of the prophet Lith, which heretofore no man had ever understood: "There is One that inhabits the place of utter cold, and One that respireth where none other may draw breath. In the days to come He shall issue forth among the isles and cities of men, and shall bring with Him as a white doom the wind that slumbereth in his dwelling place."

And he remembered, as well, the grisly and horrific doom which had befallen his sorcerous colleague, the warlock Evagh, in Yikilth the ice-island. There, in the frozen realm of the worm Rlim Shaikorth, Evagh had suffered a metamorphosis so terrible that few savants have dared be specific in their redactions of the tale. But, Pharazyn and Evagh had been students of the same master, and following upon the demise or enchantment of the warlock, Pharazyn had been moved to interrogate the wandering spirits of wind and wave until at length he had learned in every dread particular that which had befallen his former comrade. And the portents which had presaged the coming of the white worm and the discarnation of Evagh were not unlike the omens and portents which Pharazyn had observed, and which he knew related to his own doom.

Therefore, he pored long over the exorcisms of Pnom and the prophecies of Lith, and peered as well into the doom-fraught pages of the Pnakotic Manuscripts, wherein there were of old indited much lore both abstruse and recondite, and otherwise forgotten among men.

* * *

Although a fire of fatty connifer blazed fiercely upon the marble hearth of his tower-top chamber, it seemed that a deathly chill began to pervade the air of the room about the midnight hour. As Pharazyn turned uneasily from the parchments of Pnom, and saw that the hearth was heaped high, and the fire burned bright, he heard the sudden turmoil of a great wind full of sea-birds eerily shrieking, and the cries of land-fowl driven on helpless wings, and over all a high laughter of diabolic voices. Madly from the north the wind beat upon his square-based towers; and birds were cast like blown leaves of autumn against the stout-paned windows; and devils seemed to tear and strain at the granite walls. Though the room's door was shut and the windows were tight-closed, an icy gust went round and round, circling the table where Pharazyn sat, snatching the broad parchments of Pnom from beneath his fingers, and plucking at the lamp-flame.

Fruitlessly, with sluggish brain, he strove to remember that counter-charm which is most effective against the spirits of the boreal quarter. Then,

strangely, it seemed that the wind fell, leaving a mighty stillness about the house.

Soon he was made aware of a light shining beyond his chamber windows, as if a belated moon had now risen above the rocks. But Pharazyn knew that the moon was at that time a thin crescent, declining with eventide. It seemed that the light shone from the north, pale and frigid as fire of ice; and going to the window he beheld a great beam, that traversed all the sea, coming as if from the hidden pole. In that light the rocks were paler than marble, and the sands were whiter than sea-salt, and the huts of the fishermen were as white tombs. The walled garden of Pharazyn was filled with the piercing light, and lo! all of the green had departed from its foliage, and all of the color had been leached from its blossom until they were like deathly flowers of snow. And the beam fell bleakly the lower walls of his house, but left still in shadow the wall of that upper chamber from which he looked.

He thought that the beam poured from a pale cloud that lay athwart the sea-line, or else from a white peak in the direction of the pole, which had never before been visible by day, but seemed to have lifted skyward in the night — of this he was uncertain. Watching, he thought he saw that it rose higher in the heavens, that beam of frigid light, but climb no higher upon the walls of his tower. At length the ice-mountain, wherefrom it seemed that ray of cold light shone, loomed mighty in the boreal heavens, until it was higher even than the dread mountain Achoravomas, which belches rivers of flame and liquid stone that pour unquenched through Tscho Vulpanomi to the austral main; nay steeper still it seemed to him, until it towered above the house of Pharazyn like unto far and fabulous Yarak itself, the mountain of ice that marks the site of the veritable pole.

Scarce could he draw breath in the cold that was on the air; and, the light of the mountainous iceberg seared his eyeballs with an exceeding froreiness. Yet he perceived an odd thing, that the rays of the glittering light from the pole fell indirectly and to either side of his house; and the lower chambers, where Ratha and Adilidis slept, were bathed in the strange luminance. It would seem that his suffumigations and other precautions had served to

preserve at least this chamber of his house from the full fury of the beam of freezing light.

Then the beam swerved from the tall towers of Pharazyn, and passed his house by, questing the night. The chill gust was gone from the room; the lamp and the fire burned steadily; and something of warmth returned slowly into the half-frozen marrow of Pharazyn.

Pondering in vain the significance of the mystery, he then seemed to hear in the air about him a sweet and wizardly voice. And, speaking in a tongue that he knew no, the voice uttered a rune of slumber. And Pharazyn could not resist the rune and upon him there fell such numbness of sleep as overcomes the outworn watcher in a place of snow.

* * *

Wakingstiffly at dawn, he rose up from the floor where he had lain, and found himself alive and unharmed by the ordeal: it was as if all which had befallen him during the nocturnal hours had been naught but the phantasmagoria of a dream.

Striding to the window, the prophet threw wide the casement and gazed with fearful trepidation upon the north. But there was nothing which met his eye that he had not beheld a thousand dawns aforetime: the bleak and barren wastes of Mhu Thulan, cuhninating in a rocky promontory which thrust out into the dark sea; and the white wilderness of northernmost Polarion beyond the snowy bastions of the wall of mountains which stood athwart the horizon. Nowhere in his range of vision could Pharazyn perceive that wanly glittering, that sky-ascending spire, of soaring ice wherefrom had shone the frigid ray.

For all that it was no longer within the scope of his perception, the prophet knew with grim certainty what it had been that he had surely seen. No captain, faring far to sea, had espied its like in the boreal main; no legend had told of it among the dim hyperboreal isles; no seer or sage had recorded it from his seething and phantasmal visions: but Pharazyn knew.

Deathly and terrible had been that glittering pinnacle, hung like a djinn-reared tower in the zenith; and he knew with sure and certain knowledge the source of the light he had beheld in the darkness like a far beacon, and that it shone not from any earthly coast, but from remote and trans-telluric gulfs profound.

For the uncanny glitterings of a frost harder than diamonds sheathed the walls of his tower in unmeltable crystal. Yet the walls of the tower were no longer touched by the beam as in the night, for it has passed on many hours since; and upon all his house there was naught but the early sun and the morning shadows.

Again he remembered the saying of Lith; and with much foreboding he descended to the ground story. There, at the northern windows, the boy Ratha and the hag Ahilidis were leaning with faces upturned to the direction wherefrom the icy beacon-light had shone. Stiffly they stood, with wide-open eyes, and a pale terror was in their regard, and upon them was the white death such as has stricken his garden in the night. And, nearing them, the prophet was stayed by a terrible chillness that smote upon him from their bodies, which were pallid as the flesh of leprosy and white as moon-washed marble.

Gazing beyond them through the window, Pharazyn perceived along the sands and rocks of the shore, certain of the fisherfolk as had crept back to their homes were lying or standing upright in stiff, rigid postures, as if they had emerged from their hiding-places to behold the pale beam and had been struck into an enchanted shumber, or the turned to stone by the Gorgon's glare of the polar light. And the whole shore and harbor, and the cliffs, and the garden of Pharazyn, even to the front threshold of his house, was mailed in crystal armor of perdurable frost, as had been the walls of his house.

He would have fled from thence, knowing his magic wholly ineffectual against this thing. But it came to him that death was in the direct falling of the rays from the ice mountain, and, leaving the shelter of the house, he must perforce enter that fatal light where next it shone questing down the darkling skies from the ultimate north. And yet not totally unprotected was

he if he remained, for the wards he had erected against supernatural intrusion had in sooth protected him from the doom which had befallen the hapless fisher-folk, and the boy Ratha, and the crone. Or was his inexplicable survival due only to the efficacy of his suffumigations and familiars?

Now terror crept into the heart of Pharazyn, for it came to him that he alone, of all who dwelt on that shore, had been exempted from the white death. He dared not surmise the reason of his exemption; but he realized the futility of flight, and in the end he deemed it best to remain patiently and without fear, awaiting whatever should befall him with the coming of another night.

Returning to his chamber he busied himself with various conjurations. But his familiars had gone away in the night, forsaking the angles at which he had posted them; and no spirit, human or demoniacal, made reply to his querying. And not in any way known to wizards could he learn aught of the mountain of ice and of its frigid ray, or divine the least inkling of its secret, to confirm the dreadful surmise that had seized upon him.

Deeply immersed in his sorcerous labors, he was unaware of the passage of time and only realized that night was upon him when presently, as he labored with his useless cantrips, he felt upon his face the breathing of a wind that was not air but a subtler and a rarer element cold as the moon's ether. His own breath forsook him with agonies unspeakable, and he fell down on the floor in a sort of waking swoon that was near to death. And again he recalled the hideous metamorphosis that had befallen the unfortunate warlock, Evagh, and his transformation upon Yikilth into a being able to endure the rigors of super-Arctic cold, to whom even the frigid and insubstantial ether was rendered somehow respirable.

In the swoon he was doubtfully aware of voices uttering unfamiliar spells. Invisible fingers touched him with icy pangs; and about him came and went a bleak radiance, like a tide that flows and ebbs and flows again. Intolerable was this luminance to all his senses; but it brightened slowly, with briefer ebbings; and in time his eyes and his flesh were tempered to endure it. Almost fully upon him now shone the mysterious light from the north,

blazing through his windows; and it seemed that a great Eye regarded him in the baleful light. He would have risen to confront the Eye, but his swoon held him like a palsy.

After that, he slept again for a certain period. Waking, he found in all his limbs their wonted strength, and quickness. The light was still upon his home, its pallid luminance glimmering through his chamber. Then, with inexplicable suddenness, it was gone, but whether it had died at its source or merely turned away to bathe some other place in the freezing regard of its Gorgon-eye, he did not know.

* * *

Morning lit the east and the second night was ended of this seige. And, peering out, he witnessed a new and more ominous marvel: for, lo! the adamantine frost had now crept nigh unto the very sill of his casement. And he was aware of a bleak certainty: that on the third night — should he live to see it — the cold and pallid beam from the icy peak would fully enter into his casement window, and his doom would be upon him everlastingly.

Terror seized upon Pharazyn then, for he saw in all of these phenomena the insidious workings of a wizardry plenipotent and transcendental, and beyond the skill of any terrene sorcerer. All that third day he searched the blood-writ runes of mouldering scrolls of pterodactyl-parchment, and scanned the writings of the elder sages, searching in vain for the means to combat the eerie menace from the pole which close-compassed him and which would, he knew, with the coming of night, drag him down to a doom so profound and unutterable that from its frigid bourn he might never escape.

For it had come to Tharazyn, in the trance-like chambers of his spell-induced swoon, what secret lurked behind the cryptic sayings of Lith. For he had found amongst the enigmatic utterances of the prophet yet a second passage whose meanings had heretofore eluded the comprehension of the sages: "But even He, who reigns among the lords of death, is made vulnerable by His coming-hence into the world of mortality. Beware, then,

the wrath of that Other One which is His Master and far more terrible than He; and Who abideth forever in His cold caverns beneath His mountain, beprisoned there by the Elder Gods. For if that Other seek ye out, Him there is no escaping save in death itself."

Now it seemed to Pharazyn that the One whose coming was foretold by the prophet Lith was the white worm, Rlim Shaikorth; from beyond the limits of the north had he come in his floating citadel, the ice-island, Yikilth, to voyage the mundane oceans and to blast with a chill splendor the puny peoples of humankind. And when Evagh the warlock had been transformed into a being for whom was made respirable the air in which no mortal man may draw breath — even that coldness and the thin ether that go everywhere with Yikilth — he was brought face to face with that being whose advent the prophet Lith had foretold obscurely, and who had vaguely the lineaments of a visage belonging neither to beast of the earth nor ocean-creature.

And unto him Rlim Shaikorth had spake: Wisdom ineffable shalt be thine, and mastery of lore beyond the reach of mortals, if thou wilt but worship me and become my thrall; with me thou shalt voyage amid the kingdoms of the north, and shalt paw among the green southern islands, and we shall smite the fair ports and cities with a blight of trans-Arctic winter: for I am he whose coming even the gods may not oppose.

Thereafter, Pharazyn knew, Evagh had dwelt upon Yikilth, and beneath the instruction of Dooni and Ux Loddhan, captive sorcerers of Thulask, who had as well been tempered to the coldness of Yikilth, together with certain outlandish and uncouth men called Polarians, he performed the sevenfold rite that is scarce suitable for narration here, and swore the threefold vow of unspeakable alienation. Thereafter for many days and nights, he sailed with Rlim Shaikorth adown the coast of Mhu Thulan and the province of Zabdamar, the great iceberg being guided by the sorcery of the worm, prevailing even against the wind and tide. By night and day, like the beams of a deathly beacon, the chill splendor smote afar from Yikilth to freeze flowery Cerngoth and sea-affronting Aguil with boreal stillness. Proud triremes were overtaken as they fled southward, their crews blasted at the

oars; and often ships were caught and embedded in the new bastions of ice that formed daily around the base of that ever-growing mountain. But, dwelling upon Yikilth, the sorcerer Evagh, and his fellow-wizards were immune to that icy death, even as the worm had promised them. All were united in the worship of the white worm; and all, it seemed, were content in a measure with their lot, and were fain of that unearthly lore and dominion which the worm had promised them.

But Evagh rebelled in secret against his thralldom to Rlim Shaikorth; he beheld with revulsion the doom of cities, and sorrow was in his heart for the fishing-coracles and the biremes of trade and warfare that floated manless after they had, met Yikilth. Ever the ice-isle followed its southwardly course, growing vaster and more prodigious by accretion; and ever, at the star-appointed time, which was the forenoon of every third day, the sorcerers convened in the presence of Rlim Shaikorth to do him worship. To the perturbation of all, their numbers unaccountably dwindled, warlock by warlock, first amongst the outlandish men from Polarion. And ever, ominously the worm grew in size; and the increase was visible as a thickening of his whole body from head to tail.

Deeming these circumstances an ill augury, the sorcerers made fearful supplication to the worm in their various tongues, and implored him to enlighten them concerning the fate of their erstwhile fellows. But the reply they received was equivocal at best: sometimes the worm was silent, and sometimes he bespoke them, renewing vaguely the promises he had made. And Ux Loddhan, it seemed, was wholly oblivious to the doom which overtook them slowly, one by one, and was fain to impute an esoteric significance to the ever-growing bulk of the white worm and the vanishing of the wizards. At length Evagh had perceived that his vanished brethren were now merged wholly in the ultraterrestrial being of Rlim Shaikorth, had been devoured by the wan and loathly mouth of the worm and abode henceforward in the evil blackness of his belly, whereto he himself was doomed to dwell, if he did not foreswear his dreadful vows and strike during those infrequent periods of slumber when even the mighty Rlim Shaikorth was vulnerable. And strike he did, effecting the dissolution both

of the white worm and of the ice- isle, Yikilth, itself; while his own spirit was borne shrieking into the boreal solitudes, there to bide forever.

Now it seemed to Pharazyn that the white worm was even that One whereof the prophet Lith had forewarned the world; and that if this was so, then even the terrible Rlim Shaikorth was but the emmisary of another and far more potent and dreadful Being, whose wrath was a peril to all the world, as the prophet Lith had foretold.

In his perusal of the parchments of Pnom, Pharazyn had found certain vague references to an entity of supra-polar cold who had come down from dim Fomalhaut when the world was young, taking as his abode the icy and cavernous bowels of Yarak, the ice-mountain which stands upon the ultimate and boreal pole, bound there forever under the sigil of those eldermost and benign divinities which guard the world and are reputedly disposed to be friendly towards man. All of this seemed to agree with that against which the sayings of Lith had so cryptically warned. And in this the dread name of Aphoom Zhah, concerning whom even the Pnakotic Manuscripts dare only hint, took on a grim and frightful relevance.

For if that which Pharazyn now dared to dream was true, then Rlim Shaikorth was only the minister of that Polar One of whom the legends of anterior cycles whisper fearful things; and the white spirits of the boreal wastes — the Cold Ones who obey the behests of the worm, and haunt perpetually the frozen wilderness, and shriek upon the nightwind like damned, tormented souls — they were but the minions and servants of Aphoom Zhah, and Rlim Shaikorth their leader. And of this Aphoom Zhah, the Pnakotic Manuscripts allude to him as a flame of coldness which shall someday encompass the lands of men, from wintry Polarion in the ultimate north, through all the Hyperborean kingdoms and archipelagoes, even to the southmost isle of Oszhtror. And was it not a very flame of coldness which Pharazyn had seen falling adown the nighted skies, from a mountain of ice very like remote and terrible Yarak?

But wherefore was the wrath of the Dweller at the Pole turned against Pharazyn; or, if not from vengeance, for what ulterior purpose did the flame

of coldness seek out his high house, night upon night? Here, too, the wisdom of Pnom yielded a clue upon perusal. For had not the sage written thusly: "Neither the Old Ones nor their minions. dare to disturb the sigil of the elder gods; the hand of mortal man alone may touch their sign unblasted;" and, in another place, "Power the star- born Ones possess over those hapless mortals in whose natal hour the star of Their origin be ascendant." And well knew Pharazyn that both he and the unhappy Evagh were birthed in the hour when dim Fomalhaut is risen over the edges of the world.

Therein lay the reason whereby had Rlim Shaikorth power to transmute the flesh of Evagh, and to temper it so that the warlock might endure the harsh rigor of Yikilth; therein, too, it might be, was the cause wherefore the light from the pole had sought out the tall towers of Pharazyn among all the residences of men. For only his hand could dislodge the stil the gods had set upon the portals of Yarak: only Pharazyn the prophet could loose the Cold Flame upon the world!

And thus it came to pass that Pharazyn knew the extremity of horror, and knew himself damned beyond all other dooms eternal: for it is a strange and fearful doom, to know that by your hand shall be set upon the flesh of men the seal of that gulf whose rigor paleth one by one the most ardent stars, and putteth rime at the very core of suns — the unutterable coldness of the profound and cosmic deeps!

* * *

When that the sun rose upon the morning of the third day after the blight of coldness had first touched the coasts of Zabdamar, and the fisher-folk who had fled inland to abide the unseasonable chill in the village of Zuth came to return to their frost-whitened huts, they found the high house of Pharazyn the prophet empty of life.

At first they were timid and trepidatious, and fingered athwart the threshold; later, when naught betide, the younger and bolder men amongst them ventured into the house, but cautiously: for it is never prudent to enter

the houses of sorcerers unbidden. In the lower parts of the house the young men found the bodies of the boy Ratha and the crone Ahilidis stark as bone; they gathered their courage and approached the pale corpses, finding them frozen and stony.

In the upper parts of the tower which were untouched by the glittering frost, the fisher-folk discovered the corpse of the prophet himself, seated in his throne-like chair carved of the ivory of mammoths. Upon his thin red lips was a cold smile, and there beneath was another smile, thinner and yet more red; for he had slit his throat from ear to ear, had Pharazyn, heedful of the less cryptic of the two sayings of the prophet Lith, that only by death can a man elude the clutches of Aphoom Zhah the Lord of the Pole.

THE MAHOUT

Arthur Merton, British resident at Jizapur, and his cousin, John Hawley, an Agra newspaper editor, who had run down into Central India for a few weeks' shooting at Merton's invitation, reined in their horses just outside the gates of Jizapur. The Maharajah's elephants, a score of the largest and finest "tuskers" in Central India, were being ridden out for their daily exercise. The procession was led by Rajah, the great elephant of State, who towered above the rest like a warship amongst merchantmen. He was a magnificent elephant, over twelve feet from his shoulders to the ground, and of a slightly lighter hue than the others, who were of the usual muddy gray. On the ends of his tusks gleamed golden knobs.

"What a kingly animal !" exclaimed Hawley, as Rajah passed.

As he spoke, the mahout, or driver, who had been sitting his charge like a bronze image, turned and met Hawley's eyes. He was a man to attract attention, this mahout, as distinctive a figure among his brother mahouts as was Rajah among the elephants. He was apparently very tall, and of a high-caste type, the eyes proud and fearless, the heavy beard carefully trimmed, and the face cast in a handsome, dignified mold.

Hawley gave a second exclamation as he met the mahout's gaze and stared at the man hard. The Hindu, after an impressive glance, turned his head, and the elephant went on.

"I could swear that I have seen that man before," said Hawley, at his cousin's interrogatory expression. "It was near Agra, about six years ago, when I was out riding one afternoon. My horse, a nervous, high-strung Waler, bolted at the sight of an umbrella which someone had left by the roadside. It was impossible to stop him, indeed, I had all I could to keep on. Suddenly, the Hindu we have just passed, or his double, stepped out into the road and grabbed the bridle. He was carried quite a distance, but managed to keep his grip, and the Waler finally condescended to stop. After receiving

my thanks with a dignified deprecation of the service he had done me, the Hindu disappeared, and I have not seen him since."

"It is scarcely probable, though, that this mahout is the same," Hawley resumed, after a pause. "My rescuer was dressed as a high-caste, and it is not conceivable that such a one would turn elephant driver."

"I know nothing of the man," said Merton, as they rode on into the city. "He has been Rajah's mahout ever since I came here a year ago. Of course, as you say, he cannot be the man who stopped your horse. It is merely a chance resemblance."

The next afternoon, Hawley was out riding alone. He had left the main toad for a smaller one running into the jungle, intending to visit a ruined temple of which Merton had told him. Suddenly he noticed elephant tracks in the dust, exceedingly large ones, which he concluded could have been made only by Rajah. A momentary curiosity as to why the elephant had been ridden off into the jungle, and also concerning the mahout, led Hawley to follow the tracks when the road branched and they took the path opposite to the one that he had intended to follow. In a few minutes he came to a spot of open ground in the thick luxuriant jungle, and reined in quickly at what he saw there.

Rajah stood in the clearing, holding something in his trunk which Hawley at first glance took to be a man, dressed in a blue and gold native attire, and with a red turban. Another look told him that it was merely a dummy—some old clothes stuffed with straw. As he watched, the mahout gave a low command, reinforced with a jab behind the ear from his ankus, or goad. Rajah gave an upward swing with his trunk, and released his hold on the figure, which flew skyward for at least twenty feet, and then dropped limply to earth. The mahout watched its fall with an expression of what seemed to be malevolence upon his face, though Hawley might have been mistaken as to this at the distance. He gave another command, and a jab at the elephant's cheek—a peculiar, quick thrust, at which Rajah picked the dummy up and placed it on his back behind the mahout in the place usually occupied by the

howdah The Hindu directing, the figure was again seized and hurled into the air.

Much mystified, Hawley watched several repetitions of this strange performance, but was unable to puzzle out what it meant. Finally, the mahout caught sight of him, and rode the elephant hastily away into the jungle on the opposite side of the clearing. Evidently he did not wish to be observed or questioned. Hawley continued his journey to the temple, thinking over the curious incident as he went. He did not see the mahout again that day.

He spoke of what he had seen to Merton that evening, but his cousin paid little attention to the tale, saying that no one could comprehend anything done by natives, and that it wasn't worth while to wonder at their actions anyway. Even if one could find the explanation, it wouldn't be worth knowing.

The scene in the jungle recurred to Hawley many times, probably because of the resemblance of the mahout to the man who had stopped his horse at Agra. But he could think of no plausible explanation of what he had seen. At last he dismissed the matter from his mind altogether.

At the time of Hawley's visit, great preparations were being made for the marriage of the Maharajah of Jizapur, Krishna Singh, to the daughter of the neighboring sovereign. There was to be much feasting, firing of guns, and a gorgeous procession. All the Rajabs, Ranas, and Thakurs, etc., for a radius of at least hundred miles, were to be present. The spectacle, indeed, was one of the inducements that had drawn Hawley down into Central India.

After two weeks of unprecedented activity and excitement in the city of Jizapur, the great day came, with incessant thunder of guns from the Maharajah's palace during all the forenoon, as the royalty of Central Indian arrived with its hordes of picturesque, tattered, dirty retainers and soldiery. Each king or dignitary was punctiliously saluted according to his rank, which in India is determined by the number of guns that may be fired in his honor.

At noon a great procession, the Maharajah heading it, issued from the palace to ride out and meet the bride and her father and attendants, who were to reach Jizapur at that hour.

Hawley and Merton watched the pageant from the large and many-colored crowd that lined the roadside without the city gates. As Rajah, the great State elephant emerged, with Krishna Singh in the gold-embroidered howdah, or canopied seat, on his back, a rising cloud of dust in the distance proclaimed the coming of the bride and her relatives.

Behind the Maharajah came a number of elephants, bearing the nobles and dignitaries of Jizapur, and the neighboring princes. Then emerged richly caparisoned horses, with prismatically-attired riders-- soldiers and attendants. Over this great glare of color and movement was the almost intolerable light of the midday Eastern sun.

The two Englishmen were some distance from the city gates, so that when the Maharajah's slow, majestic procession passed them, that of the bride was drawing near—a similar one, and less gorgeous only because it was smaller.

Perhaps fifty yards separated the two when something happened to bring both processions to a halt. Hawley, who happened at the moment to be idly watching the elephant Rajah, and his driver, saw the mahout reach swiftly forward and stab the animal's cheek with his goad, precisely as he had done on that day in the jungle when Hawley had come unexpectedly upon him. Probably no one else noticed the action, or, if they did, attached any importance to it in the excitement that followed.

As he reached with his trunk for the dummy seated on his back, so Rajah reached into the howdah and grasped Krishna Singh about the waist. In an instant the astonished, terror-stricken Maharajah was dansling in mid-air where the elephant held him poised a moment. Then, in spite of the shouts, commands, and blows of his mahout, Rajah began to swing Krishna Singh to and fro, slowly at first, but with a gradually increasing speed. It was like watching a gigantic pendulum. The fascinated crowd gazed in a sudden and

tense silence for what seemed to them hours, though they were really only seconds, before the elephant, with a last vicious upward impetus of his helpless victim, released his hold. Krishna Singh soared skyward, a blot of gold and red against the intense, stark, blazing azure of the Indian sky. To the horror-stricken onlookers he seemed to hang there for hours, before he began to fall back from the height to which the giant elephant had tossed him as one would toss a tennis-ball. Hawley turned away, unable to look any longer, and in an instant heard the hollow, lifeless thud as the body struck the ground.

The sound broke the spell of horror and amazement that had held the crowd, and a confused babble arose, interspersed with a few wails and cries. One sharp shriek came from the curtained howdah of the bride. The Maharajali's body guard at once galloped forward and formed a ring about the body. The crowd, to whom the elephant had gone "musth," or mad, began to retreat and disperse.

Hawley, in a few words, told his cousin of what he has seen the mahout do, and his belief that the elephant's action had thus been induced.

The two Englishmen went to the captain of the body-guard, who was standing by the side of the fallen Maharajah. Krishna Singh lay quite dead, his neck broken by the fall. The captain, upon being informed of what Hawley had seen, directed some of his men to go in search of the mahout, who, in the confusion, had slipped from Rajah's neck, disappearing no one knew where. Their search was unsuccessful, nor did a further one, continued for over a week, reveal any trace of the elephant driver.

But several days afterward Hawley received a letter, bearing the Agra postmark. It was in a hand unfamiliar to him and was written in rather stiff, though perfectly correct English, such as an educated native would write. It was as follows: To Hawley Sahib:

I am the man who stopped the Sahib's horse near Agra one day, six years ago. Because I have seen in the Sahib's eyes that he recognized and

remembers me, I am writing this. He will then understand much that has puzzled him.

My father was Krishna Singh's half-brother. Men who bore my father an enmity, invented evidence of a plot on his part to murder Krishna Singh and seize the throne. The Maharajah, bearing him little love and being of an intensely suspicious nature, required little proof to believe this, and caused my father and several others of the family to be seized and thrown into the palace dungeons. A few days later, without trial, they were led out and executed by the "Death of the Elephant." Perchance the Sahib has not heard of this. The manner of it is thus: The condemned man is made to kneel with his head on a block of stone, and an elephant, at a command from the driver, places one of his feet on the prisoner's head, killing him, of course, instantly.

I, who was but a youth at the time, by some inadvertence was allowed to escape, and made my way to Agra, where I remained several years with distant relatives, learning, in that time, to speak and write English. I was intending to enter the service of the British Raj, when an idea of revenge on Krishna Singh, for my father's death, suddenly sprang into full conception. I had long plotted, forming many impracticable and futile plans for vengeance, but the one that then occurred to me seemed possible, though extremely difficult. As the Sahib has seen, it proved successful.

I at once left Agra, disguising myself as a low-caste, and went to Burma, where I learned elephant-driving—a work not easy for one who has not been trained to it from boyhood. In doing this, I sacrificed my caste. In my thirst for revenge, however, it seemed but a little thing.

After four years in the jungle I came to Jizapur and, being a skilled and fully accredited mahout, was given a position in the Maharajah's stables. Krishna Singh never suspected my identity, for I had changed greatly in the ten years since I had fled from Jizapur, and who would have thought to find Kshatriya in the position of such a low-caste elephant-driver?

Gradually, for my skill and trustworthiness, I was advanced in position, and at last was entrusted with the State elephant, Rajab. This was what I had long been aiming at, for on my attaining the care of Krishna Singh's own elephant depended the success or failure of my plan.

This position obtained, my purpose was but half-achieved. It was necessary that the elephant be trained for his part, and this, indeed, was perhaps the most difficult and dangerous part of my work. It was not easy to avoid observation, and detection was likely to prove fatal to me and to my plan. On that day when the Sahib came upon me in the jungle, I thought my scheme doomed, and prepared to flee. But evidently no idea of the meaning of the performance in the jungle entered the Sahib's mind.

At last came my day of revenge, and after the Maharajah's death I succeeded in miraculously escaping, though I had fully expected to pay for my vengeance with my own life. I am safe now—not all the police and secret emissaries in India can find me.

The death that my father met has been visited upon his murderer, and the shadow of those dreadful days and of that unavenged crime has at last been lifted from my heart. I go forth content, to face life and fate calmly, and with a mind free and untroubled.

THE MAKER OF GARGOYLES

Among the many gargoyles that frowned or leered from the roof of the new-built cathedral of Vyones, two were pre-eminent above the rest by virtue of their fine workmanship and their supreme grotesquery. These two had been wrought by the stone-carver Blaise Reynard, a native of Vyones, who had lately returned from a long sojourn in the cities of Provence, and had secured employment on the cathedral when the three years' task of its construction and ornamentation was well-nigh completed. In view of the wonderful artistry shown by Reynard, it was regretted by Ambrosius, the archbishop, that it had not been possible to commit the execution of all the gargoyles to this delicate and accomplished workman; but other people, with less liberal tastes than Ambrosius, were heard to express a different opinion.

This opinion, perhaps, was tinged by the personal dislike that had been generally felt toward Reynard in Vyones even from his boyhood; and which had been revived with some virulence on his return. Whether rightly or unjustly, his very physiognomy had always marked him out for public disfavor: he was inordinately dark, with hair and beard of a preternatural bluish-black, and slanting, ill-matched eyes that gave him a sinister and cunning air. His taciturn and saturnine ways were such as a superstitious people would identify with necromantic knowledge or complicity; and there were those who covertly accused him of being in league with Satan; though the accusations were little more than vague, anonymous rumors, even to the end, through lack of veritable evidence.

However, the people who suspected Reynard of diabolic affiliations were wont for awhile to instance the two gargoyles as sufficient proof. No man, they contended, who was so inspired by the Arch-Enemy, could have carven anything so sheerly evil and malignant, could have embodied so consummately in mere stone the living lineaments of the most demoniacal of all the deadly Sins.

The two gargoyles were perched on opposite corners of a high tower of the cathedral. One was a snarling, murderous, cat-headed monster, with retracted lips revealing formidable fangs, and eyes that glared intolerable hatred from beneath ferine brows. This creature had the claws and wings of a griffin, and seemed as if it were poised in readiness to swoop down on the city of Vyones, like a harpy on its prey. Its companion was a horned satyr, with the vans of some great bat such as might roam the nether caverns, with sharp, clenching talons, and a look of Satanically brooding lust, as if it were gloating above the helpless object of its unclean desire. Both figures were complete, even to the hindquarters, and were not mere conventional adjuncts of the roof. One would have expected them to start at any moment from the stone in which they were mortised.

Ambrosius, a lover of art, had been openly delighted with these creations, because of their high technical merit and their verisimilitude as works of sculpture. But others, including many humbler dignitaries of the Church, were more or less scandalized, and said that the workman had informed these figures with the visible likeness of his own vices, to the glory of Belial rather than of God, and had thus perpetrated a sort of blasphemy. Of course, they admitted, a certain amount of grotesquery was requisite in gargoyles; but in this case the allowable bounds had been egregiously overpassed.

However, with the completion of the cathedral, and in spite of all this adverse criticism, the high-poised gargoyles of Blaise Reynard, like all other details of the building, were soon taken for granted through mere everyday familiarity; and eventually they were almost forgotten. The scandal of opposition died down, and the stone-carver himself, though the town-folk continued to eye him askance, was able to secure other work through the favor of discriminating patrons. He remained in Vyones; and paid his addresses, albeit without visible success, to a taverner's daughter, one Nicolette Villom, of whom, it was said, he had long been enamored in his own surly and reticent fashion.

But Reynard himself had not forgotten the gargoyles. Often, in passing the superb pile of the cathedral, he would gaze up at them with a secret

satisfaction whose cause he could hardly have assigned or delimited. They seemed to retain for him a rare and mystical meaning, to signalize an obscure but pleasurable triumph.

He would have said, if asked for the reason for his satisfaction, that he was proud of a skilful piece of handiwork. He would not have said, and perhaps would not even have known, that in one of the gargoyles he had imprisoned all his festering rancor, all his answering spleen and hatred toward the people of Vyones, who had always hated him; and had set the image of this rancor to peer venomously down for ever from a lofty place. And perhaps he would not even have dreamt that in the second gargoyle he had somehow expressed his own dour and satyr-like passion for the girl Nicolette — a passion that had brought him back to the detested city of his youth after years of wandering; a passion singularly tenacious of one object, and differing in this regard from the ordinary lusts of a nature so brutal as Reynard's.

Always to the stone-cutter, even more than to those who had criticized and abhorred his productions, the gargoyles were alive, they possessed a vitality and a sentiency of their own. And most of all did they seem to live when the summer drew to an end and the autumn rains had gathered upon Vyones. Then, when the full cathedral gutters poured above the streets, one might have thought that the actual spittle of a foul maevolence, the very slaver of an impure lust, had somehow been mingled with the water that ran in rills from the mouths of the gargoyles.

At that time, in the year of our Lord, 1138, Vyones was the principal town of the province of Averoigne. On two sides the great, shadow-haunted forest, a place of equivocal legends, of loup-garous and phantoms, approached to the very walls and flung its umbrage upon them at early forenoon and evening. On the other sides there lay cultivated fields, and gentle streams that meandered among willows or poplars, and roads that ran through an open plain to the high chateaux of noble lords and to regions beyond Averoigne.

The town itself was prosperous, and had never shared in the ill-fame of the bordering forest. It had long been sanctified by the presence of two nunneries and a monastery; and now, with the completion of the long-planned cathedral, it was thought that Vyones would have henceforward the additional protection of a more august holiness; that demon and stryge and incubus would keep their distance from its heaven-favored purlieus with a more meticulous caution than before.

Of course, as in all mediaeval towns, there had been occasional instances of alleged sorcery or demoniacal possession; and, once or twice, the perilous temptations of succubi had made their inroads on the pious virtue of Vyones. But this was nothing more than might be expected, in a world where the Devil and his works were always more or less rampant. No one could possibly have anticipated the reign of infernal horrors that was to make hideous the latter months of autumn, following the cathedral's erection.

To make the matter even more inexplicable, and more blasphemously dreadful than it would otherwise have been, the first of these horrors occurred in the neighborhood of the cathedral itself and almost beneath its sheltering shadow.

Two men, a respectable clothier named Guillaume Maspier and an equally reputable cooper, one Gerome Mazzal, were returning to their lodgings in the late hours of a November eve, after imbibing both the red and white wines of the countryside in more than one tavern. According to Maspier, who alone survived to tell the tale, they were passing along a street that skirted the cathedral square, and could see the bulk of the great building against the stars, when a flying monster, black as the soot of Abaddon, had descended upon them from the heavens and assailed Gerome Mazzal, beating him down with its heavily flapping wings and seizing him with its inch-long teeth and talons.

Maspier was unable to describe the creature with minuteness, for he had seen it but dimly and partially in the unlit street; and moreover, the fate of his companion, who had fallen to the cobblestones with the black devil

snarling and tearing at his throat, had not induced Maspier to linger in that vicinity. He had betaken himself from the scene with all the celerity of which he was capable, and had stopped only at the house of a priest, many streets away, where he had related his adventure between shudderings and hiccuppings.

Armed with holy water and aspergillus, and accompanied by many of the towns-people carrying torches, staves and halberds, the priest was led by Maspier to the place of the horror; and there they had found the body of Mazzal, with fearfully mangled face, and throat and bosom lined with bloody lacerations. The demoniac assailant had flown, and it was not seen or encountered again that night; but those who had beheld its work returned aghast to their homes, feeling that a creature of nethermost hell had come to visit the city, and perchance to abide therein.

Consternation was rife on the morrow, when the story became generally known; and rites of exorcism against the invading demon were performed by the clergy in all public places and before thresholds. But the sprinkling of holy water and the mumbling of the stated forms were futile; for the evil spirit was still abroad, and its malignity was proved once more, on the night following the ghastly death of Gerome Mazzal.

This time, it claimed two victims, burghers of high probity and some consequence, on whom it descended in a narrow alley, slaying one of them instantaneously, and dragging down the other from behind as he sought to flee. The shrill cries of the helpless men, and the guttural growling of the demon, were heard by people in the houses along the alley; and some, who were hardy enough to peer from their windows, had seen the departure of the infamous assailant, blotting out the autumn stars with the sable and misshapen foulness of its wings, and hovering in execrable menace above the house-tops.

After this, few people would venture abroad at night, unless in case of dire and exigent need; and those who did venture went in armed companies and were all furnished with flambeaux, thinking thus to frighten away the demon, which they adjudged a creature of darkness that would abhor the

light and shrink therefrom, through the nature of its kind. But the boldness of this fiend was beyond measure; for it proceeded to attack more than one company of worthy citizens, disregarding the flaring torches that were thrust in its face, or putting them out with the stenchful wind of its wide vans.

Evidently it was a spirit of homicidal hate, for all the people on whom it seized were grievously mangled or torn to numberless shreds by its teeth and talons. Those who saw it, and survived, were wont to describe it variously and with much ambiguity; but all agreed in attributing to it the head of a ferocious animal and the wings of a monstrous bird. Some, the most learned in demonology, were fain to identify it with Modo, the spirit of murder; and others took it for one of the great lieutenants of Satan, perhaps Amaimon or Alastor, gone mad with exasperation at the impregnable supremacy of Christ in the holy city of Vyones.

The terror that soon prevailed, beneath the widening scope of these Satanical incursions and depredations, was beyond all belief — a clotted, seething, devil-ridden gloom of superstitious obsession, not to be hinted at in modern language. Even by daylight, the Gothic wings of nightmare seemed to brood in underparting oppression above the city; and fear was everywhere, like the foul contagion of some epidemic plague. The inhabitants went their way in prayer and trembling; and the archbishop himself, as well as the subordinate clergy, confessed an inability to cope with the ever-growing horror. An emissary was sent to Rome, to procure water that had been specially sanctified by the Pope. This alone it was thought, would be efficacious enough to drive away the dreadful visitant.

In the meantime, the horror waxed, and mounted to its culmination. One eve, toward the middle of November, the abbot of the local monastery of Cordeliers, who had gone forth to administer extreme unction to a dying friend, was seized by the black devil just as he approached the threshold of his destination, and was slain in the same atrocious manner as the other victims.

To this doubly infamous deed, a scarce-believable blasphemy was soon added. On the very next night, while the torn body of the abbot lay on a rich catafalque in the cathedral, and masses were being said and tapers burnt, the demon invaded the high nave through the open door, extinguished all the candles with one flap of its sooty wings, and dragged down no less than three of the officiating priests to an unholy death in the darkness.

Every one now felt that a truly formidable assault was being made by the powers of Evil on the Christian probity of Vyones. In the condition of abject terror, of extreme disorder and demoralization that followed upon this new atrocity, there was a deplorable outbreak of human crime, of murder and rapine and thievery, together with covert manifestations of Satanism, and celebrations of the Black Mass attended by many neophytes.

Then, in the midst of all this pandemoniacal fear and confusion, it was rumored that a second devil had been seen in Vyones; that the murderous fiend was accompanied by a spirit of equal deformity and darkness, whose intentions were those of lechery, and which molested none but women. This creature had frightened several dames and demoiselles and maid-servants into a veritable hysteria by peering through their bedroom windows; and had sidled lasciviously, with uncouth mows and grimaces, and grotesque flappings of its bat-shaped wings, toward others who had occasion to fare from house to house across the nocturnal streets.

However, strange to say, there were no authentic instances in which the chastity of any woman had suffered actual harm from this noisome incubus. Many were approached by it, and were terrified immoderately by the hideousness and lustfulness of its demeanor; but no one was ever touched. Even in that time of horror, both spiritual and corporeal, there were those who made a ribald jest of this singular abstention on the part of the demon, and said it was seeking throughout Vyones for some one whom it had not yet found.

The lodgings of Blaise Reynard were separated only by the length of a dark and crooked alley from the tavern kept by Jean Villom, the father of Nicolette. In this tavern, Reynard had been wont to spend his evenings;

though his suit was frowned upon by Jean Villom, and had received but scant encouragement from the girl herself. However, because of his well-filled purse and his almost illimitable capacity for wine, Reynard was tolerated. He came early each night, with the falling of darkness, and would sit in silence hour after hour, staring with hot and sullen eyes at Nicolette, and gulping joylessly the potent vintages of Averoigne. Apart from their desire to retain his custom, the people of the tavern were a little afraid of him, on account of his dubious and semi-sorcerous reputation, and also because of his surly temper. They did not wish to antagonize him more than was necessary.

Like everyone else in Vyones, Reynard had felt the suffocating burden of superstitious terror during those nights when the fiendish marauder was hovering above the town and might descend on the luckless wayfarer at any moment, in any locality. Nothing less urgent and imperative than the obsession of his half-bestial longing for Nicolette could have induced him to traverse after dark the length of the winding alley to the tavern door.

The autumn nights had been moonless. Now, on the evening that followed the desecration of the cathedral itself by the murderous devil, a new-born crescent was lowering its fragile, sanguine-colored horn beyond the house-tops as Reynard went forth from his lodgings at the accustomed hour. He lost sight of its comforting beam in the high-walled and narrow alley, and shivered with dread as he hastened onward through shadows that were dissipated only by the rare and timid ray from some lofty window. It seemed to him, at each turn and angle, that the gloom was curded by the unclean umbrage of Satanic wings, and might reveal in another instant the gleaming of abhorrent eyes ignited by the everlasting coals of the Pit. When he came forth at the alley's end, he saw with a start of fresh panic that the crescent moon was blotted out by a cloud that had the semblance of uncouthly arched and pointed vans.

He reached the tavern with a sense of supreme relief, for he had begun to feel a distinct intuition that someone or something was following him, unheard and invisible — a presence that seemed to load the dusk with

prodigious menace. He entered, and closed the door behind him very quickly, as if he were shutting it in the face of a dread pursuer.

There were few people in the tavern that evening. The girl Nicolette was serving wine to a mercer's assistant, one Raoul Coupain, a personable youth and a newcomer in the neighborhood, and she was laughing with what Reynard considered unseemly gayety at the broad jests and amorous sallies of this Raoul. Jean Villom was discussing in a low voice the latest enormities and was drinking fully as much liquor as his customers.

Glowering with jealousy at the presence of Raoul Coupain, whom he suspected of being a favored rival, Reynard seated himself in silence and stared malignly at the flirtatious couple. No one seemed to have noticed his entrance; for Villom went on talking to his cronies without pause or interruption, and Nicolette and her companion were equally oblivious. To his jealous rage, Reynard soon added the resentment of one who feels that he is being deliberately ignored. He began to pound on the table with his heavy fists, to attract attention.

Villom, who had been sitting all the while his back turned, now called out to Nicolette without even troubling to face around on his stool, telling her to serve Reynard. Giving a backward smile at Coupain, she came slowly and with open reluctance to the stone-carver's table.

She was small and buxom, with reddish-gold hair that curled luxuriantly above the short, delicious oval of her face; and she was gowned in a tight-fitting dress of apple-green that revealed the firm, seductive outlines of her hips and bosom. Her air was disdainful and a little cold, for she did not like Reynard and had taken small pains at any time to conceal her aversion. But to Reynard she was lovelier and more desirable than ever, and he felt a savage impulse to seize her in his arms and carry her bodily away from the tavern before the eyes of Raoul Coupain and her father.

"Bring me a pitcher of La Frenaie," he ordered gruffly, in a voice that betrayed his mingled resentment and desire.

Tossing her head lightly and scornfully, with more glances at Coupain, the girl obeyed. She placed the fiery, blood-dark wine before Reynard without speaking, and then went back to resume her bantering with the mercer's assistant.

Reynard began to drink, and the potent vintage merely served to inflame his smoldering enmity and passion. His eyes became venomous, his curling lips malignant as those of the gargoyles he had carved on the new cathedral. A baleful, primordial anger, like the rage of some morose and thwarted faun, burned within him with its slow red fire; but he strove to repress it, and sat silent and motionless, except for the frequent filling and emptying of his wine-cup.

Raoul Coupain had also consumed a liberal quantity of wine. As a result, he soon became bolder in his love-making, and strove to kiss the hand of Nicolette, who had now seated herself on the bench beside him. The hand was playfully with-held; and then, after its owner had cuffed Raoul very lightly and briskly, was granted to the claimant in a fashion that struck Reynard as being no less than wanton.

Snarling inarticulately, with a mad impulse to rush forward and slay the successful rival with his bare hands, he started to his feet and stepped toward the playful pair. His movement was noted by one of the men in the far corner, who spoke warningly to Villom. The tavern-keeper arose, lurching a little from his potations, and came warily across the room with his eyes on Reynard, ready to interfere in case of violence.

Reynard paused with momentary irresolution, and then went on, half insane with a mounting hatred for them all. He longed to kill Villom and Coupain, to kill the hateful cronies who sat staring from the corner, and then, above their throttled corpses, to ravage with fierce kisses and vehement caresses the shrinking lips and body of Nicolette.

Seeing the approach of the stone-carver, and knowing his evil temper and dark jealousy, Coupain also rose to his feet and plucked stealthily beneath his cloak at the hilt of a little dagger which he carried. In the meanwhile,

Jean Villom had interposed his burly bulk between the rivals. For the sake of the tavern's good repute, he wished to prevent the possible brawl.

"Back to your table, stone-cutter," he roared belligerently at Reynard.

Being unarmed, and seeing himself outnumbered, Reynard paused again, though his anger still simmered within him like the contents of a sorcerer's cauldron. With ruddy points of murderous flame in his hollow, slitted eyes, he glared at the three people before him, and saw beyond them, with instinctive rather than conscious awareness, the leaded panes of the tavern window, in whose glass the room was dimly reflected with its glowing tapers, its glimmering tableware, the heads of Coupain and Villom and the girl Nicolette, and his own shadowy face among them.

Strangely, and, it would seem, inconsequently, he remembered at that moment the dark, ambiguous cloud he had seen across the moon, and the insistent feeling of obscure pursuit while he had traversed the alley.

Then, as he still gazed irresolutely at the group before him, and its vague reflection in the glass beyond, there came a thunderous crash, and the panes of the window with their pictured scene were shattered inward in a score of fragments. Ere the litter of falling glass had reached the tavern floor, a swart and monstrous form flew into the room, with a beating of heavy vans that caused the tapers to flare troublously, and the shadows to dance like a sabbat of misshapen devils. The thing hovered for a moment, and seemed to tower in a great darkness higher than the ceiling above the heads of Reynard and the others as they turned toward it. They saw the malignant burning of its eyes, like coals in the depth of Tartarean pits, and the curling of its hateful lips on the bared teeth that were longer and sharper than serpent-fangs.

Behind it now, another shadowy flying monster came in through the broken window with a loud flapping of its ribbed and pointed wings. There was something lascivious in the very motion of its flight, even as homicidal hatred and malignity were manifest in the flight of the other. Its satyr-like

face was twisted in a horrible, never-changing leer, and its lustful eyes were fixed on Nicolette as it hung in air beside the first intruder.

Reynard, as well as the other men, was petrified by a feeling of astonishment and consternation so extreme as almost to preclude terror. Voiceless and motionless, they beheld the demoniac intrusion; and the consternation of Reynard, in particular, was mingled with an element of unspeakable surprise, together with a dreadful recognizance. But the girl Nicolette, with a mad scream of horror, turned and started to flee across the room.

As if her cry had been the one provocation needed, the two demons swooped upon their victims. One, with a ferocious slash of its outstretched claws, tore open the throat of Jean Villom, who fell with a gurgling, blood-choked groan; and then, in the same fashion, it assailed Raoul Coupain. The other, in the meanwhile, had pursued and overtaken the fleeing girl, and had seized her in its bestial forearms, with the ribbed wings enfolding her like a hellish drapery.

The room was filled by a moaning whirlwind, by a chaos of wild cries and tossing, struggling shadows. Reynard heard the guttural snarling of the murderous monster, muffled by the body of Coupain, whom it was tearing with its teeth; and he heard the lubricous laughter of the incubus, above the shrieks of the hysterically frightened girl. Then the grotesquely flaring tapers went out in a gust of swirling air, and Reynard received a violent blow in the darkness — the blow of some rushing object, perhaps of a passing wing, that was hard and heavy as stone. He fell, and became insensible.

Dully and confusedly, with much effort, Reynard struggled back to consciousness. For a brief interim, he could not remember where he was nor what had happened. He was troubled by the painful throbbing of his head, by the humming of agitated voices about him, by the glaring of many lights and the thronging of many faces when he opened his eyes; and above all, by the sense of nameless but grievous calamity and uttermost horror that weighed him down from the first dawning of sentiency.

Memory returned to him, laggard and reluctant; and with it, a full awareness of his surroundings and situation. He was lying on the tavern floor, and his own warm, sticky blood was rilling across his face from the wound on his aching head. The long room was half filled with people of the neighborhood, bearing torches and knives and halberds, who had entered and were peering at the corpses of Villom and Coupain, which lay amid pools of wine-diluted blood and the wreckage of the shattered furniture and tableware.

Nicolette, with her green gown in shreds, and her body crushed by the embraces of the demon, was moaning feebly while women crowded about her with ineffectual cries and questions which she could not even hear or understand. The two cronies of Villom, horribly clawed and mangled, were dead beside their over-turned table.

Stupefied with horror, and still dizzy from the blow that had laid him unconscious, Reynard staggered to his feet, and found himself surrounded at once by inquiring faces and voices. Some of the people were a little suspicious of him, since he was the sole survivor in the tavern, and bore an ill repute, but his replies to their questions soon convinced them that the new crime was wholly the work of the same demons that had plagued Vyonés in so monstrous a fashion for weeks past.

Reynard, however, was unable to tell them all that he had seen, or to confess the ultimate sources of his fear and stupefaction. The secret of that which he knew was locked in the seething pit of his tortured and devil-ridden soul.

Somehow, he left the ravaged inn, he pushed his way through the gathering crowd with its terror-muted murmurs, and found himself alone on the midnight streets. Heedless of his own possible peril, and scarcely knowing where he went, he wandered through Vyonés for many hours; and somehow in his wanderings, he came to his own workshop. With no assignable reason for the act, he entered, and re-emerged with a heavy hammer, which he carried with him during his subsequent peregrinations.

Then, driven by his awful and unremitting torture, he went on till the pale dawn had touched the spires and the house-tops with a ghostly glimmering.

By a half-conscious compulsion, his steps had led him to the square before the cathedral. Ignoring the amazed verger, who had just opened the doors, he entered and sought a stairway that wound tortuously upward to the tower on which his own gargoyles were ensconced.

In the chill and livid light of sunless morning, he emerged on the roof; and leaning perilously from the verge, he examined the carved figures. He felt no surprise, only the hideous confirmation of a fear too ghastly to be named, when he saw that the teeth and claws of the malign, cat-headed griffin were stained with darkening blood; and that shreds of apple-green cloth were hanging from the talons of the lustful, bat-winged satyr.

It seemed to Reynard, in the dim ashen light, that a look of unspeakable triumph, of intolerable irony, was imprinted on the face of this latter creature. He stared at it with fearful and agonizing fascination, while impotent rage, abhorrence, and repentance deeper than that of the damned arose within him in a smothering flood. He was hardly aware that he had raised the iron hammer and had struck wildly at the satyr's horned profile, till he heard the sullen, angry clang of impact, and found that he was tottering on the edge of the roof to retain his balance.

The furious blow had merely chipped the features of the gargoyle, and had not wiped away the malignant lust and exultation. Again Reynard raised the heavy hammer.

It fell on empty air; for, even as he struck, the stone-carver felt himself lifted and drawn backward by something that sank into his flesh like many separate knives. He staggered helplessly, his feet slipped, and then he was lying on the granite verge, with his head and shoulders over the dark, deserted street.

Half swooning, and sick with pain, he saw above him the other gargoyle, the claws of whose right foreleg were firmly embedded in his shoulder. They tore deeper, as if with a dreadful clenching. The monster seemed to

tower like some fabulous beast above its prey; and he felt himself slipping dizzily across the cathedral gutter, with the gargoyle twisting and turning as if to resume its normal position over the gulf. Its slow, inexorable movement seemed to be part of his vertigo. The very tower was tilting and revolving beneath him in some unnatural nightmare fashion.

Dimly, in a daze of fear and agony, Reynard saw the remorseless tiger-face bending toward him with its horrid teeth laid bare in an eternal rictus of diabolic hate. Somehow, he had retained the hammer. With an instinctive impulse to defend himself, he struck at the gargoyle, whose cruel features seemed to approach him like something seen in the ultimate madness and distortion of delirium.

Even as he struck, the vertiginous turning movement continued, and he felt the talons dragging him outward on empty air. In his cramped, recumbent position, the blow fell short of the hateful face and came down with a dull clangor on the foreleg whose curving talons were fixed in his shoulder like meat-hooks. The clangor ended in a sharp cracking sound; and the leaning gargoyle vanished from Reynard's vision as he fell. He saw nothing more, except the dark mass of the cathedral tower, that seemed to soar away from him and to rush upward unbelievably in the livid, starless heavens to which the belated sun had not yet risen.

It was the archbishop Ambrosius, on his way to early Mass, who found the shattered body of Reynard lying face downward in the square. Ambrosius crossed himself in startled horror at the sight; and then, when he saw the object that was still clinging to Reynard's shoulder, he repeated the gesture with a more than pious promptness.

He bent down to examine the thing. With the infallible memory of a true art-lover, he recognized it at once. Then, through the same clearness of recollection, he saw that the stone foreleg, whose claws were so deeply buried in Reynard's flesh, had somehow undergone a most unnatural alteration. The paw, as he remembered it, should have been slightly bent and relaxed; but now it was stiffly outthrust and elongated, as if, like the

paw of a living limb, it had reached for something, or had dragged a heavy burden with its ferine talons.

THE MALAY KRISE

"Sahib," said the sword-dealer, "this blade, which came from far Singapore, has not its equal for sharpness in all Delhi."

He handed me the blade for inspection. It was a long kris, or Malay knife, with a curious boat-shaped hilt, and, as he had said, was very keen.

"I bought it of Sidi Hassen, a Singapore dealer into whose possession it came at the sale of Sultan Sujah Au's weapons and effects after the Sultan's capture by the British. Hast heard the tale, Sahib? No? It runs thus:

"Sujah Au was the younger son of a great Sultan. There being little chance of his ever coming to the throne, he left his father's dominions, and becoming a pirate, set out to carve for himself a name and an empire. Though having at first but a few prahus (boats) and less than a hundred men, he made up this lack by his qualities of leadership, which brought him many victories, much plunder and considerable renown. His fame caused many men to join him, and his booty enabled him to build more prahus. Adding continually to his fleets, he soon swept the rivers of the Peninsula, and then began to venture upon the sea. In a few years his ships were held in fear and respect by every Dutch merchantman or Chinese junk whose sails loomed above the waters of the China Sea. Inland he began to overrun the dominions of the other Sultans, conquering, amongst others, that of his older brother, who had succeeded to his father's throne. Sujah Ali's fame reached far, and its shadow lay upon many peoples.

"Then the English came to the Peninsula and built Singapore. Sujah Ali despatched ships to prey upon their vessels, many of whom he succeeded in capturing. The English sent big ships after him, bearing many heavy guns and many armed men.

"The Sultan went to meet them in person, with the greater part of his fleet. It was a disastrous day for him. When the red sun sank into the sea, fully

fifty of his best prahus, and thousands of his men, amongst whom he mourned several of his most noted captains, lay beneath the waters. He fled inland with the shattered remnant of his fleet.

"The British resolved to crush him decisively, sent boats up the rivers, and in numerous hard-fought battles they sunk most of Sujah Ali's remaining prahus, and cleared land and water of the infesting pirates. The Sultan himself, however, they sought in vain. He had fled to a well-nigh inaccessible hiding-place—a small village deep in a network of creeks, swamps, and jungle-covered islands. Here he remained with a few fighting-men while the English hunted unsuccessfully for the narrow, winding entrances.

"Amina, his favorite wife, was among those who had accompanied him to this refuge. She was passionately attached to the Sultan, and, although such was his wish, had positively refused to be left behind.

"There was a beautiful girl in the village, with whom Sujah Ali became infatuated. He finally married her, and she exercised so great an influence over him that Amina, who had hitherto considered herself first in her husband's estimation, grew jealous. As time passed, and she perceived more clearly how complete was his infatuation, her jealousy grew more intense and violent, and at last prompted her to leave the village secretly one night, and to go to the captain of a British vessel which had been cruising up and down the river for weeks. To this man, one Rankling Sahib, she revealed the secret of Sujah Ali's hiding place. In thus betraying him, her desire was probably more for revenge upon her rival than upon the Sultan.

"Rankling Sahib, guided by Amina, passed at midnight through the network of creeks and jungles. He landed his crew and entered the village. The Malays, taken completely by surprise, offered little or no resistance. Many awoke only to find themselves confronted by loaded rifles, and surrendered without opposition.

"Sujah Ali, who had lain awake all evening wondering as to the cause of Amina's absence, rushed out of his hut with half a score of his men, and

made a futile attempt at escape. A desperate fight ensued, in which he used his kris, the same that thou seest, with deadly effect. Two of the English he stretched dead, and a third he wounded severely.

"Ranking Sahib had given orders that the Sultan be taken alive, if possible. Finally, wounded, weary and surrounded by his foes on all sides, the Sultan was made prisoner. And the next morning he was taken down the river to Singapore.

"This is the kris you see on the wall."

THE MANDRAKES

Gilies Grenier the sorcerer and his wife Sabine, coming into lower Averoine from parts unknown or at least unverified, had selected the location of their hut with a careful forethought.

The hut was close to those marshes through which the slackening waters of the river Isoile, after leaving the great forest, had overflowed in sluggish, reed-clogged channels and sedge-hidden pools mantled with scum like witches' oils. It stood among osiers and alders on a low, mound-shaped elevation; and in front, toward the marshes, there was a loamy meadow-bottom where the short fat stems and tufted leaves of the mandrake grew in lush abundance, being more plentiful and of greater size than elsewhere through all that sorcery-ridden province. The fleshly, bifurcated roots of this plant, held by many to resemble the human body, were used by Gilles and Sabine in the brewing of love-philtres. Their potions, being compounded with much care and cunning, soon acquired a marvelous renown among the peasants and villagers, and were even in request among people of a loftier station, who came privily to the wizard's hut. They would rouse, people said, a kindly warmth in the coldest and most prudent bosom, would melt the armor of the most obdurate virtue. As a result, the demand for these sovereign magistrals became enormous.

The couple dealt also in other drugs and simples, in charms and divination; and Gilles, according to common belief, could read infallibly the dictates of the stars. Oddly enough, considering the temper of the Fifteenth Century, when magic and witchcraft were still so widely reprobated, he and his wife enjoyed a repute by no means ill or unsavory. No charges of maleficence were brought against them; and because of the number of honest marriages promoted by the philtres, the local clergy were content to disregard the many illicit amours that had come to a successful issue through the same agency.

It is true, there were those who looked askance at Gilles in the beginning, and who whispered fearfully that he had been driven out of Blois, where all persons bearing the name Grenier were popularly believed to be werewolves. They called attention to the excessive hairiness of the wizard, whose hands were black with bristles and whose beard grew almost to his eyes. Such insinuations, however, were generally considered as lacking proof, insomuch as no other signs or marks of lycanthropy were ever displayed by Gilles. And in time, for reasons that have been sufficiently indicated, the few detractors of Gilles were wholly overborne by a secret but widespread sentiment of public favor.

Even by their patrons, very little was known regarding the strange couple, who maintained the reserve proper to those who dealt in mystery and enchantment. Sabine, a comely woman with blue-gray eyes and wheat-colored hair, and no trace of the traditional witch in her appearance, was obviously much younger than Gilles, whose sable mane and beard were already touched with the white warp of time. It was rumored by visitors that she had oftentimes been overheard in sharp dispute with her husband; and people soon made a jest of this, remarking that the philtres might well be put to a domestic use by those who purveyed them. But aside from such rumors and ribaldries, little was thought of the matter. The connubial infelicities of Gilles and his wife, whether grave or trivial, in no wise impaired the renown of their love-potions.

Also, little was thought of Sabine's presence, when, five years after the coming of the pair into Averroigne, it became remarked by neighbors and customers that Gilles was alone. In reply to queries, the sorcerer merely said that his spouse had departed on a long journey, to visit relatives in a remote province. The explanation was accepted without debate, and it did not occur to any one that there had been no eye-witnesses of Sabine's departure.

It was then mid-autumn; and Gilles told the inquirers, in a somewhat vague and indirect fashion, that his wife would not return before spring. Winter came early that year and tarried late, with deeply crusted snows in the forest and on the uplands, and a heavy armor of fretted ice on the marshes. It was

a winter of much hardship and privation. When the tardy spring had broken the silver buds of the willows and covered the alders with a foliage of chrysolite, few thought to ask Gilles regarding Sabine's return. And later, when the purple bells of the mandrake were succeeded by small orange-colored apples, her prolonged absence was taken for granted.

Gilles, living tranquilly with his books and cauldrons, and gathering the roots and herbs for his magical medicaments, was well enough pleased to have it taken for granted. He did not believe that Sabine would ever return; and his unbelief, it would seem, was far from irrational. He had killed her one evening in autumn, during a dispute of unbearable acrimony, slitting her soft, pale throat in self-defense with a knife which he had wrested from her fingers when she lifted it against him. Afterward he had buried her by the late rays of a gibbous moon beneath the mandrakes in the meadow-bottom, replacing the leafy sods with much care, so that there was no evidence of their having been disturbed other than by the digging of a few roots in the way of daily business.

After the melting of the long snows from the meadow, he himself could scarcely have been altogether sure of the spot in which he had interred her body. He noticed, however, as the season drew on, that there was a place where the mandrakes grew with even more than their wonted exuberance; and this place, he believed, was the very site of her grave. Visiting it often, he smiled with a secret irony, and was pleased rather than troubled by the thought of that charnel nourishment which might have contributed to the lushness of the dark, glossy leaves. In fact, it may well have been a similar irony that had led him to choose the mandrake meadow as a place of burial for the murdered witch-wife.

Gilles Grenier was not sorry that he had killed Sabine. They had been ill-mated from the beginning, and the woman had shown toward him in their quotidian quarrels the venomous spitefulness of a very hell-cat. He had not loved the vixen; and it was far pleasanter to be alone, with his somewhat somber temper unruffled by her acrid speeches, and his sallow face and grizzling beard untorn by her sharp finger-nails.

With the renewal of spring, as the sorcerer had expected, there was much demand for his love-philtres among the smitten swains and lasses of the neighborhood. There came to him, also, the gallants who sought to overcome a stubborn chastity, and the wives who wished to recall a wandering fancy or allure the forbidden desires of young men. Anon, it became necessary for Gilles to replenish his stock of mandrake potions; and with this purpose in mind, he went forth at midnight beneath the full May moon, to dig the newly grown roots from which he would brew his amatory enchantments.

Smiling darkly beneath his beard, he began to cull the great, moon-pale plants which flourished on Sabine's grave, digging out the homunculus-like taproots very carefully with a curious trowel made from the femur of a witch.

Though he was well used to the weird and often vaguely human forms assumed by the mandrake, Gilles was somewhat surprised by the appearance of the first root. It seemed inordinately large, unnaturally white; and, eyeing it more closely, he saw that it bore the exact likeness of a woman's body and lower limbs, being cloven to the middle and clearly formed even to the ten toes! These were no arms, however, and the bosom ended in the large tuft of ovate leaves.

Gilles was more than startled by the fashion in which the root seemed to turn and writhe when he lifted it from the ground. He dropped it hastily, and the minikin limbs lay quivering on the grass. But, after a little reflection, he took the prodigy as a possible mark of Satanic favor, and continued his digging. To his amazement, the next root was formed in much the same manner as the first. A half-dozen more, which he proceeded to dig, were shaped in miniature mockery of a woman from breasts to heels; and amid the superstitious awe and wonder with which he regasded them, he became aware of their singularly intimate resemblance to Sabine.

At this discovery, Gilles was deeply perturbed, for the thing was beyond his comprehension. The miracle, whether divine or demoniac, began to assume a sinister and doubtful aspect. It was as if the slain woman herself had

returned, or had somehow wrought her unholy simulacrum in the mandrakes.

His hand trembled as he started to dig up another plant; and working with less than his usual care, he failed to remove the whole of the bifurcated root, cutting into it clumsily with the trowel of sharp bone.

He saw that he had severed one of the tiny ankles. At the same instant, a shrill, reproachful cry, like the voice of Sabine herself in mingled pain and anger, seemed to pierce his ears with intolerable acuity, though the volume was strangely lessened, as if the voice had come from a distance. The cry ceased, and was not repeated. Gilles, sorely terrified, found himself staring at the trowel, on which there was a dark, blood-like stain. Trembling, he pulled out the severed root, and saw that it was dripping with a sanguine fluid.

At first, in his dark fear and half-guilty apprehension he thought of burying the soots which lay palely before him with their eldritch and obscene similitude to the dead sorceress. He would hide them deeply from his own sight and the ken of others, lest the murder he had done should somehow be suspected.

Presently, however, his alarm began to lessen. It occurred to him that, even if seen by others, the roots would be looked upon merely as a freak of nature and would in no manner serve to betray his crime, since their actual resemblance to the person of Sabine was a thing which none but he could rightfully know.

Also, he thought, the roots might well possess an extraordinary virtue, and from them, perhaps, he would brew philtres of never-equalled power and efficacy. Overcoming entirely his initial dread and repulsion, he filled a small osier basket with the quivering, leaf-headed figurines. Then he went back to his hut, seeing in the bizarre phenomenon merely the curious advantage to which it might be turned, and wholly oblivious to any darker meaning, such as might have been read by others in his place.

In his callous hardihood, he was not disquieted overmuch by the profuse bleeding of a sanguine matter from the mandrakes when he came to prepare them for his cauldron. The ungodly, furious hissing, the mad foaming and boiling of the brew, like a devil's broth, he ascribed to the unique potency of its ingredients. He even dared to choose the most shapely and perfect of the woman-like plants, and hung it up in his hut amid other roots and dried herbs and simples, intending to consult it as an oracle in future, according to the custom of wizards.

The new philtres which he had concocted were bought by eager customers, and Gilles ventured to recommend them for their surpassing virtue, which would kindle amorous warmth in a bosom of marble or enflame the very dead.

Now, in the old legend of Averoigne which I recount herewith, it is told that the impious and audacious wizard, fearing neither God nor devil nor witch-woman, dared to dig again in the earth of Sabine's grave, removing many more of the white, female-shapen roots, which cried aloud in shrill complaint to the waning moon or turned like living limbs at his violence. And all those which he dug were formed alike, in the miniature image of the dead Sabine from breasts to toes. And from them, it is said, he compounded other philtres, which he meant to sell in time when such should be requested.

As it happened, however, these latter potions were never dispensed; and only a few of the first were sold, owing to the frightful and calamitous consequences that followed their use. For those to whom the potions had been administered privily, whether men or women, were not moved by the genial fussy of desire, as was the wonted result, but were driven by a darker rage, by a woful and Satanic madness, irresistibly impelling them to harm or even slay the persons who had sought to attract their love.

Husbands were turned against wives, lasses against their lovers, with speeches of bitter hate and scatheful deeds. A certain young gallant who had gone to the promised rendezvous was met by a vengeful madwoman, who tore his face into bleeding shreds with her nails. A mistress who had

thought to win back her recreant knight was mistreated foully and done to death by him who had hitherto been impeccably gentle, even if faithless.

The scandal of these untoward happenings was such as would attend an invasion of demons. The crazed men and women, it was thought at first, were veritably possessed by devils. But when the use of the potions became rumored, and their provenance was clearly established, the burden of the blame fell upon Gilles Grenier, who, by the law of both church and state, was now charged with sorcery.

The constables who went to arrest Gilles found him at evening in his hut of raddled osiers, stooping and muttering above a cauldron that foamed and hissed and boiled as if it had been filled with the spate of Phlegethon. They entered and took him unaware. He submitted calmly, but expressed surprize when told of the lamentable effect of the love-philtres; and he neither affirmed nor denied the charge of wizardry.

As they were about to leave with their prisoner, the officers heard a shrill, tiny, shrewish voice that cried from the shadows of the hut, where bunches of dried simples and other sorcerous ingredients were hanging. It appeared to issue from a strange, half-withered root, cloven in the very likeness of a woman's body and legs — a root that was partly pale, and partly black with cauldron-smoke. One of the constables thought that he recognized the voice as being that of Sabine, the sorcerer's wife. All swore that they heasd the voice clearly, and were able to distinguish these words:

"Dig deeply in the meadow, where the mandrakes grow the thickliest."

The officers were sorely frightened, both by this uncanny voice and the obscene likeness of the root, which they regarded as a work of Satan. Also, these was much doubt anent the wisdom of obeying the oracular injunction. Gilles, who was questioned narrowly as to its meaning, refused to offer any interpretation; but certain marks of perturbation in his manner finally led the officers to examine the mandrake meadow below the hut.

Digging by lantern-light in the specified spot, they found many more of the roots, which seemed to crowd the ground; and beneath, they came to the

rotting corpse of a woman, which was still recognizable as that of Sabine. As a result of this discovery, Gilles Grenier was arraigned not only for sorcery but also for the murder of his wife. He was readily convicted of both crimes, though he denied stoutly the imputation of intentional malefice, and claimed to the very last that he had killed Sabine only in defense of his own life against her termagant fury. He was hanged on the gibbet in company with other murderers, and his dead body was then burned at the stake.

BERSERKER

BOOKS

