A1519

A BANTAM GIANT 35¢

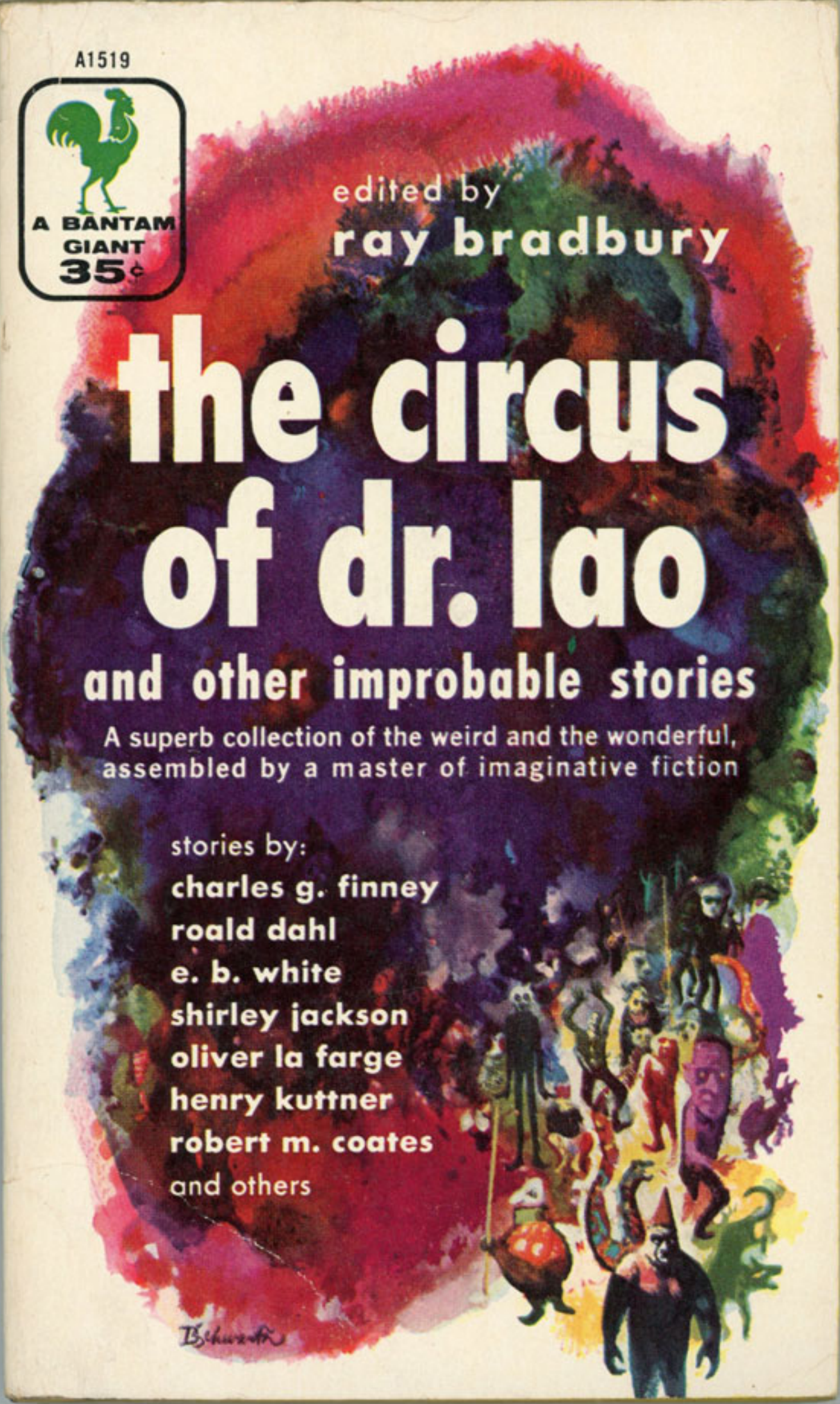
edited by
ray bradbury

the circus of dr. lao

and other improbable stories

A superb collection of the weird and the wonderful, assembled by a master of imaginative fiction

stories by:
charles g. finney
roald dahl
e. b. white
shirley jackson
oliver la farge
henry kuttner
robert m. coates
and others



the circus of dr. lao

is like no circus you ever saw—full of fantastic happenings, crammed with the wonder and terror of the supernatural.

And the stories Ray Bradbury has chosen to go with this famous novel are in keeping with this special mood.

E. B. WHITE
tells of a machine that easily might make man obsolete.

NIGEL KNEALE
tells of the very sweet revenge of some be-devilled frogs.

ROALD DAHL
tells of an imaginative game that turns into a horrifying nightmare.

HENRY KUTTNER
tells of a man who thinks he's getting the better part of a bargain with the devil.

These are only a few of the extraordinary tales in this volume.

There goes the calliope, the trumpet, the drum . . . Get ready for THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO and Other Improbable Stories — the greatest show on—or off—the earth.

the circus of dr. lao

and other improbable stories

edited by

ray bradbury

bantam books  new york

THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO and Other Improbable Stories

A BANTAM BOOK

PUBLISHED, OCTOBER, 1956

Copyright Notices and Acknowledgments

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 56-10486

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

BANTAM BOOKS, 25 West 45th Street, New York 36, N. Y.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO and the stories which follow are fantasies, not science-fiction. First then, some definitions.

Science-fiction is the law-abiding citizen of imaginative literature, obeying the rules, be they physical, social, or psychological, keeping regular hours, eating punctual meals; predictable, certain, sure.

Fantasy, on the other hand, is criminal. Each fantasy assaults and breaks a particular law; the crime being hidden by the author's felicitous thought and style which cover the body before blood is seen.

Science-fiction works hand-in-glove with the universe.

Fantasy cracks it down the middle, turns it wrong-side-out, dissolves it to invisibility, walks men through its walls, and fetches incredible circuses to town with sea-serpent, medusa, and chimera displacing zebra, ape, and armadillo.

Science-fiction balances you on the cliff.

Fantasy shoves you off.

Why let ourselves be shoved off cliffs by this so-called "escape" fiction?

Right now, I want to throw that word 'escape' out the window. In speaking of these stories, these fantasies, I would like to emphasize instead their contribution toward growth and responsibility, small as it may be. Stories can ony be labeled "escapist" if they solve problems by ignoring or destroying them. Mickey Spillane's characters, for instance, in another genre, shoot first so they will not have to ask or answer questions later.

Thoughtful men find many things in our civilized order worth—not escaping—but growing away from: the preconceived notion, prejudice, bias, dogma, of any kind whatever. Through our creative arts, including fantastic literature, we can return to the raw stuff of environment for re-seasoning, for an understanding of the wilderness, the animal, the death which tempts us to solve problems with annihilation. Seeking help from literary sources, we often appear blasphemous and "escapist" to those still in the temple, political gymnasium, or

school. Actually, we are only 'standing off' for a long clear look at the human situation, preparing to doff old burdens in order to assume the new.

We all try to sense this world with eye, ear, nose, and mouth; our hand fumbles with the slippery stuff of this material existence which, while mysterious, seems far more understandable, real, concrete, than other men's minds. We all wish to accumulate sensation and use it to build some temporary redoubt. And perhaps DR. LAO and the stories collected here do remind us that, indeed, all such fortresses must, by the nature of existence, be made of easily broken eggshell and sheddable armour. Man should not live to keep any single political or philosophical architecture neat, clean, and impregnable; rather such frameworks should exist for use, to be razed and burnt, once their time is past.

Of course, not only the fantasy, but all writing of any quality releases us from conformity, delivers us into other people's lives, habits and customs, engages our sympathies for alien causes, and revitalizes our senses. Good writing can move in either of two directions. It can set down what seem immediately and absolutely true observations about the real world and mankind. Then, if we desire, a second process can take over, the Romantic process which etches the world and man as the writer would like them to be or as he sees them through a specially ground, a rose-tinted, or a grotesquely warped lens.

Fantasy, it follows, is a Romantic product. Ignoring evil, it can manufacture outsize sculptures of man toward which he may strive ideally. Or, reversing the order, it can ignore the good, show us the pocks and sores on our ill-lit souls, thus force-ventilating, force-growing, frightening us on toward maturity. It is up to the individual author to decide whether he will call people on with beauty or shock them to action with evil revelation.

The fantasy, then, attempts to disrupt the physical world in order to bring change to the heart and mind. Lionel Trilling's definition of Romance seems apt here. He speaks of it as "a synonym for the will in its creative aspect, especially in its aspect of moral creativeness, as it subjects itself to criticism and conceives for itself new states of being." So the fantasy, like the novel of ideas, handles those parts of reality which Henry James labeled as "the things we cannot possibly not know" and moves beyond them to his "beautiful circuit of thought and desire."

More simply, facing a flood, priests and politicians often cry, "I'm made of cork!" The writer of fantasy replies, "You're made of iron!" After the deluge, only those who prove buoyant of imagination and free of unnecessary reli-

gious or political deadweight can be found afloat, softly whistling in the calmed billows.

Down through history, the fantasist can be heard protesting that, after all, the Emperor *is* naked, the Mystery *is* unsolved, so where do we go from here?

At such times, the fantasy does its job more quickly, more efficiently, than other literary forms. From Dante's DIVINE COMEDY to FAUST to MOBY DICK, good and evil are rendered in concrete, understandable images ripe for discussion. Such tales as Hawthorne's EARTH'S HOLOCAUST, here included, shrink pomp and ceremony to mechanical-toy size.

THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO's cargo of mythological beasts approaches, as did Hawthorne, Melville, and countless others, the enigma of good and evil, the real and the romantic, shakes the reader severely, threatens some of his most cherished conceptions, and departs having offered no cure-all solutions. The reader, like the inhabitants of the small desert town, is left with a strewn jigsaw which he must fit together in his own time, according to his own temper, believing or disbelieving the entire menagerie, depending on his real or romantic needs.

There is a fifty-fifty chance you may emerge from the good Doctor's tent vaguely dissatisfied with questions posed and left unanswered. But we must examine not what Mr. Finney might have done (and I, for one, am curious to know the circus's effects on the futures of the people of Abalone, Arizona) but what he really accomplished with his materials.

Certainly Mr. Finney has given us a long stare at Reality, and done so by dressing it up in fantastic guises. He catches us off guard by pretending to show us something not real, which, at a crucial moment, unshells itself to reveal the raw center of existence. Too late, we turn away. Eyes shut, book closed, we examine his images in private. In the satyr we see animal lusts and actualities; in the Hound of the Hedges we find idealized a "hint of the goal of life," the "apogee of all that life could ever promise," the romantic conception of all "beauty and gentleness and grace."

"The first to catch a circus in a lie is a boy." Reversing this familiar saying, we may well observe that the traveling Circus of Dr. Lao catches life in many of *its* lies.

The other stories collected here infract, in one way or another, many seemingly durable laws. Shirley Jackson's THE SUMMER PEOPLE nearly destroys for all time the bromide that when the chips are down, loving kindness lies deep in every human heart. Its element of fantasy surprises the reader like a winter wind blowing quietly on an August afternoon.

Loren Eiseley's BUZBY'S PETRIFIED WOMAN proves mind over matter by shaping stone in the likeness of a cherished and most secret dream.

Most of these stories point a moral, even if as in E. B. White's THE HOUR OF LETDOWN it is only "prepare your dignity for that future when man, in a machine world, is indeed a minority," or, citing Nigel Kneale's THE POND, "do unto frogs as you would have them do unto you."

But, morality and symbolism to one side, these stories are recommended, above all, because they are fine entertainment. I make no plea for the moral or symbolic fantasy alone. In spite of world conditions today, we can certainly indulge in even those fantasies, say, of Edgar Rice Burroughs and A. Merritt, whose sole purpose is enchantment and high adventure. In practical terms, they make life worth living, survival important, for millions of boys each year. I don't recall looking upon Jules Verne's books as moral classics, but there is no doubt that their imaginative qualities stimulated three boys to grow up, one to invent the first practical submarine, another to become one of our most famous explorers of caves, and the third, Admiral Byrd, to say, on the eve of his departure for the Anarctic, "Jules Verne leads me."

So we find that even when we appear to be ruining our minds with what seems completely irresponsible fiction, the end-product is often an electrifying response to the world.

We feel the need to wake or sleep, eat or fast, accept or reject existence. We embrace the golden cocktail-hour image of ourselves, or tremble at the stark three o'clock of a sleepless morning reflection we find in our bedroom mirror. Somewhere between lies truth. Searching for the mean, our arts follow cycles of vigorous and brutal certainty, or tenuous theory and dream.

Man lives by creating and creates by alternating wonder with criticism followed by new states of wonder. Here in this book, then, new states of wonder, followed in your own good time, if you desire, by critical assaults which may burn Dr. Lao's miraculous show to earth. No matter; others, happening by, will raise its tents again. There goes the whistle, the trumpet, the drum: you cannot walk through walls, you can walk through walls; the Indian dead have no tongues, the Indian dead speak to those who listen; petrified rock and the beauty of women are separate things, worn rock and the beauty of women are one, when the desert wind blows.

The circus moves and, moving, takes us with it from some mysterious beginning to some unknowable end. As privileged passengers, each of us put here by a blind world to see what it itself cannot see, perhaps this circus and the stories which form

its sideshows, may for a time help us put off our personal bickerings to make the journey profitable to the senses.

This collection is dedicated to Saul David, of Bantam Books, who waited three years for the mountain to deliver forth the mouse; and to William F. Nolan, for suggestions and help all down the line. Because of them, the show is on the road.

RAY BRADBURY
February 5th, 1956

THE CIRCUS OF DR. LAO

In the *Abalone* (Arizona) *Morning Tribune* for August third there appeared on page five an advertisement eight columns wide and twenty-one inches long. In type faces grading from small pica to ninety-six point the advertisement told of a circus to be held in Abalone that day, the tents to be spread upon a vacant field on the banks of the Santa Ana River, a bald spot in the city's growth surrounded by all manner of houses and habitations.

Floridly worded, the advertisement made claims which even Phineas Taylor Barnum might have hedged at advancing. It alleged for the show's female personnel a pulchritude impossible to equal in any golden age of beauty or physical culture. The mind of man could not conceive of women more beautiful than were the charmers of this circus. Though the whole race of man were bred for feminine beauty as the whole race of Jersey cattle is bred for butterfat, even then lovelier women could not be produced than the ones who graced this show. . . . Nay, these were the most beautiful women of the world; the whole world, not just the world of today, but the world since time began and the world as long as time shall run.

Nor were the wild animals on display at the circus any less sensational than were the girls. Not elephants or tigers or hyenas or monkeys or polar bears or hippopotami; anyone and everyone had seen such as those time after time. The sight of an African lion was as banal today as that of an airplane. But here were animals no man had ever seen before; beasts fierce beyond all dreams of ferocity; serpents cunning beyond all comprehension of guile; hybrids strange beyond all nightmares of fantasy.

Furthermore, the midway of the circus was replete with sideshows wherein were curious beings of the netherworld on display, macabre trophies of ancient conquests, resurrected supermen of antiquity. No glass-blowers, cigarette fiends, or

frogboys, but real honest-to-goodness freaks that had been born of hysterical brains rather than diseased wombs.

Likewise, the midway would house a fortuneteller. Not an ungrammatical gypsy, not a fat blonde mumbling silly things about dark men in your life, not a turbaned mystic canting of the constellations; no, this fortuneteller would not even be visible to you, much less take your hand and voice generalities concerning your life lines. Anonymous behind the veil of his mystery he would speak to you and tell you of foreordained things which would come into your life as the years unfolded. And you were warned not to enter his tent unless you truly wanted to know the truth about your future, for never under any conditions did he lie about what was going to happen; nor was it possible for you after learning your future to avert in any way its unpleasant features. He absolutely would not, however, forecast anything of an international or political nature. He was perfectly capable of so doing, of course, but the management had found that such prophecies, inasmuch as they were invariably true, had in the past been used to unfair and dishonorable advantage by unscrupulous financiers and politicians: that which had been meant for mankind had been converted to personal gain—which was not ethical.

And for men only there was a peepshow. It was educational rather than pornographic. It held no promise of hermaphroditic goats or randy pony stallions lusting after women. Nor any rubberstamp striptease act. But out of the erotic dramas and dreams of long-dead times had been culled a figure here, an episode there, a fugitive vision elsewhere, all of which in combination produced an effect that no ordinary man for a long series of days would forget or, for that matter, care to remember too vividly. Because of the unique character of this segment of the circus, attendance would be limited to men over twenty-one, married men preferred; and absolutely no admittance to any man under the influence of liquor.

In the main tent the circus performance proper, itself diverting beyond description with colorful acts and remarkable scenes, would end with a formidable spectacle. Before your eyes would be erected the long-dead city of Woldercan and the terrible temple of its fearful god Yottle. And before your eyes the ceremony of the living sacrifice to Yottle would be enacted: a virgin would be sanctified and slain to propitiate this deity who had endured before Bel-Marduk even, and was the first and mightiest and least forgiving of all the gods. Eleven thousand people would take part in the spectacle, all of them dressed in the garb of ancient Woldercan. Yottle himself would appear, while his worshipers sang the music of the spheres. Thunder and lightning would attend the ceremonies,

and possibly a slight earthquake would be felt. All in all it was the most tremendous thing ever to be staged under canvas.

Admission 10c to the circus grounds proper. 25c admission to the big top; children in arms free. 10c admission to the sideshows, 50c admission to the peepshow. Parade at 11 A.M. Midway open at 2 P.M. Main show starts at 2:45. Evening performance at 8. Come one, come all. The greatest show on earth.

The first person to notice anything queer about the ad, aside from its outrageous claims, was the proofreader of the *Tribune* checking it for typographical errata the night before it appeared in the paper. An ad was an ad to Mr. Etaoin, the proofreader, a mass of words to be examined for possible error both of omission and commisson, manner and matter. And his meticulous, astigmatic, spectacle-bolstered eyes danced over the type of this full-page advertisement, stopping at the discovery of transposition or mis-spelling long enough for his pencil to indicate the trouble on the margin of the proof, then dancing on through the groups of words to the end. After he had read the ad through and corrected what needed correcting, he held it up at arm's length to read over the bigger type again and ascertain whether he had missed anything at the first perusal. And looking at the thing in perspective that way, he discovered that it was anonymous, that it carried on endlessly as to the wonders of the show but never said whose show it was, that never a name appeared anywhere in all that overabundance of description.

"Something's screwy," reflected Mr. Etaoin. And he took the ad copy to the *Tribune* advertising manager for counsel and advice.

"Look here," he said to that gentleman, "here's a whole page of hooey about some circus and not a word as to whose circus it is. Is that O.K.? Is that the way it's supposed to run in the paper? Generally these circus impresarios are hell on having their names smeared all over the place."

"Let's see," said the ad manager, taking up the copy. "By God, that is funny. Who sold this ad, anyway?"

"Steele's name's on the ticket," offered the proofreader.

Advertising Solicitor Steele was summoned.

"Look here," said the ad manager, "there aint any name or nothing on this ad. What about that?"

"Well, sir, I don't know," said Steele vaguely. "A little old Chinaman brought the copy in to me this morning, paid cash for the ad, and said it was to run just exactly the way it was written. He said we could use our judgment about the type face

and so on, but the words must be exactly the way he had 'em. I told him O.K. and took the money and the ad, and that's all I know about it. I guess that's the way he wants it, though. He was so insistent we mustn't change anything."

"Yeah, but doesn't he want his name in there somewhere?" persisted the proofreader.

"Damn if I know," said Steele.

"Let it ride just the way it is," ruled the manager. "We got the money. That's the main thing in any business."

"Sure must be some show," said the proofreader. "Did you guys read this junk?"

"Nah, I didn't read it," said Steele.

"I aint read an ad in ten years," said the manager. "I just look at 'em kinda; I don't read 'em."

"O.K.," said Mr. Etaoin, "she goes as is then. You're the boss."

The next person to notice something unusual in the page display was Miss Agnes Birdsong, high-school English teacher. Two words in it bothered her: pornographic and hermaphroditic. She knew what pornography meant, having looked it up after reading a review of Mr. Cabell's *Jurgen*. But hermaphroditic had her at a loss. She thought she suspected she knew what it meant; she detected the shadows of the god and the goddess, but their adjectival marriage left her bewildered. She pondered a little, then reached for her dictionary. A guardian of the language could do no less. The definitions left her wiser but not sadder. She returned to the ad to wonder further what a fugitive vision seen through a peephole would be like. She pondered upon the conjuring up in a stuffy circus tent of an erotic dream of a long-dead day. She wished momentarily she were a man. She thought, and quickly slew the thought, of dressing up like a man and attending that peepshow. "I'll go and see the parade," compromised Miss Agnes Birdsong.

The children of Plumber Rogers saw the ad while they were searching for the comics. It was a tremendous occasion. A circus in town that very day and they hadn't even known it was coming. A parade in two hours that would pass two blocks from the Rogers house. Clowns. Elephants. Tigers. Calliopes. Bands. Horses. Fanfare and pomp. The yellow glare of Abalone took on a golden glow for the children of Plumber Rogers, for a circus was in town.

"Now, don't go getting all excited, you kids," said the plumber uneasily. "I don't know whether you'll get to go or not." (He hadn't had work since the first day of the de-

pression.) "I don't think it'll be much of a circus anyway."

He took the paper from them and read the ad for himself. . . . Eleven thousand people would take part in the spectacle . . . "Why, that's a goddam lie!" said Plumber Rogers. "There aint hardly that many people in Abalone."

"Oh, John," said Mrs. Rogers, shocked; "you oughtn't to talk that way before the children."

But John wasn't listening. He was reading about the women in the circus.

"Tell you what; let's go, Sarah," he said. "The kids haven't seen anything for a long time. Maybe something'll turn up in the way of work pretty soon. These hard times can't last much longer."

At nine o'clock the chief of police read the advertisement. He turned to the desk sergeant. "Say, I didn't know there was going to be a circus in town today. Did you know anything about it?"

"Naw," said the sergeant. "I don't pay no 'tention to circuses anyway. I aint been to one since I was a kid. Never did like the damn things a whole hell of a lot anyway."

The chief phoned the city clerk's office. "Say, about this circus that's advertised in the paper this morning. I didn't know nothing about it till just now I read about it. They got a permit, do you know?"

He listened awhile. "Yeah . . . yeah . . . no . . . I guess so . . . I don't know . . . yeah . . . no . . . oh, sure . . . yeah . . . yeah . . . no . . . uh huh. Good-by."

"Well?" said the desk sergeant.

"The clerk claims an old Chink came in and got a permit for a circus just before quitting time last night. Said the Chink had the owner's written consent to use the vacant lot for the show."

"Well?" said the desk sergeant.

"Well, you send a couple of guys out there this afternoon to look the joint over," said the chief. "I guess it's all right, but it seems kind of screwy to me anyway. Did you ever hear of a Chink running a circus before?"

"Aw, I aint paid no 'tention to circuses since I was a kid," said the desk sergeant.

A traffic officer of the railroad read the ad at seven-thirty while he was eating breakfast just before going to work. Behind one of his ears a pimple loomed temptingly, ripe for a squeezing. His hair was dryish and thinnish and untidy and brownish and needed further combing. His flesh was the flesh of one neither young nor old, but more old than young, more

repulsive than tempting. Cannibals might have eaten him; shipwrecked mariners never. An undiscerning woman might have loved him; a cinema queen never. He wasn't a very good traffic officer; he might have made a failure of the insurance business. Heaven perhaps could comfort him; this world never. His two young sons sometimes would wonder how his hands would look in handcuffs, his feet in ballet slippers, his nose in a stein of beer. He read the ad uneasily, remarking to his wife petulantly:

"Here's a damn circus in town. But it never came over the railroad; must have its own trucks. Just some more business we didn't get. By George, there's lots of it we don't get any more. First thing I know they won't be needing traffic men on the line any more. Then what in hell'll we do?"

"Oh, now, don't start worrying," said his wife, "till you've got something to worry about."

A state quarantine inspector came in from his nightly vigil at the bug station out on the California highway and at breakfast in a restaurant met a fellow-inspector from the bug station on the New Mexico highway. They saw the ad in the restaurant paper.

"Did you see any circus come by your place last night?" asked Inspector Number One.

"Nope," said Inspector Number Two.

"Neither did I. It must have come in over the railroad, I guess. If you aint got nothing to do this afternoon, let's go to the damn thing."

"Awright," said Inspector Number Two. "I kinda like the goddam things."

A lawyer who prided himself on his knowledge of history and religion read the ad and bogged down at the "long-dead city of Woldercan" and the "fearful god Yottle." He went to his encyclopædia to refresh his memory. Neither city nor deity could he find. He wasn't sure about Bel-Marduk either, so he looked him up, too. Bel, however, was there. "Yottle . . ." thought the lawyer, "Woldercan . . . baloney; somebody's been making up a lot of stuff. Fooling the people all of the time. Wonder what a circus conception of a god previous to Bel-Marduk would be like. Oh, Lord, what'll people think of next? Believe I'll go to the darn thing. Can't do any worse than bore me to death."

A widow, a Mrs. Howard T. Cassan, read the advertisement at quarter of ten. ". . . the midway will house a fortune-teller . . . veiled in mystery . . . prophecies invariably true

. . ." Mrs. Cassan always went to fortunetellers. When none was available she cast the cards or séanced with ouija. She had had her future foretold so many times that in order to fulfill all the forecasts she would have to live ninety-seven more years and encounter and charm a war-strength regiment of tall, dark men. "I'll go and ask this man—let's see—yes, I'll ask him about that oil well I dreamed about," said Mrs. Howard T. Cassan.

Two college youths from back East, Slick Bromiezchski and Paul Conrad Gordon, at the moment in Abalone, Arizona, after an outing in old Mexico, read the ad and decided to see the circus.

"Let's take in that peepshow," said Slick.

"You're damn right; and we'll take it in cockeyed drunk, too," said Paul. "Refusing admittance to men under the influence of liquor is a challenge no Sigma Omicron Beta can overlook."

Mr. Etaoin, the *Tribune* proofreader, conned the ad again at his breakfast at ten-thirty to see if he had overlooked any errors in it the night before. Finding none pleased him. He regarded the page fondly, marking the emphasis gained by the use of white space around the big black type, commending the restrained use of italics, admiring the thin Goudy caps and small caps. The sense of what he looked at piqued him. "Wonder what kind of show it is?" thought Mr. Etaoin. "Believe I'll go to the thing."

Mr. Larry Kamper read the ad cursorily in a cast-aside *Tribune* as he lounged under the palm trees in the park by the railroad station waiting for a freight train to leave Abalone. Larry knew not what train he was waiting for, nor in which direction it might be going, nor where he would get off. But he didn't mind. He had recently been discharged from the army, still had a little money, was reasonably his own master and comparatively free from worry. His last permanent address had been Company E, 15th U.S. Infantry, American Compound, Tientsin, China. He had been discharged at Fort Mason after his return to America on an army transport, had been paid all that was due him, and now was touring the great Southwest, a land hitherto out of his ken, on sidedoor Pullmans. So he lounged under the palm trees in the park near the railroad station, waiting for a freight train to go in either one direction or another, and cursorily read the ad in the cast-aside *Tribune*. And, lo, upon the world-weary traveler there fell a pall of nostalgia, and waveringly a ghost cry from the bones of his dead youth smote his ears: he had not seen

a circus for ten years; to be a little boy again; to tremble at the sight of strange animals; to recapture the simple thrill of wonderment: that would be pleasure; that would be good. Larry the infantryman, Larry the booze-fighter, Larry the whorechaser, Larry the loudmouthed, read the ad and longed for his boyhood. And presently he got to his feet and wondered what time it was and started for the circus grounds.

Six blocks down Main Street Larry Kamper encountered the parade. Realizing he was too early for the show, he shouldered his way through the mass of Mexicans that cluttered the curb to get a look at the procession.

He almost laughed when he saw it. Only three frowzy little beast-drawn wagons, the first driven by an old Chinaman, the second by a pale bearded man, the last by a Jewish-looking fellow with a cap of goat horns on his head. There was a big coiled grey snake in the Chinaman's wagon, a bear in the second wagon, a green dog in the last.

"Hey," said a man standing beside Larry, "what sort of animal is that thing pulling the first cart there?"

Larry looked and saw a horse bearing on its forehead a long thin white horn.

"Just some fake," said Larry. "What d'you call them things? Singlehorns? That aint it. Monohorns? Naw . . . uh . . . unicorns? That's it. Unicorn. Fellah took a horse and made a unicorn out of it by pasting a horn on its head, I guess."

"Yeah, but that aint no horse like any ever what I see," said the man. "Look at thet there tail. Ever see a horse with a tail like that critter's got?"

"Well, I don't know a hell of a lot about horses," said Larry. "I been in the infantry six years. But it aint no unicorn; I know that, 'cause there aint no unicorns, nor ever was."

"Well, sir, that thing aint a horse either," said the man. "I been boy-raised with horses, and I can tell 'em when I see 'em; and that aint no horse."

"I guess it's a freak of some kind then," said Larry. And he also said: "Well, Jeesis, what's that thing driving the last wagon?"

The man looked and said: "Why, it's just a feller with some goat horns on his head. Another fake, I reckon."

"I never seen a man like that before," said Larry. "Look at his feet."

"What's the matter with his feet?"

"Aw, he pulled 'em down too quick. He had 'em up on the dashboard for just a second. Had awful funny-looking shoes on, if you could call 'em shoes. Look at his face; ever see a face like that before?"

"Sure," said the man; "hell of a lot of 'em. What's wrong with his face?"

"I dunno," said Larry. "The whole thing's screwy, anyway. Circus parade with only three wagons! My Gawd. Hey, what's that animal in the last wagon?"

"You got me, brother. Looks like a dog, though."

"That aint no dog," said Larry.

"Well, say now, let's get together on some of this stuff," protested the man. "Which of us is cockeyed, anyway?"

"Oh, to hell with the parade," said Larry. "I got some money. Come on, let's get a glass of beer."

"Right," said the man.

They went into Harry Martinez's place.

"Two cervezas," said the man to Barkeep Harry.

"Naw, naw," said Larry. "I just want beer."

"That means beer out here; it's Spanish," grinned Harry.

Larry was relieved. "Awright, then. What'dya think of the parade?"

"I didn't think a hell of a lot of it," said Harry, " 'cept that I couldn't figure why they had that man in the second cage. What was he, a wild man from Borneo or something?"

"Man?" said Larry's companion. "I didn't see no man in a cage. There was a snake and a bear and something what looked like a dog kinda, but I didn't see no man. Did you?" he asked Larry.

"I dunno what the hell I saw now," said Larry.

"Well," said Harry Martinez, "I'm here to tell you that I got good eyes, an' that in the cage on the second wagon of that there parade I seen a man. He looked like a Russian or something. And what kind of an animal was that what was pulling that second wagon; tell me that, either of you."

"I didn't rightly notice," said Larry's companion.

"Neither did I," said Larry.

"Well," said Harry Martinez, "I did. Did you ever hear of a sphinx?"

"That big statue thing in Arabia?"

"Yeah. Well, it looked like a sphinx pulling that second wagon. 'Course it was a fake. Big mule, I reckon, tricked out in a lion's hide."

"Nope," said Larry, "I remember now. That wasn't no mule."

"Well, what the hell was it then?" asked his friend.

"I dunno, but it wasn't a mule, that's a cinch," said Larry, finishing his beer.

"Two more beers," said his friend.

"Right," said Harry Martinez.

Mr. Etaoin, the *Tribune* proofreader, stepped out of the restaurant onto Main Street and saw the parade coming his way. He lit a cigarette and awaited its coming.

When it came, he gazed at it bemusedly wondering if he saw aright. An elderly lady tapped his arm. She had a little boy with her.

"Please, mister, can you tell us what kind of a snake that is in the wagon? Is it something they caught here in Arizona? We're just out from the East, you know, and don't know all the animals here yet."

Mr. Etaoin regarded the reptile in the slow-moving wagon. It had no scales; only a grey slimy hide like a catfish.

"I don't know what it is, lady," he said; "but it's not an Arizona snake, that's certain. They don't get that big out here. Matter of fact, I don't know where in the world snakes do get as big as that fellow is."

"Maybe it's a sea serpent, grandma," said the little boy.

"That's as good an idea as any," agreed Mr. Etaoin.

Two business men came alongside. "Lord, but that's a big snake," said one. "Wonder what kind it is?"

"It's a sea serpent," said the little boy.

"It is, huh?" said the man. "Well, by George, I always heard of them things; kinda like myths, you know. But this is the first time I ever really saw one. So that's the sea serpent, huh? Well, sir, he's a monster; I'll give him credit for that. Yessir."

The man with him said: "What's that man doing in the second cage?"

"That's no man, Bill; that's a bear. What's wrong with your eyes?"

"Looks like a man to me," said Bill. "What do you call it, friend?" he asked Mr. Etaoin.

"My glasses are kinda dusty," said the proofreader, "but it looks to me like a man that walks like a bear."

"Well, I say it's a bear what walks like a man," said the first business man facetiously. "Man that walks like a bear . . . haw, haw. That's pretty good! Where's he going to walk to in that cage? Huh?"

"Why, it's a Russian, isn't it?" asked the old lady.

"Good Lord, woman," said Bill, "we aint that bad yet here in Arizona. We don't pen Russians up and put 'em on display with animals; that is, not yet we don't."

"Here, now," said the first man to Bill; "don't talk to a lady that way. You said it was a man yourself, didn't you? What difference does it make whether it's a Russian or not? You got to excuse him, lady."

"I don't give a damn whether it's a Russian or an Eskimo or a Democrat!" said Bill. "By God, it aint no bear, and that's that."

"Well, I never heard such language in all my life!" announced the old lady. "If that's western chivalry for you, the sooner I get back to Sedalia the better!"

Mr. Etaoin, to make conversation, said: "What kind of a donkey is it pulling the last wagon?"

"Why, it's just a common ordinary everyday good-for-nothing lousy lowdown jackass of a donkey," said Bill truculently. "I aint going to get in no argument about him, fellah. I'm sorry, lady, for speaking the way I did. I don't feel so good this morning."

The little boy piped up: "It's a burro, isn't it, mister?"

"Have it your own way, lad. I don't care if it's a walrus."

"How come it's so doggone yellow?" asked the first man.

"It looks like it was made of gold," said the old lady brightly.

Bill started to laugh. "Haw, haw, haw! The golden ass! The golden ass!"

Bill's companion took his arm. "Come on, Bill; let's go. Folks are beginning to look at you funny."

"Are people all like that in Abalone?" the old lady asked Mr. Etaoin.

"No, not all of 'em," he apologized. "Just one or two now and then."

The two college youths from back East came out of their hotel and climbed into their old touring car; Slick Bromiezchski driving, Paul Conrad Gordon giving advice: "Choke it, boy; choke hell out of it."

The car started and they got as far as Main Street when a red light halted them. Then the parade came along and halted them some more.

"There's the circus," said Slick. "Where's the peepshow float?"

"Patience," said Paul Conrad. "They don't put their peepshows on parade. This is only the teaser to the main dish."

"Sure is a hell of a parade," said Slick. "Old Chink with one foot in the grave; Christlike looking personage; and that guy made up to look like Rodin's Faun—or am I thinking of Praxiteles? Anyhow, what do you think of it, Oom Powl?"

"Rodin's Faun!" said Paul; "that's what I was trying to think of. Afternoon of a faun. Nymphs. You know."

"Sure. But why that particular stream of consciousness?"

"It's the guy with the horns on his head," said Paul. "Suppose he were real?"

"All right. I'm supposing as hard as I can. Now what?"

"Well, good Lord, can you imagine a real honest-to-god satyr driving a gold-plated mule down the main drag of a hick town?"

"Sure. I can imagine anything. What of it?"

"Oh, nothing. Let's go. Time's flying. We got to get under the influence and make a test case on the circus grounds, you will recall."

On her way to the Cash and Carry, Mrs. Howard T. Cassan was momentarily held up by the parade.

"My, what horrid animals," she thought. "I wonder which one is the fortuneteller—which one of the men, that is."

From a window in an upper apartment over her head a female voice called down: "Excuse me, please, but can you tell from where you are whether that's a man or a bear in the second wagon?"

"Why, it's a bear, I believe," Mrs. Cassan called back obligingly. "Though I don't know what kind of a bear."

"The lady on the corner says it's a bear, Joe," said the voice.

"Bear, hell," said Joe's voice. "Don't you think I know a Russian when I see one?"

"Well, dear me!" said Mrs. Cassan.

The lawyer who prided himself on his extra-legal knowledge watched the parade tolerantly from his kitchen door with his wife.

"It's sort of pitiful, isn't it?" he said. "A goofy little road show like that hanging silly disguises on animals to make them look like things out of mythology. It isn't even well done. That horse rigged up like a sphinx, for instance. Look at the fool woman's face on the thing. You can tell from here it's paper mâché or something. And those absurd breasts hanging down in front of it."

"Now, Frank," said his wife, "don't be vulgar, please. What's that man doing in that cage, do you suppose? Is he some sort of a freak?"

"Why, that's not a man, honey; that's a bear. Looks like a big grizzly from here."

His wife pretended to smell his breath. "What have you been drinking, Frank, dear? Don't you credit me with enough intelligence to distinguish a man from a bear?"

Frank looked at her in mock alarm. "I told you last week you ought to get fitted for glasses, honey. I'm going to take you down myself right after lunch and have the doctor fix you up with a triple-strong pair of lenses. A man; haw, haw, haw!"

His wife got sore. "You make me so damn mad when you sneer that way. I mean when you laugh that sneering way. You do it on purpose. You know good and well that's a man; you're just trying to be funny."

The lawyer looked at his wife strangely. "All right, honey," he said quietly; "it's a man. Come on; let's go in and eat."

The telephone rang as they were sitting down. Frank answered it:

"Hello."

" 'Lo, Frank?"

"Yeah."

"This is Harvey. Did you folks see the parade go by just now?"

"Yeah."

"Well, so did Helen and I. We couldn't decide what that was in the middle cage. Did you notice? We been having quite an argument, and I thought I'd call you up to settle it. Helen claimed it was a bear in there, but I thought it was a Russian. What did you folks make it out to be?"

"We're undecided, too," said Frank and hung up.

Quarantine Inspector Number Two saw the parade as he leaned out of his coupé window to yell at Inspector Number One, who was ambling toward him down Main Street. Inspector Number One got in the coupé and watched with him.

"Man, that sure is a big snake," he said. "Reminds me of that big sidewinder I killed down on the Beeswax road last spring. Thing had sixteen rattles."

"Must've been sixteen years old then," said Inspector Number Two.

"Oh, that's the way you tell, is it? I always figured it was something like that. What do you make of that bear there? Is he a Sonoran grizzly?"

"I don't see no bear."

"Well, it's right there in that second wagon, bigger'n hell."

"You're still asleep, fellah; that's a man. Looks like a Russian."

"Yeah? Who is it, Trotsky?"

"I dunno who it is, but it aint no bear. Say, look at that dog, will you! Ever see a green dog before?"

"There's lots of things in that parade I aint never seen before. Just how in hell do you figure that aint a bear in the middle wagon?"

" 'Cause I seen bears and I seen men; and I can tell a man from a bear as far as I can see either of 'em; and that thing is a man and not a bear; and I'm tired of arguing about anything so damn foolish."

"All right," said Inspector Number One. "Don't go getting hard about it. I aint going to argue with you. What do you make of the dog?"

"Well, it's jest about the biggest dog I ever seen, but I never seen one that color before. Look at its hide; the thing shore has rough hair. Good Lord, its teeth are green, too. Well, what kind of a dog is that, anyway?"

"You got me. That's a nice little burro pulling the last cart."

"That aint no burro."

"Well, what the hell is it, then; an elephant?"

"Say, what's the matter with you today? You know that aint no burro. You know burros've got hair on 'em. You know burros aint slick like they was made of glass like that thing is. You know they don't shine that way."

"Well, it looks like a burro."

"Yeah. You thought that man looked like a bear, too. I don't know what's got into you today."

"By God, that was a bear! You better pull yourself together, guy. They got a booby hatch in this state for people what gets funny notions." Inspector Number One got out of the coupé. "Don't go getting any funny notions when you're on shift tonight, or somebody's liable to get your job. I'm telling you straight, see?"

Inspector Number Two lit a cigar. A policeman friend of his came up and jocularly cautioned him about parking too long in one spot.

"Listen, Tom," said the inspector, "did you see that parade go by just now?"

"Yeah, I saw the crazy thing. Hell of a big bear they had in one of the wagons."

"Oh, Lord!" said the inspector and drove away.

The railroad traffic officer's wife called him up at about eleven o'clock.

"Ed," she said, "have you seen the circus parade? The children want to go over and watch it, but it's so far from the house I'm sort of afraid to let them. Is it really worth watching, do you know?"

"Yes, I just now saw it," said Ed. "All they got is three wagons pulled by horses or something. I thought sure there'd be some trucks. I can't imagine how they got into town. I know those beasts didn't pull those wagons all the way from California or from wherever they came. No, the kids wouldn't like it, I don't believe. There's a big snake in one wagon and a wild man or something in the other and a funny-looking dog in the last. I don't think the kids would like it, really. No clowns or anything like that."

One of his fellow-workers, listening in on the conversation, said: "Where was that wild man, Ed? I must have missed him."

"In the middle wagon."

"Ho, ho, ho! That wasn't no wild man; that was a big bear. Funny thing: a couple of guys out in front made the same mistake you did. Thought the bear was a man. Haw, haw, haw!"

"Well, it surer'n hell looked like a man," said Ed.

"You been worrying about that circus so much all morning," said the desk sergeant to the chief of police; "there goes the parade now—why don't you go out and look at it?"

Its inertia broken by these pregnant words, practically the entire force left off lounging around the spittoons and went out on the curb by the parked Black Maria to watch the little procession go by. The old Chinaman driving the first wagon noted the uniforms and bowed to vested authority. The unicorn harnessed between the shafts noted the brass buttons, too, and flinging its icicle horn skyward, whinnied like a bugle and danced on its hind feet. The aged Chinaman flailed it with his lash, and its caperings subsided.

"That's a high-stepping bronc he's got hooked on there," commented one of the lesser policemen. "How'd it get that horn, d'yuh reckon? Never heard of a horse having a horn before."

"That aint no horse," said another policeman; "that's a unicorn."

"What's a unicorn?"

"Why, it's something like a cross between a horse and a rhino, I guess. They come from Armenia, I believe, or some goddam place like that."

"Oh, sure, I remember reading about them in school now when I was a kid. Aint they awfully rare or something?"

"Yep. Rarer than hell."

"Man, that's a big snake in there. Wonder what it is."

"Looks like a boa constrictor to me."

"Nope," said one of the motorcycle patrolmen, "it aint a boa constrictor. It's an anaconda from South America. Teddy Roosevelt caught one when he was hunting down there years ago."

"Is it poisonous?"

"Oh, sure. That thing's got enough poison to kill a whole regiment."

"Jesus! Sure is some snake!"

"I've seen 'em bigger'n that one when the liquor's in me," said a big fat cop.

The other officers laughed and agreed.

The desk sergeant, who had been watching from the window, called out: "Hey, chief, we ought to have a wagon like that middle one there to pen up drunks in like that feller's penned up."

"Yeah," said the chief, "it's a good idea; only what feller you talking about?"

"The one in the wagon."

The chief chuckled. "Heh, heh. Old Baldy thinks that bear is a man. Guess his sight's failing."

"I don't see no bear, chief," said the motorcycle patrolman.

"Well, it's right in front of your goddam nose. Wipe off your goggles and you can see it."

"I'll be damned if that's a bear," persisted the patrolman.

"Well," said the chief in disgust, "there's two people I don't never argue with: one's a woman and the other's a damn fool. And you aint no woman!"

Mrs. Rogers asked her three children if they had enjoyed the parade.

"Naw," said Willie. "There wasn't no clowns there, ner elephants, ner nuthin'."

"Well, I liked it," said Alice. "There was the prettiest little mule. All shiny like it was gold or something."

"I liked the big green dog," said little Edna.

"A green dog?" said Mrs. Rogers. "Now, Edna, what are you saying?"

"Well, it was green, mother. Just as green as grass. Only it didn't never bark or anything."

"And then there was that thing like that statue on the table," said Willie.

"What statue?" asked Mrs. Rogers.

Willie brought the statue in. "This one. What's the name of it, mother?"

"Well, it's called a sphinx, but I'm quite sure you didn't see a sphinx in a circus parade."

"Yes we did, mother," said Alice, "a real live sphinx. It looked like a woman sticking her front out of a lion. It was pulling a wagon with a big bear in it."

"It wasn't a bear," said Edna, "it was a man."

"It was a bear," said Alice.

"It was a man."

"It was a bear."

"It was a man."

"Oh, heavens! Don't start that now," said Mrs. Rogers. "What was it, Willie, a bear or a man?"

"I thought it was a Russian," said Willie.

Mrs. Rogers sat down. "You children see the strangest things sometimes. What else was there, Alice?"

"Well, there was a man with horns on his head like a goat; and there was a Chinaman; and there was a snake; and there was a man what looked like God."

"Oh, Alice," said Mrs. Rogers, "how can you say such a thing?"

"Well," said Alice, "he looked just like those pictures of Jesus in the Sunday-School book, didn't he, Edna?"

"Just exactly," said Edna. "Long brown hair and beard and white robes and everything. He looked awfully old, though."

"Well, was that all there was in the parade?" asked Mrs. Rogers.

"That's all, mother. There weren't any clowns or elephants or bands or camels or anything."

"Weren't there any horses?"

"There was a horse with a horn on its head, but it had a funny tail," said Edna.

"Well, it must have been a queer parade," said Mrs. Rogers. "I wish I had seen it."

A little later Mr. Rogers came in with a funny look on his face.

"What's the matter?" his wife asked.

"I dunno," said the plumber; "it don't seem right. That parade I saw just now. Oh, yeah, before I forget; I got work, Sarah, nine months' work starting tomorrow."

"Well, thank God!" said Mrs. Rogers. "Where? Tell me quick!"

"Oh, maintenance stuff down at the hotel. But I wanted to tell you about that parade. Never saw such a thing. Got a snake there I bet's eighty feet long if he's an inch. And then there was a Chink. Funny old bird. Oh, yeah; but what I wanted to tell you about was a bear they had in a cage. There was a fellah standing beside me tried to tell me it was a man. Ever hear of such a thing? Couldn't tell a bear from a man! I thought he was joking at first, but he got hard as the devil, so I piped down and let him think it was a man. Ever hear of such a thing?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Rogers, "I've heard considerable about it already this morning."

"How's that?"

"Oh, the children saw the parade, too."

"Oh, they did, huh? That's good. They didn't think that bear was a man, did they?"

"Willie thought it was a Russian," said Mrs. Rogers.

At quarter to eleven Miss Agnes Birdsong, high-school English teacher, was down on Main Street waiting for the parade and feeling a little foolish. She felt even more foolish when she saw what a silly little parade it turned out to be. But she looked pretty standing in the shade in her flimsy summer dress; she looked pretty, and she knew it, and she kept on standing there and watching.

She couldn't quite identify the animals at first. Then she said to herself: "Of course, that thing's a unicorn." Then she remembered that unicorns were figments of the imagination. "It's a fake," she corrected herself.

She regarded the snake with a slight feeling of illness. She hated snakes anyway; this huge grey yellow-tongued worm with scarlet throat and jeweled eyes bothered her and frightened her. Suppose it should get loose. Of course, it was penned in there, but suppose it should get loose. How terrible. The grinning old Chinaman, noting her concern, reached around behind him with his whip handle and prodded the serpent. It hissed like a truck tire going flat and shifted its slimy coils.

Miss Agnes shuddered.

Then she saw the sphinx and the old bearded man driving it and the man in the cage on the wagon. The old bearded man was wool-gathering; the reins lay listless in his hands; his thoughts, far away from Abalone and the business of driving in the parade, played gently in some stray corner of the universe of his mind. The sphinx, noting its driver's inattention, took the bit in its teeth, gave a sluggish leap, and almost snapped the reins from the old fellow's grasp.

"Pay attention to your business, Apollonius," snarled the sphinx.

Miss Agnes Birdsong nearly sat down on the sidewalk in amazement. She looked at the people around her, but they seemed not to have heard a word. Miss Agnes touched her pulse and her brow. "I am a calm, intelligent girl," she said firmly. "I am a calm, intelligent girl."

Then the last wagon came along drawn by the golden ass, driven by the clovenfooted satyr. A little gold ring was in the satyr's nose; beside him on the seat was his syrinx. To Miss Agnes he smelled like a goat. His torso was lean as a marathon runner's; his hoofs were stained grass-green. A grape leaf was caught in his hair. He leered at Miss Agnes; he shielded his eyes with his hand and leered at her. He turned in his seat and stared back at her, staring and staring as though out of his accumulation of years he could remember nothing to compare with her.

"I am a calm, intelligent girl," Miss Agnes reassured herself. "I am a calm, intelligent girl, and I have not seen Pan on Main Street. Nevertheless, I will go to the circus and make sure."

At a quarter past twelve, Mr. Etaoin, the *Tribune* proofreader, went around to the *Tribune* newsroom to see about getting a pass to the circus.

The city editor gave him one. "Old Chink brought 'em in this morning. Funny old bird. Spoke good English. Didn't want any free publicity for his show or anything. Said he understood it was customary for newspaper men to get in at all the shows and entertainments for nothing anyway, so

he was bringing around a few passes to save trouble out at the grounds. Oh, by the way, Etaoin, did you see the parade this morning? I missed it, but from what I've heard it was a kinda screwy thing."

"It was unusual rather than screwy," said Etaoin. "Did you hear anything about a bear that looked like a man?"

"No," said the editor, "but I did hear something about a man that looked like a bear."

"That's just as good," said the proofreader.

"Well, what about this unicorn stuff?" asked the editor.

"Yeah, they had a unicorn, too."

"Oh, yeah? Seems to me I heard something about a sphinx, also."

"There was a sphinx there, too."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Uh huh. And the golden ass of Apuleius was there and the sea serpent and Apollonius of Tyana and the hound of the hedges and a satyr."

"Quite a collection," said the editor. "You haven't forgotten any of them, have you?"

Etaoin thought awhile. "Oh, sure," he said; "I did forget. There was that Russian."

At a quarter of two Mr. Etaoin started for the circus grounds intent on viewing the sideshows first before the big top opened up for the main performance. He had a pass good for everything anyway; there was no profit in not using it to the uttermost; no sense in not squeezing from it everything gratis that could be squeezed. Money was made to buy things with, but passes were designed to take you places for nothing. The freedom of the press.

It was hot as he walked through the streets of Abalone. Etaoin reflected how much better it was to have it so hot rather than correspondingly cold—it would be way below zero. Overcoats. Mufflers. Overshoes. Eartabs. And every time he'd go in a door the lenses of his glasses would cloud over with opaque frostiness, and he would have to take them off and regard things with watery eyes while he wiped them dry again. A pox on wintertime. A curse on cold weather. An imprecation on snow. The only ice Mr. Etaoin ever wanted to see again was ice in little dices made in electric refrigerators. The only snow he ever wanted to see again was the snow in newsreels. He wiped the perspiration from his brow and crossed to the shady side of the street. On the telephone wires birds perched, their bills hanging open in the terrific heat. Heat waves like cellophane contours writhed from building roofs.

By the time he reached the circus grounds he had almost forgotten the circus; and, as he walked up to the tents, he

was at a loss to think what he was doing there in that dusty field under the red-hot sun at that time of day. Then over the pathway between the rows of tents he saw a big red and black banner. It proclaimed:

THE CIRCUS OF DOCTOR LAO

"So that's the name of it," thought Mr. Etaoin.

The tents were all black and glossy and shaped not like tents but like hard-boiled eggs standing on end. They started at the sidewalk and stretched back the finite length of the field, little pennants of heat boiling off the top of each. No popstands were in sight. No balloon peddlers. No noisemakers. No hay. No smell of elephants. No roustabouts washing themselves in battered buckets. No faded women frying hot dogs in fly-blown eating stands. No tent pegs springing up under one's feet every ninth step.

A few people stood desultorily about; a few more wafted in and around the rows of tents. But the tent doors all were closed; cocoon-like they secreted their mysterious pupæ; and the sun beat down on the circus grounds of Abalone, Arizona.

Then a gong clanged and brazenly shattered the hot silence. Its metallic screams rolled out in waves of irritating sound. Heat waves scorched the skin. Dust waves seared the eyes. Sound waves blasted the ears. The gong clanged and banged and rang; and one of the tents opened and a platform was thrust out and a Chinaman hopped on the platform and the gong's noise stopped and the man started to harangue the people; and the circus of Doctor Lao was on:

"This is the circus of Doctor Lao.
We show you things that you don't know.
We tell you of places you'll never go.
We've searched the world both high and low
To capture the beasts for this marvelous show
From mountains where maddened winds did blow
To islands where zephyrs breathed sweet and slow.
Oh, we've spared no pains and we've spared no dough;
And we've dug at the secrets of long ago;
And we've risen to Heaven and plunged Below,
For we wanted to make it one hell of a show.
And the things you'll see in your brains will glow
Long past the time when the winter snow
Has frozen the summer's furbelow.
For this is the circus of Doctor Lao.
And youth may come and age may go;
But no more circuses like this show!"

The little yellow wrinkled dancing man hopped about on the platform sing-songing his slipshod dactyls and iambics; and the crowd of black, red, and white men stared up at him and marveled at his ecstasy.

The ballyhoo ceased. The old Chinaman disappeared. From all the tents banners were flung advertising that which they concealed and would reveal for a price. The crowd lost its identity; the individual regained his, each seeking what he thought would please him most. Mr. Etaoin wondered just where to go first. Over him fluttered a pennant crying, FORTUNES TOLD. "I shall have my fortune told," Mr. Etaoin confided to himself; and he scuttled into the tent.

Miss Agnes Birdsong, high-school English teacher, arrived at the circus grounds ten minutes after two. She neatly parked her neat little coupé alongside the curb on the opposite side of the street, raised the windows, got out, locked the doors, and walked across the street to the multitude of tents.

On a platform in front of one of the tents the old bearded man who had been wool-gathering while he drove in the parade that morning was doing the ballyhooing. It was the poorest ballyhoo speech Miss Agnes had ever heard in all her life, and she had heard some terrible ones. The old man spoke in a thin, weak voice, apparently extemporaneously, for he often had to stop and think what to say next. He was talking about the sideshows:

". . . 'nd in that tent over there, the third one after the big one, you people will see the chimera, a very curious beast. I don't suppose any of you people know what a chimera is, but it doesn't matter; go and look at him anyway. He can't hurt you, of course; being penned up that way for so long has gentled his nature. I think he's shedding now, that is, the lion part of him is shedding, so he won't look so glossy, but you can still tell what he is, of course. And Doctor Lao will be around there somewhere to answer any questions you may want to ask regarding the chimera. A very curious beast. I understand they are very nearly extinct. I can't think where the doctor got this one. In the next tent is the werewolf, I believe; yes, the werewolf is in the next tent to the chimera. You all know what a werewolf is, I assume. Very interesting beast, indeed. Later on, in the month of October, it becomes a woman for six weeks. Period of metamorphosis is curious to watch. Too bad it isn't changing form now. Know you people would like to see a wolf change into a woman. We feed it lamb chops as a rule. However, Doctor Lao will tell you all about it over in the tent. He has a very interesting lecture on the werewolf, I understand. Really must listen to it myself sometime. I don't know a great deal about the beast, to be per-

fectly frank. Then, in another tent is the medusa. I myself perform magic tricks in the tent across the way. And, let me see, I'm sure you people would be interested in seeing the mermaid, because in this desert country away from the sea, these ocean-dwelling creatures are bound to be unusual. Then, too, there is the hound of the hedges, which probably you have never seen, because it is indigenous to grasslands and weed patches and hedgerows and the like. The show for men only is in the last tent. I imagine the fertility dance of the Negro priests will start presently. Of course, that tent is for men only.

"So glad to see so many of you people here this afternoon, and I am sure that Doctor Lao is likewise pleased. He went to a great deal of trouble to collect all these animals, and I know you will all be interested in the strange animals. Oh, yes, I forgot to tell you about the roc's egg. It's in another tent back there, I'm not sure just which one. It's a great big egg, big as a house almost, and sweats salt water. I'm sure you good people will be interested in seeing the roc's egg. Doctor Lao will give a lecture on it in the tent. I think it's the third tent there, but I'm not sure. I really must, I suppose, familiarize myself more with the position of the various exhibits. Well, I suppose you are all tired of hearing me talk and want to go look at the shows. Remember, I perform my magic in the tent just across the way."

The old man climbed painfully and slowly off the platform and pushed his way through the crowd to the tent where he did his magic. A few people followed in after him. Miss Agnes Birdsong stood undecided. Then out of the corner of her right eye she saw the old Chinaman scuttling along with a pot of tea in his hand and a pipe of opium in his mouth. She halted him.

"Doctor Lao?"

"Yes, lady."

"Where is the tent with Pan?"

"We do not have Pan in this circus, lady. What you are thinking of, no doubt, is the satyr who drove for us in the parade this morning. He is in that tent over there. Admission is ten cents. If you wish to see him, just pay me here and go right in. We are a little short-handed on ticket-takers at present."

Miss Agnes gave the Chinaman two nickels and, assuring herself she was a calm, intelligent girl, entered the tent to see the satyr.

He lay scratching himself on a rack of grapevines, his thin, wispy beard all messy with wine lees. His hoofs were incrusted with manure, and his hands were bony, gnarled and twisted, brown and rough and long-nailed. Between his

horns was a bald spot surrounded by greying curly hair. His ears were sharp-pointed, and lean, thin muscles crawled over his arms. The goat hair hid the muscles of his legs. His ribs stuck out. His shoulders hunched about his ears.

He grinned at Miss Agnes, took up his syrinx, and started to play. Thin reedy piping music danced in the dull air in the dark tent. He arose and danced to his own music, his goat tail jerking shortly, prodding stiffly, wagging and snapping. His feet did a jig, the clicking hoofs keeping time to his piping, pounding the dirt floor, clacking, clicking, clucking. The goaty smell grew stronger.

Miss Agnes stood there assuring herself she was a calm, intelligent girl. The satyr capered around her, tossing his pipes, tossing his head, wriggling his hips, waggling his elbows. The syrinx peep, peep, peepled. The door of the tent fell shut. Around Miss Agnes the aged goat man galloped. His petulant piping screeched in her ears like the beating of tinny bells; it brought a nervousness that shook her and made her blood pump. Her veins jumping with racing blood, she trembled as Grecian nymphs had trembled when the same satyr, twenty centuries younger, had danced and played for them. She shook and watched him. And the syrinx peep, peep, peepled.

He danced closer, his whirling elbows touching with their points her fair bare arms, his shaggy thighs brushing against her dress. Behind his horns little musk sacs swelled and opened, thick oily scented stuff oozing out—a prelude to the rut. He trod on her toe with one hoof; the pain welled up to her eyes, and tears came. He pinched her thigh as he scampered around her. The pinch hurt, but she found that pain and passion were akin. The smell of him was maddening. The tent reeked with his musk. She knew that she was sweating, that globules of sweat ran down from under her arms and dampened her bodice. She knew that her legs were shiny with sweat. The satyr danced on stiff legs about her, his bony chest swelling and collapsing with his blowing. He bounded on stiff legs; he threw the syrinx away in a far corner; and then he seized her. He bit her shoulders, and his nails dug into her thighs. The spittle on his lips mingled with the perspiration around her mouth, and she felt that she was yielding, dropping, swooning, that the world was spinning slower and slower, that gravity was weakening, that life was beginning.

Then the door of the tent opened and Doctor Lao came in.

"The satyr," he said, "is perhaps the most charming figure in the old Greek polytheistic mythology. Combining the forms of both man and goat, its make-up suggests fertility, inasmuch as both men and goats are animals outstanding in concupiscent activities. To the Greeks satyrs were, indeed, a sort of deifica-

tion of lust, woodland deities, sylvan demigods. And, as a matter of fact, groves and woodlots are today favorite trysting places for lovers intent on escaping censorious eyes.

"We caught this fellow near the town of Tu-jeng in North China close to the Great Wall. We caught him in a net by a little waterfall, a net which we had set for a chimera. Incidentally, although we did not know it at that time, it is impossible to catch a chimera in a net by reason of its fiery breath, which burns up the meshes. But more of that later.

"Satyrs are not omnivorous like man, but rather herbivorous like the goat. We feed this fellow nuts and berries and herbs. He will also eat lettuces and some cabbage. He has always refused onions and garlic seed, however. And he drinks nothing but wine.

"Notice that he has a gold ring in his nose. I cannot account for it. It was there when we first captured him, but I do not know how it got there.

"Note also that this satyr is a very old one. I doubt not that he is one of the original satyrs of ancient Hellas. Obviously, being half-gods, satyrs live a long, long time. I place this fellow's age at nearly two thousand three hundred years, although Apollonius, my colleague, is inclined to grant him even more. If he could talk, he might tell us some very curious things about his existence. How the encroachment of the hostile Christian deity drove him and his kind out of the Hellenic hills to seek refuge in unamiable lands. How some of his relatives went north into Europe to become strange gods, like Adonis becoming Balder, or Circe becoming one of the Lorelei, or the Lares Domestici becoming cuckoo clocks and mantel statuettes. Yes, he could tell much, I fancy.

"But most interesting of all would be the narration of his own journey into China, his bewilderment at the lacquer temples and prayer wheels, his disgust at the hot spiced Chinese wines, and his sadness at the footbound Chinese maidens who could not dance to his piping. Hey, the forlorn, lost demigod.

"Satyrs originated, I fancy, back in the old pastoral days when men stayed out in the hills with their flocks for long periods of time. Among other things, to amuse themselves and soothe their flocks, the shepherds would play on pipes such as this fellow has here with him. And, doubtless too, on the hills at night by their fires the shepherds would dream of love. Men do dream of love, you know; lonely men do. Well, they would dream of love, and their dreams would be of such potency that their very flocks would be colored by them. In the moonlight's magic, perhaps, a she-goat would be transformed into a charming girl. . . . And then in lambing time a strange, wee fellow would be seen cavorting among the

woolly babies. On his brow he bears his mother's horns; his feet are hoofed like hers; but for the rest he is a man. He grows up to become scornful of the stodgy sheep and goats and shy of man. He steals his father's lute and skips away. Simple folk see him at dusk by a lakeside, and a new pastoral god is born. . . .

"The satyr sits by some mirrored lake and plays, and even the little fishes swarm about and mimic a dance, for the music of the satyr's pipes is irresistible. He plays on his pipes, and the leaves on the trees dance, and the worms stick their heads out of their holes and writhe, and under the rocks scorpion hugs scorpion in hot, orgiastic bliss. . . . And, by and by, a nymph comes shyly to peep through the vines. . . .

"But that was a long time ago, and this is an old, old satyr. I doubt if he could do anything like that now. Let us go on to the next tent and see the sea serpent. This way, please."

The whole Rogers family came to the circus grounds a little after two that afternoon. The children were excited because they were about to see the circus; the mother was buoyant because her husband had a job again.

"Now I aint got a heck of a lot of money," said papa, "but we can see a sideshow or two, I reckon, and then go on into the main show. What sideshow do you kids want to see first?"

Unable to make up their minds, the children wrangled peevishly among themselves.

"Tell you what," said Mrs. Rogers after listening to them for a while; "let's go see that bear or man or Russian or whatever it is. I really would like to see it just to find out why it causes so many arguments."

Plumber John agreed; the family went in search of the bear tent. They couldn't find it. Then Doctor Lao came out on the platform again, recited his poem again, and started to talk about the show again.

John Rogers went up beside the platform and called to him: "Say, doc, where do you all keep the big bear at? We want to see it again. The one that was in the parade this morning."

"Me no savvee bear business," said the doctor and plunged on in his speech:

"In the tent to the right, ladies and gentlemen, you will find that world-famous thaumaturgist, Apollonius of Tyana, born contemporary with Christ. 'Socrates,' they used to say, 'leaves men on the earth, Apollonius transports them to heaven; Socrates is but a sage. Apollonius is a god.' Well, he's over there in the next tent ready to perform a miracle or two for your edification. You will find him an old, old man. He has been alive since the Christian era began, and his years

are beginning to show on him. Also, he has but recently learned English; bear with him there and do not laugh at his mistakes. Remember, he is the man who remained silent for five whole years listening to the counsel of his heart, the man who conversed with the astrologers of Chaldea and told them things they had never dreamed, the man who prophesied the death of the Emperor Domitian, the man who underwent the eighty tests of Mithra. In the tent to the right, ladies and gentlemen. Ten cents admission. Children in arms free."

"Hey, doc," said Plumber Rogers again, "whereabouts is the big bear? We all wanta see it again."

"Me no savvee bear business," said Doctor Lao and continued:

"In this tent to my left, good people, is one of those startling women, a medusa. One look out of her eyes and you turn to stone."

The doctor opened the tent door behind him and revealed a stone figure.

"This is what is left of a person in the last town where we showed. He would not heed my warning to look only at the medusa's reflection in a mirror. Instead he sneaked behind the canvas guardrail and stared her straight in the face. And this, ladies and gentlemen, is what is left of him. He doesn't make a very good statue, does he? Let me implore you, ladies and gentlemen, when you go into that tent, for your own good, look at her only in the mirror. It is very distressing for us always to have one or two customers turned to stone at every performance, besides being very difficult to explain to the police. So, once again, I ask you to look only at the medusa's reflection, not at the lady herself."

John Rogers tweaked the hem of the doctor's gown. "We wanta see the big bear, doc, me and the wife and the kids. Which tent is it in?"

Doctor Lao frowned down on the plumber. "Whatsa mattah allee time talkee talk bear business? Me no savvee bear business. You no like this Gloddam show, you go somewhere else." The doctor spread wide his arms and swept on in his discourse:

"Possibly the strangest of all the animals in this menagerie, and certainly one which none of you should miss seeing, is that most unique of all beasts, the hound of the hedges. Evolved among the hedgerows and grassplots of North China this animal is the living, breathing symbol of greenness, of fecund, perennial plant life, of the transitional stage between vegetable and animal. The greatest scientists of the world have studied this hound and cannot decide whether he is fauna or flora. Your guess, ladies and gentlemen, is as good as the next. When you examine him, you will notice that, although his form is that of the usual dog, his various bodily parts are

those of plants. His teeth, for instance, are stiff, thick thorns; his tail is a plait of ferns; his fur is grass; his claws are burrs; his blood is chlorophyll. Surely this is the weirdest beast under the casual canopy of heaven. We feed him hedge apples and green walnuts. Sometimes, too, though not often, he will eat persimmons. Let me advise you, good people, to see the hound of the hedges even though you must forgo seeing the mermaid or the werewolf. The hound is unique."

"I can't seem to get much information out of the old boy," said the plumber to his wife. "Let's look at something else first; then maybe we can find the bear later."

"Well," said Mrs. Rogers, "suppose we watch the magician. I think the children would like that."

So the plumber and his family went into the tent to the right to watch Apollonius perform. Except for the mage they were the only ones in the tent.

Apollonius looked at them dreamily as they filed in. "It will be ten cents apiece," he said. John Rogers handed him a half-dollar. The thaumaturge put the coin in an old cigar box and scratched his head thoughtfully. "Now what sort of magic would you be wanting to see?" he asked.

"I want to see you take a pig out of this bag," said Alice, holding up to him her little sack of candy.

"Elementary, my child, elementary," said Apollonius. He inserted two fingers into the mouth of the candy sack and drew out a Poland China shoat. It squealed and writhed and kicked its little legs. The magician handed it to Willie. "You keep this, lad. Feed it well. It ought to make good sidemeat some day."

"Oh, goodness," said Mrs. Rogers, "we haven't room for a pig, really. Our place is so small, you know."

"Um," said Apollonius. "What a pity." He took the pig away from Willie and shoved it back in the sack. "It was such a nice pig, too. What do you want me to do now?"

"Know any card tricks?" asked Mr. Rogers.

"A multitude of them," said Apollonius. He reached into a pocket of his gown, took out a pack of cards and shuffled them with one hand. The cards climbed and fell in graceful spirals and parabolas, pyramiding and mixing and disintegrating, but always returning into a neat square-sided pack.

"This is not magic," commented the wizard. "This is only manual dexterity. Shall I convert some wine into water for you?"

"Why not change water into wine?" asked the plumber.

"I can do that as readily," said the magician. He took up a beaker of water and mumbled over it. It changed color; a soft vinous odor was diffused in the air. He handed the beaker to Mr. Rogers. "Try a sip."

John tasted it. "Sherry," he said.

Apollonius tasted it. "I'd call it muscatel," he corrected. "What do you say it is, madam?"

Mrs. Rogers tried the wine. "It's a little like that in church," she said thoughtfully. "Of course, that's the only wine I ever drank before, so I don't know how to compare it."

"Well, it's not sacramental wine," said Apollonius. "I'm sure of that. But drink it up before Doctor Lao sees it. He doesn't like to have alcohol on the grounds."

Edna Rogers tugged at her mother.

"Mother, have him do something we like," she pouted.

"Do you care for flowers?" asked Apollonius.

"A little," said Edna.

"Naw, we don't like 'em," said Willie.

"Oh, yes, make some flowers for the children," said Mrs. Rogers.

The thaumaturge made passes in the air, and pink rose petals fell all about the family and on their shabby shoulders. He made more passes, and violets grew about their feet. Black flowers, yellow edged, climbed the sides of the tent. Mauve flowers with fuzzy tops and thin green leaves sprang up among the violets. A great grey flower on a hairy stalk floated up over their heads. It had a beard like a goat. Spikes and spines clustered the edges of its uneven petals.

Apollonius regarded the big blossom in wonderment. "Goodness," he said, "I never made a flower like that one before in all my life. I wonder what kind it could be. Do you know, mister?"

"Naw," said the plumber. "I don't know a whole lot of flowers. Just the common kinds like dandelions and all."

"Well," said Apollonius, "it's a big brute, whatever it is."

"I think you do the cleverest tricks," said Mrs. Rogers. "Don't you, children?"

Touched to the quick, the mage said: "Oh, these aren't tricks, madam. Tricks are things that fool people. In the last analysis tricks are lies. But these are real flowers, and that was real wine, and that was a real pig. I don't do tricks. I do magic. I create; I transpose; I color; I transubstantiate; I break up; I recombine; but I never trick. Would you like to see a turtle? I can create a very superior turtle."

"I do," said Willie. "I want to see a turtle."

The magician kicked away some of the violets until he came to the bare soil. Enough of this he scraped up to fill both hands. He molded the earth between his fingers, smoothing it and shaping it and patting it and rubbing it. It became yellow and thick and malleable.

"Oh, oh!" said Alice. "Look, it's changing into a turtle. Gee, that's a wonderful trick."

Apollonius placed the turtle on the ground. Its head was withdrawn into its shell. He tapped on its back with a twig. "That generally makes them stick their heads out," he explained.

After a moment or so of being tapped the turtle did stick its head out. But instead of a single head it produced two. The heads were side by side, joined to the neck like the forks of a stick. The two heads opened their four eyes and two mouths and yawned. Then each head tried to start in a different direction.

"Oh, goodness," said Apollonius disgustedly, "I would botch the job just when I wanted to do a really neat piece of magic for you. Imagine making such a freak of a thing! Two heads! Really, I apologize. I'm ashamed at my ineptitude."

"Oh, that's all right," said the plumber. "I guess them things are kinda hard to make right anyway."

Some more people came crowding into the tent, Doctor Lao following them.

"Uh, Apollonius," whispered the doctor, "I promised these folks you would resurrect a man from the dead for them. You'll do it, won't you? They all expressed themselves as being very much interested in watching you at it."

"Why, certainly," the wizard whispered back. "But, doctor, have we got a corpse?"

"I'll go and see," said the old Chinaman.

The crowd of people milled around on the flowers and frightened the turtle so that it pulled its heads back into its shell again. A big fat woman stepped on it. She looked down to see what was under her foot.

"Good God Almighty, Luther, there's a turtle in here!" she screeched.

"Where? Where?" asked Luther nervously. "Where the hell is it, Kate?"

"Right under my feet," sobbed Kate.

"It won't hurt you," said Mr. Rogers. "It's a real tame turtle, I think."

Luther pulled Kate aside and stared down at the chelonian. "It don't look tame to me."

"It's got two heads; hasn't it, mother?" said Willie.

"By God, I knew there was something queer about it," said Luther.

Doctor Lao came back in the tent with a big bundle in his arms.

"I got one," he whispered to Apollonius.

"Now stand back, all you people, around the edges of the tent," directed the doctor. "Apollonius of Tyana is about to perform the greatest piece of magic in several centuries. Before your very eyes he will restore life to a lifeless corpse.

Before your very eyes the dead will become quick again. And at no further cost to you than what you paid to enter this tent. Stand aside, ladies and gentlemen; stand aside, please! Give the man all the room he needs."

Apollonius stooped over and unrolled the bundle. A little shrivelled dead man, one who had been a laborer of some sort, was disclosed. He had on overalls, old worn army shoes with leather laces in them, a blue hickory shirt, and an old worn-out cowboy hat. In the leather sweat band of the hat were the initials "R.K." floridly delineated in indelible pencil. One of the leather shoestrings in the man's old worn-out army shoes had been broken and retied in several places. The knots looked as if they might have been done by a seafaring man.

Apollonius placed the cadaver on its side, drawing the arms up above the head. He bent the knees and slightly spread the legs. The corpse looked as if it was sleeping in a very uncomfortable position.

Appollonius began to pray a low, thick prayer. His eyeballs turned dead green; thin, hazy stuff floated out of his ears. He prayed and prayed and prayed. To the subtle spirit of life he sent his terrible invocation.

Then all of a sudden, when everyone was most expecting it, the dead man came to life, sat up, coughed, and rubbed his eyes.

"Where the devil am I?" he wanted to know.

"You're at the circus," said the doctor.

"Well, lemme outa here," said the man. "I got business to attend to."

He got to his feet and started off with a slight limp.

Luther caught his arm as he made for the door. "Listen, mister," he asked, "was you really dead?"

"Deader than hell, brother," said the man and hurried on out of the tent.

At about two-thirty two policemen arrived at the circus grounds to look the show over and see that nothing inimical to the public interest took place. One of the cops was a big fat jolly ignorant-looking guy; the other was a tall thin ugly man. They wore uniforms, Sam Browne belts, sidearms and shiny, brass badges. Doctor Lao spotted them from afar and slipped up behind them.

"Whatsah mattah? Chase crook? Somebody steal? Whatsah mattah cops come this Gloddam place? This my show, by Glod!"

"Now don't get all excited," said the fat cop. "We just come out to look around a little. Jest keep yer shirt on, slant-eye. We aint gonna arrest nobody unless they needs it. We're officers; how about us takin' in a few of these here sideshows?"

"Make yourselves at home, gentlemen," said Doctor Lao. "Go where you please when you please. I shall instruct the ticket-takers to let you in wherever you may choose to go."

"That's the way to talk," said the policeman. "Whattayah got that's hot right now?"

"The sideshows are all open. Go anywhere you please," said the doctor. "You must excuse me now; I must go and give my lecture on the medusa."

The cops wandered around a little, peering in tents and staring at people and nodding to their friends. They caught a little boy sneaking in under a tent, pulled him back, bawled him out, and sent him home in tears. Then they decided to see a sideshow or two.

"We'll jest go in one right after another so's not to miss anything," said the thin ugly cop.

"Right," said the fat ignorant-looking cop. "Ever see such a goofy circus?"

"Never," said his buddy. "Let's go in here."

They went in the medusa tent. The interior was tinted a creamy yellow, and pale silver stars spangled the yellowness. A big mirror hung on the far wall. Before the mirror was a canvas cubicle, the interior of which was reflected in the mirror. One could not see into the cubicle unless one looked in the mirror. Mirror and cubicle both were roped off so that no one could approach very near to either.

Sitting on a couch in the cubicle was the medusa paring her nails. Her youth was surprising. Her beauty was startling. The grace of her limbs was arousing. The scantiness of her clothing was embarrassing. A lizard ran up the canvas side of her enclosure. One of the snakes on her head struck like a whiplash and seized it. The other snakes fought with the captor for the lizard. That was bewildering.

"What in the devil kind of a woman is that?" demanded the big fat ignorant-looking cop.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Doctor Lao, "this is the medusa. She is a Sonoran medusa from Northern Mexico. Like her Gorgon sisters, she has the power to turn you into stone if you look her in the eye. Hence, we have this mirror arrangement to safeguard our customers. Let me beg of you, good people, to be satisfied with a reflected vision of her and not go peeking around the edge of the canvas at her. If anybody does that, I forecast lamentable results.

"First of all, however, look at her snakes. You will notice that most of them are tantillas, those little brown fellows with black rings about their necks. Towards the rear of her head, though, you can see some grey snakes with black spots on them. Those are night snakes, Hypsiglena ochrorhyncus, as they are called in Latin. And her bangs are faded snakes,

Arizona elegans, no less. One of the faded snakes just now caught a lizard which some of you may have seen. Her night snakes also eat small lizards, but the tantillas eat nothing but grubs and similar small worms; the feeding of them is sometimes difficult in colder climes.

"It was a doctor from Belvedere, I believe, who first pointed out that the snakes of a medusa were invariably the commoner snakes of the locality in which she was born; that they were never poisonous; that they embraced several different species; that they fed independent of the woman they adorned. This Belvederian doctor was interested primarily in the snakes and only secondarily in the medusa, so his observations, as far as sideshow purposes are concerned, leave much to be desired. However, I have made a study of this and several other medusas and, hence, am able to tell you a little about them.

"The origination of medusas is a puzzle to science. Their place in the evolutionary scale is a mystery. Their task in the great balance of life is a secret. For they belong to that weird netherworld of unbiological beings, salient members of which are the chimera, the unicorn, the sphinx, the werewolf, and the hound of the hedges and the sea serpent. An unbiological order, I call it, because it obeys none of the natural laws of hereditary and environmental change, pays no attention to the survival of the fittest, positively sneers at any attempt on the part of man to work out a rational life cycle, is possibly immortal, unquestionably immoral, evidences anabolism but not katabolism, ruts, spawns, and breeds but does not reproduce, lays no eggs, builds no nests, seeks but does not find, wanders but does not rest. Nor does it toil or spin. The members of this order are the animals the Lord of the Hebrews did not create to grace His Eden; they are not among the products of the six days' labor. These are the sports, the offthrows, of the universe instead of the species; these are the weird children of the lust of the spheres.

"Mysticism explains them where science cannot. Listen: When that great mysterious fecundity that peopled the worlds at the command of the gods had done with its birth-giving, when the celestial midwives all had left, when life had begun in the universe, the primal womb-thing found itself still unexhausted, its loins still potent. So that awful fertility tossed on its couch in a final fierce outbreak of life-giving and gave birth to these nightmare beings, these abortions of the world. Ancient man feebly represented this first procreation with his figurine of the Ephesian Diana, who had strange animals wandering about her robe and sheath and over her shoulders, suckling at her numerous bosoms, quarreling among the locks of her hair. Nature herself probably was dreaming of that

first maternity when she evolved the Surinam toad of the isthmian countries to the south of here, that fantastic toad which bears its babes through the skin of its back. Yes! Perhaps through the skin of the back of the mighty mother of life these antibiological beings came forth. I do not know.

"Now this medusa here is a young one. I should place her age at less than one hundred years. Judges of women have told me she is unusually attractive, that she possesses beauty far more lovely than that possessed by the average human girl. And I concede that in the litheness of her arms, the swelling of her breasts, the contours of her face, there is doubtless much that would appeal to the artistic in man. But she is a moody medusa. Sometimes I try to talk to her, to find out what she thinks about sitting there regarding all the world reflected in a mirror, potentially capable of depopulating a city merely by walking down the streets looking at the passers-by.

"But she will not talk to me. She only glances at me in the mirror with boredom—or is it pity or amusement?—on her face and fondles her snakes, dreaming, doubtless, of the last man she has slain.

"I recall an incident of some years ago when we were showing in the Chinese city of Shanhaikwan, which is situated at the northern extremity of the Great Wall. The medusa and some of the other exhibits in my circus were slightly ill from a long sea voyage, and the whole circus had a droopy air about it that was simply devastating to the business. Well, we put up our tents in Shanhaikwan and thought to stay there awhile until our animals had recovered. It was summer; the mountain breeze from Manchuria was refreshing. There was no war in progress thereabouts for a wonder, for that is the most war-ridden spot in the whole world; and we decided to stay there awhile and try to regain our customary equanimity.

"Sailors were in the city, sailors from foreign countries who were off their warships on shore leave; and they came to see my circus. They were a gang of drunken swine, but they paid the money, and I let them in. They saw the medusa and, being asses, thought she was just a girl I had fitted out with a cap of snakes in order to fool people. As if one had to go to all that trouble to fool people! However, as I was saying, they thought the medusa was an imposture; but they were enamored of her beauty and, for a boyish lark, they planned among themselves to kidnap her one night, take her down on the beach, rape her, and then cast her aside.

"So one black night, when the moon was behind a cloud-bank, these sailors came sneaking up to the circus grounds and with their knives sliced a hole in the medusa's tent and

went in after her. The night being so dark that they could not see her face, they were safe enough for the time being, at least.

"Apollonius and I were returning from a wineshop and realized what they were doing as we came staggering and arguing to our tent. I was very angry and would have loosed the sea serpent upon the ravishers; but Apollonius said not to, that the moon would be out presently, and then matters would take care of themselves. So I quieted down, and we watched and waited.

"There were ten drunken sailors in the mob. Pale as ghost-flesh were their white uniforms in the black darkness. As I say, they split the tent with their knives, seized the medusa, gagged her, and carried her down to the beach. Just when they got her past the dunes, the moon came out from behind its veil. And I assume the sailors were standing in a semicircle about the medusa, for next morning, when Apollonius and I went down there, ten stone sailors were careening in the sand just as she had left them after looking at them; and the drunken leers were still on their silly, drunken faces. And still are for aught I know, for those leers were graved in the living stone.

"I tell you, it does not pay to fool with a medusa. Are there any questions anyone would like to ask? If not, I suggest we go and look at the sphinx."

A big fat woman in the crowd said: "Well, I don't believe a word you say. I never heard so much nonsense in all my living days. Turning people to stone! The idee!"

A little man beside her said: "Now, Kate, don't go sounding off that way in front of all these people."

Kate said: "You shut up, Luther; I'll say what I darn good and well please!"

Doctor Lao said: "Madam, the rôle of skeptic becomes you not; there are things in the world not even the experience of a whole life spent in Abalone, Arizona, could conceive of."

Kate said: "Well, I'll show you! I'll make a liar out of you in front of all these people, I will!"

And Kate shouldered her way through the onlookers to the roped-in canvas cubicle where lounged the medusa.

"In the name of the Buddha, stop her!" screamed Doctor Lao.

But Kate bent under the guard rope and stuck her face around the edge of the cubicle. "Hussy," she started to say. And before she could utter a third syllable, she was frozen into stone.

Later on, while everybody was stewing around wondering what to do about it, a geologist from the university examined

Kate. "Solid chalcedony," he said. "Never saw a prettier variegation of color in all my life. Carnelian chalcedony. Makes mighty fine building stone."

Ed and Martha, the railroad traffic officer and his wife, brought their two sons to the circus at two twenty-five.

"Well," said Martha, "I never did see such a funny-looking circus in all my life. Are you sure we're at the right place, Ed?"

"Absolutely, my dear."

"Well, then, I suppose we better look at some of the sideshows. Here's a tent with a mermaid in it. Let's go in here."

"Well, I'll tell you, Martha, I hate to spend money on anything that's so obviously a fake. We both know there aint any such thing as a mermaid. Let's look around a little more. I don't mind being fooled if I don't know at the time that I am being fooled, but the very idea of spending money to see something I know good and well is a fake is somehow repugnant to me."

"Maybe it aint a fake, papa," offered Ed junior.

"Don't say 'aint,' dear," corrected mama patiently.

"Let's go look at the snake," suggested little Howard.

"Oooh, snakes make mother so nervous." Mama shuddered.

"Well, whatta we gonna do? Just stand around all the time?" asked Howard.

"Now don't go talking to your mother that way, or father'll switch some politeness into you when we get home," threatened the traffic officer.

Howard began to cry.

"And don't go turning on the weeps, either, or you'll get switched right now."

Howard ceased crying.

"Perhaps this hound of the hedges would be interesting," said Martha, looking at the legend on a banner streaming from a near-by tent.

"No," said Ed, "there's nothing to it. Only a dog painted green. I saw it in the parade this morning."

"Aw, gee, papa, let's look at something," begged Ed junior.

"Frankly, Martha," said Ed, "I don't believe there's anything here we want to see. We shouldn't have come. I never dreamed anyone would try to palm off on the public such a collection of foolishness."

Doctor Lao came by headed for the medusa exhibit.

"Whatsah mattah? You tink someblody makeum fool allah time. I no fool you. You come this place looky look; you looky look. By Glod, I no charge you nothing. You go in flor

nothing; takeum whole dam family flor nothing. You see: I no fool you. This place no catchum fake. This my show, by Glod!"

He pushed the traffic officer and his family into the tent with the roc's egg and dashed on about his business.

"He's the boss of this circus," explained Ed embarrassedly to his wife. "I guess he got sore about what I said about everything being a fake. What in the world is this thing here?"

"The sign said it was the roc's egg," said Martha.

The egg loomed like a monolith before them. Pockmarks in its shell were as big as golf balls. They oozed a thin watery secretion.

"It looks like an egg all right," agreed Ed. "But it's preposterous that any egg could be so big."

"Well, it is that big, isn't it, papa?" asked Howard.

"I guess so, my boy; I guess so."

"Well, what do we do? Just stand here and look at it?" asked Ed junior.

"Now, don't be impatient, dear," said mama.

"I tell you what," said the traffic officer; "I've got it figured out, I believe. It's not an egg at all. It's made of concrete or something, and it is a fake. There couldn't be an egg that big."

"Well, it looks that big, papa," said Howard.

"Now, Howard," cautioned mama.

"Well, why does all the water run out of it?" asked Ed junior.

"Oh, lots of times concrete'll sweat in hot weather, if it's poorly made," said papa. "It's porous, see, and soaks up moisture on cool nights. Then when it gets hot like this afternoon, the moisture collects and runs out. Kinda like a water pitcher. Capillary action, they call it."

"Gee, papa, you know everything, don't you, papa?'" said Howard.

"Well, I can tell a lump of concrete from an egg when I see it," admitted the traffic officer.

The egg began to emit creaking sounds. It seemed to move a little, and from its apex a noise of tapping came. "It's the heat expanding it," said papa.

The tapping became louder. An irritating scratching accompanied it. The egg shook and rolled a little. "Back up a little, everybody," said papa. "Looks like the thing was going to turn over."

A grating, tearing sound came from the top of the egg, and a hunk of shell fell off at their feet. A yellow bill the size of a plowshare stuck out of the egg.

"My God, it's hatching," said mama.

"Stand back, everybody," ordered papa.

The top of the egg splintered and crackled, and out of the ruptured opening a baby roc stuck its frowzy head and looked down at them. Silly pinfeathers, big as ostrich plumes, adorned its grey skin, and the yellow at the corners of its mouth was as yellow as butter. Then the egg fell all apart, and the roc chick stood weeping in the litter of eggshell. It opened its mouth and wailed with horrible hunger.

"Come on, let's get out of here," said the traffic officer.

"It wasn't really concrete, was it, papa?" asked Howard.

"Now, Howard, please don't ask any more questions," said mama.

Papa said: "Let's go on home, Martha. I don't like this place."

"All right," said Martha, smiling.

At the curb near the edge of the circus grounds a big truck prevented them from getting into their own car. Some rough-looking men were loading a big hunk of stone onto the body of the truck. The traffic officer recognized a man standing near the truck. He hailed him:

"Hello there, Luther! What did you do, buy a statue at the circus?"

Luther looked at him sourly. "That aint no statue," he said. "That's Kate."

"Epitomizing the fragrance of grassplots, lawns, and hedgy, thickset places, this behemoth of hounds stands unique in the mysterious lexicon of life. Most of the other curiosities of this circus, I regret to say, have a taint of evil or hysteria about them, but not this magnificent hound. He is as sweet as hay new mown with clover blossoms still unshriveled lying in it. He is as sunny as the dewy mornings his parent grasses so much love. He is a grand beast, if beast he may be called. Also, though I refer to him in the masculine gender, such designation is very loose; for, as a matter of fact, this hound has sex only as a water lily might have sex. He is alone of his kind throughout the world; no mate and no sire; no dam and no brood. This hound is no more masculine than a horse radish, no more feminine than a cabbage, less carnal than a tiger lily, and as little lustful as a rose bush.

"We found him in North China along the canals where the ricefields flourish and where grasses and little stunted hedges grow. For a long, long time that land had been nothing but so much parched dust with no green thing growing upon it anywhere. Then the canals were constructed and brought water to it, and over its dry skin lovely green things commenced to grow. That which had seemed dead quickened into life. That which had seemed sterile glistened with fertility. And as a

symbol and embodiment of that exuberant fecundity, the grasses and the weeds and the flowers and hedges and bushes each gave a little of themselves and created this hound, truly an unparalleled achievement in the annals of horticulture.

"We saw him first at dusk playing about the hedgerows, leaping, gamboling, biting at the hedge apples, pawing little holes in the ground and nosing fugitive seeds into them. Alarmed by us he ramped about in great tearing circles, flitting through the grasses and disappearing behind hedges so swiftly the eye could hardly follow him. His beautiful greenness entranced us. We had never seen so wonderful a hound in all the world.

"So we caught him. Out of his strange eyes he looked at us —eyes that were like green unripened pods. He was perfectly gentle. His tail of ferns wagged a little, switching his sides of green, green grass. From his panting mouth chlorophyll slavered. Around his neck a thin grass snake was curled, and his leafy ears harbored green katydids and tiny black crickets.

"In the meshes of our nooses he stood there regarding us. And, oh, that first close view of his great green glorious head! He was standing in the grasses, shoulder deep among the fresh green grasses; his parent grasses, the grasses that he loved. With their slim green fingers they caressed him and sought to shield him from us. They sought with their greenness to reabsorb his greenness, to hide him, to protect him; this their son. I tell you, nothing in the world has ever thrilled me as much as did the first sight of the hound of the hedges, and I have adored and studied animals for more than a hundred years. I said: 'Here is the masterwork of all life, here in this superb living body that is neither plant nor animal but a perfect balance of both. Here is a mass of living cells so complete in itself that it even demands no outlet for reproduction, content to know that, though it did reproduce its form a thousand times, it could never through that or through the evolutionary changes of a thousand generations improve upon its own victorious completeness.'

"Most immaculate of all was his conception among the humble weeds and grasses. All things trample them, devour them, plow them under and destroy them. But they endure and are beautiful and retain their gentleness and harbor no rancor. Yet once a great passion came to them, a pure passion not ever to be clearly understood; revolt was in it, and other things foreign to grasses; and out of that strange passion of the plants the hound of the hedges was conceived and born.

"And I wondered, too, for it had always been my belief that beauty was a modification of sex. Life sings a song of sex. Sex is the scream of life. Rutting and spawning the dance of

life. Breed, breed, breed. Fill and refill the wombs of the world. Tumescence and ejaculation. Flinging out spore and seed and egg and bud. Quickening and birth. Sterility and death. That was life, I thought, and that was life's means to the end that finally, after almost infinite centuries of trial and error, there might be produced the perfect living thing.

"But here was this hound, product of no trial and error process, lacking lust, unhampered by ancestral fears and instincts. And I wondered if in this hound of the hedges were not to be found the apogee of all that life could ever promise. For here were beauty and gentleness and grace; only ferocity and sex and guile were lacking.

"And I wondered: 'Is this a hint of the goal of life?' "

Doctor Lao reached in the cage and patted the hound's head. The beast soughed like the murmur of wind in sycamore leaves.

"What the hell is the Chink talking about?" asked Quarantine Inspector Number One.

"I'll be damned if I know," said Quarantine Inspector Number Two. "Let's go see the mermaid. That goddam dog looks like a fake to me, somehow."

She lolled in her tank of salt water, her winnowing fishtail stirring salty bubbles that frothed and foamed about her slight breasts, and little bits of waterfoam clung to her fair wild hair. Her sea-green, sleekscaled fishtail arched in the water, and the fanlike fin on the end showed pink as a trout's. She sang a little lilting song of the far waves from which they had taken her, and the goldfish that swam with her in the tank poised on their nervous fins to listen. She laughed at the little red fishes, stirring them with her slender hands. They came to her and nibbled about her shoulders and swam in and out among the tresses of her water-lifted hair. Graceful as a fish she was and beautiful as a girl, and stranger than either; and the two quarantine inspectors were shocked because she wore no bathing suit.

"We found her in the Gulf of Pei-Chihli," said Doctor Lao. "We found her there on the brown, muddy waves. They were brown and muddy because inland it had rained and the little rivers had carried the silt out into the sea. And after finding her we came upon the sea serpent, and we captured him, too. It was a most fortunate day. But she pines sometimes, I think, for her great grey ocean. I hate to keep her penned up in this tank, but I know of nowhere else to put her. I think I shall turn her loose some day when we are showing along the seacoast. Yes, I shall take her out in the dawn when no one else is about and carry her down to the sea. Waist-deep in the

water I'll go with her in my arms, and I'll put her down gently and let her swim away. And I shall stand there, an odd, foolish-looking old man, waist-deep in the water, mourning over the beauty I have just let slip away from me, mourning over the beauty I could touch and see but never completely comprehend; and, if anyone sees me there, waist-deep at dawn in the water, surely they will think me mad. But do you suppose that after she swims out a little ways she will turn and wave at me? Do you suppose she will blow a little kiss to me? Oh, God, if I could only have seen her when I was a young man! The contemplation of her beauty might have changed my whole life. Beauty can do that, can't it?

"Yes, I think I will take her down to the sea and free her. And I will stand there and watch her swim out into the tide. But I wonder if she will turn and wave at me. Do you think she will, sir?"

"Uh, I couldn't say," said Quarantine Inspector Number Two.

"What do you feed her, doc?" asked Inspector Number One.

"Seafoods," said the doctor. "Let's go look at the sphinx."

The blunt-nosed woman-face of the thing stared at the two inspectors as they followed the Chinaman into the tent. The leonine tail switched softly at flies. "You bring the queerest people in here, Doctor Lao," said the sphinx reproachfully.

"It's all in the interest of the trade," said the doctor.

"Good Lord! Can it talk?" asked an inspector.

"Of course," said the doctor, while the sphinx looked bored.

"What is it, a he-sphinx or a she-sphinx?" asked the other inspector.

Doctor Lao was embarrassed. "Come outside and I'll tell you," he muttered.

Out of the tent he said to them secretively: "I wish you hadn't asked that in front of the sphinx. You see, it's neither man nor woman; it's both."

"Aw, how can it be?" asked the first inspector.

"Haven't you gentlemen ever heard of such a thing? Really, I'm amazed. A long time ago a man named Winkelmann found it out by looking closely at little African sphinxes. They are actually both male and female at the same time. The state of being bisexual, it is called."

"Well, I'll be durned," said Inspector Number Two. "Let's go back and look at that critter again, Al."

Frank Tull, the lawyer, telephoned his wife a little after two from his office and asked her if she wanted to go to the circus.

"No," she said, "but I advise you to go and take another

good long look at that man you thought was a bear. Then maybe you'll realize how easy it is for people to see one thing and swear they saw something totally different when they get on the witness stand."

"Aw, honey," said Frank, "what the hell do you want to be nasty for? I thought you had forgotten all about that by this time. I said it was a man, didn't I?"

"Yes, but you said it just to humor me. And if there's anything I hate, it's being humored, especially when I know I'm right."

"Well, I'll tell you what, dear: you come and go with me, and we'll both look at that thing again, and whichever of us was wrong will apologize to the other. How's that?"

"My God, Frank, I know perfectly well it was a man! I see no necessity for going out to that hot circus just to convince myself all over again. But you go, and I will be very gracious about it when you come home and apologize to me for sneering at me the way you did this morning."

"You are being very unreasonable, darling."

"On the contrary, I conceive myself as being the acme of reasonableness, considering the way you cackled at me, and all those horried things you said about my needing glasses. If I had acted according to the promptings of my indignation I would have caused a scene that might have ended only in the divorce courts."

"Listen, honey, are you really still sore about that parade, or are you just kidding me?"

"No, I'm not sore, Frank. But neither am I kidding."

"Well, I wish you'd change your mind and go."

"No, Frank, really I don't care about seeing it. You go on by yourself and have a good time, dear."

"Well . . . good-by."

"Good-by."

So Frank told his stenographer to tell any of his clients who might call on him that he would be back in half an hour, and he went out and got in his sedan and drove down Main Street to the circus grounds.

A man of many artificial parts was Lawyer Frank Tull. His teeth had been fashioned for him and fitted to his jaws by a doctor of dental surgery. His eyes, weak and wretched, saw the world through bifocal lenses, so distorted that only through them could the distortion of Frank's own eyes perceive things aright. He had a silver plate in his skull to guard a hole from which a brain tumor had been removed. One of his legs was made of metal and fiber; it took the place of the flesh-and-blood leg his mother had given him in her womb. Around his belly was an apparatus that fitted mouth-like over his double

hernia and prevented his guts from falling out. A suspensory kept his scrotum from dangling unduly. In his left arm a platinum wire took the place of the humerus. Once every alternating week he went to the clinic and was injected either with salvarsan or mercury according to the antepenultimate week's dose to prevent the Spirochæta pallida from holding too much power over his soul. Odd times he suffered prostate massages and subjected himself to deep irrigations to rectify another chronic fault in his machinery. Now and then, to keep his good one going, they flattened his rotten lung with gas. On one ear was strapped an arrangement designed to make ordinary sounds more audible. In the shoe of his good foot an arch supporter kept that foot from splaying out. A wig covered the silver plate in his skull. His tonsils had been taken from him, and so had his appendix and his adenoids. Stones had been carved from his gall, and a cancer burnt from his nose. His piles had been removed, and water had been drained from his knee. Sometimes they fed him with enemas; and they punched a hole in his throat so that he could breathe when his noseholes clogged. He carried his head in a steel brace, for his neck was broken; currently also his toenails ingrew. As a member of the finest species life had yet produced he could not wrest a living from the plants of the field, nor could he compete with the beasts thereof. As a member of the society into which he had been born he was respected and taken care of and lived on, surviving, no doubt, because he was fit. He was a husband but not a father, a married man but not a lover. One hundred years after he died they opened up his coffin. All they found were strings and wires.

He parked his car, got out of it, and walked across the street to the circus to look at its freaks.

The chimera lay sleeping on a pile of freshly turned clay, and it coughed in its sleep; and the fetor of its belching, wafting upwards, asphyxiated the gnats that swarmed about its head. Little dead denizens of the lower air strata, they fell like floating flakes of powder, and no requiem accompanied their falling. The sleeping chimera kicked in his sleep, following the dictates of some action-filled dream; and the great claws of his paws lacerated the clay upon which he slept. His eagle wings half spread, their pinions expanding fanwise, and, all rumpled, they drew together again, the feathers tangled and fluffy. His dragon tail stirred snakelike, and the metal barb of its tip plowed up little furrows in the clay. His whiskers were singed where his fire-breath had scorched them. Some of the scales on his tail were gangrened and sloughing off where a colony of parasites bred and pullulated. He was shedding; great loose patches of fur, like hunks of felt, hung from his hide. Ticks crawled about in and over those patches. He

had a nasty minkish smell, keenly sweetish, fattily pukish, vile and penetrating.

Frank Tull, the lawyer, stood there and stared at the chimera and was horrified to perceive that it was not a fake after all.

"By Gawd!" said one of the quarantine inspectors, "I never thought there was no sech animal."

The sleeping chimera gave a great snort; sparks, soot, smoke, and flame frothed out of his nostrils.

"That's why we have to bed him down on clay," said Doctor Lao. "If we let him sleep on hay, he'd burn it all up. Do you know how he manages that fire-breathing trick? Well, sir, it's simple when you understand his metabolism. You see, the chimera, like Arizona's outstanding citizen, the Gila monster, has no elimination system in the sense that ordinary animals have. Instead of expelling waste matter through the bowels, he burns it up within him, and he snorts out the smoke and ashes. Yes, a chimera is its own incinerator plant. Very unusual beast."

"What makes you think Gila monsters have no elimination system?" asked Mr. Etaoin.

"Well, that's what everybody around here claims," said the doctor. "A hell of a lot of people have told me that. Seems that's how the Gila monsters get their poison: the waste matter in them having no outlet, it concentrates and intensifies and putrefies and works into their saliva so that when one of the big lizards bites anyone he thereby poisons him. Quite an interesting theory, I think. I much prefer its piquancy to a more rational explanation of Heloderma's venomous attributes."

"Well, however did you ketch this here shimmerra, doctor?" a country lass wanted to know.

"Oh, we got him years ago in Asia Minor. Chimeras have one frailty: they are enamored of the moon. So we took a mirror, placed it on a mountain top where it reflected the midnight moonlight, and the lunar-loving monster thought his bright silver ball was in reach at last. Well, sir, he came soaring and screaming down out of the heavens, crashed into the mirror, and us boys we jumps out, and over his shoulders we flings a golden chain. We had him!"

"Oh, Doctor Lao!" said a woman reporter from the *Abalone Tribune,* "I do so hope you will give me an interview sometime and tell me all about your wonderful adventures!"

"They'd make front-page news all right in a hick town like this," affirmed Doctor Lao.

An old-like, wealthy-looking party in golf pants and sport shirt and plaid socks probed at the chimera with his walking cane. The monster peevishly switched his tail like a horse

switching at flies, raking the cane out of the old-like party's hand and sloughing him across the shins with the metal-barbed tip.

"Don't be foolin' with that animal, mister," warned Doctor Lao.

"What do you feed him?" somebody asked.

"Rattlesnakes," said the doctor.

"Lots of rattlers around Abalone here," said one of the quarantine inspectors. "I killed a hellbellin' big sidewinder down towards Beeswax last spring."

"You must be mistaken, friend," said Doctor Lao. "Sidewinders do not attain to any great size. In fact, they are among the smallest of the crotaline snakes."

"Well, this one was bigger than hell, by God," asserted the quarantine inspector.

"What I can't understand," said the old-like party in the golf pants, "is how in the world one animal can combine in itself the attributes of a lizard, an eagle, and a lion, as does this chimera, and have them all so perfectly blended together. Now, I cannot tell where the lion leaves off in this beast and where the lizard begins, nor where the eagle starts in; yet there they all three are in a balanced combination. What sort of lizard would you say is incorporated in the monster's make-up, Doctor Lao? Could it be one of those Central American monitors, or iguanas as they are called?"

"Me no savvee lizard talk," said the old Chinaman.

"Maybe it's the beast of the Apocalypse," remarked Lawyer Frank Tull, who felt that he should remark something and not stand there forever silent like an idiot or a damn fool.

"Nothing of the sort," replied the old-like party in the golf pants. "We all know there never was such a thing. Biblical baloney, if you will permit me to say so, my dear sir. Biblical baloney. Sheer and unadulterated biblical baloney. Yes, sir, biblical baloney. You'll find lots of it in the old book."

"Well, my daddy claims the Bible's a mighty fine book," said the country lass.

"The chimera," said Doctor Lao, "flies high on tireless pinions; so high, indeed, that mortal man is rarely vouchsafed a glimpse of him. Years ago, in the Asia Minor campaigns of the great Iskander, one of the Macedonian captains killed a chimera with his longbow. He took it back with him to the museum at Alexandria, and there, to preserve it for posterity, it was mounted by some forgotten Egyptian taxidermist. Years later, a monk from Tibet saw it in the museum and, on returning to his lamasery, made a statue of it in porcelain and set it out to decorate the yard. Still later, a Chinese, coming to that part of the country from the Northern Capital, saw the strange figure and took measurements of its

proportions. Returning to his home, he fashioned another statue in bronze and presented it to Kublai, then great khan of all the Mongols. Then, when Kublai had the Tatar wall constructed in a square about the Northern Capital, he also ordered an astronomical tower built upon its eminence. In the tower were placed various instruments, yardstick arrangements for measuring the stars. And for the decorative motif to be worked into the design of these instruments, Kublai ordained that the figure of the chimera be used. This was done. Nowadays, one may still see chimeras in bronze writhing around celestial globes and holding in their claws celestial computing rods.

"Other Chinese kings, coming there from time to time, saw these chimeras, wondered at them, understood their significance not, and went away thinking that somehow the beasts symbolized the power of the great khan. Then the petty Chinese princes commenced using the chimera motif themselves and had it worked into the designs of their own royal decorations. About that time the misleading name of dragon was coined to designate this royal emblem, and wrongly, of course, the dragon was taken to mean ferocity. But the chimera of Kublai was a benevolent beast, a patron of the arts of contemplation and study; and it must have been surprised when later it found itself spraddled on a banner, going to war.

"Afterwards, when other lesser kings supplanted Kublai, one of them decided that his particular dragon should have five toes and that the dragons of other kings might have three toes, four toes, or even six or seven toes, but not five. A rival king disobeyed this edict, and war ensued. I forget how the war came out. You will notice that this chimera of mine, however, has four toes on his front feet and three on his rear, so the dogmatic king, if he supposed he had authenticity to back his claims, was very much mistaken. I never thought to count the toes on Kublai's chimeras in Peking, so I can't say whether the ancient sculptors were accurate."

"Will chimeras breed in captivity?" asked the lawyer.

"Oh, certainly," said the doctor. "They'll breed any time. This fellow here is always trying to get at the sphinx."

"Well, that isn't exactly what I mean, though, of course, it's interesting to know. I meant will they reproduce?"

"How can they, when they all are males?"

"What? Are there no female chimeras?"

"Not a single one, and very few males either, for that matter. You are looking at a rare animal, mister."

"Well, if there are no females, then where do they come from?"

"This one came from Asia Minor, as I already said a moment ago."

"Oh, hell! I mean how are they born?"

"Your question is unanswerable. No one knows the least detail of the life cycle of the chimera."

"Could it not be that the female chimera, like the females of several insect species, is of an entirely different bodily make-up from the male and, so far, has not been identified as such by science?" asked the old-like party in the golf pants.

"Science does not even recognize the existence of the male chimera, let alone search for its mate," said Doctor Lao.

"What is science, anyway?" asked the country lass.

"Science?" said the doctor. "Why, science is nothing but classification. Science is just tagging a name to everything."

The chimera awoke. The mists of sleep glazed his green eyes, and reflections of strange dreams swam and receded in his brain. Raising a hind foot he scratched at his tick-crawling hide and, done with the scratching, sniffed at the claw that had scourged the ticks. Doctor Lao took a rattlesnake from a large canister and tossed it to the chimera. The rattler fell in a heap, arched its head, whirred and buzzed and shifted its coils and defied the monster.

The chimera regarded the rattler as intently as a scullion maid regards a cockroach she is about to step on. Then he flung his tail high up over his back, as does a scorpion, and leaning forward, still as does a scorpion, struck the viper a smart blow on its head with the metal tip of his tail, also as would a scorpion. The rattler died. The chimera picked it up in his forepaws and, sitting kangaroo-like on his haunches, devoured the snake, nipping off the rattles with his front teeth and nicely spitting them aside. He ate the rattler a bite at a time as a child eats a banana and with every whit as much satisfaction. Done with the meal, the monster groveled before Doctor Lao, snorting smoke rings and begging for more food.

"No, my pretty thing; one snake a day is all you get in this hot weather," said the aged Chinese.

"You know," he continued to his audience, "it is very necessary to watch our animals' diet down here in Arizona. I think it is because of the lack of humidity or something. Although it may very well be nothing but the dust. Anyhow, if we overfeed them, they invariably have colic or, what is worse, worms. This chimera, of course, with his peculiar interior incinerating system burns the worms up as fast as they attack him. But take our sphinx, for instance. It is a homeric task to worm a sphinx. Ordinary vermifuges won't do at all. It takes a profoundly powerful purgative in large, incessant doses. The last time I wormed the sphinx it voided some of the strangest-looking worms I ever saw in my life. Just like enormous noodles they were. And now every time I look at noodles I think of those wretched tapeworms, and every time

I look at tapeworms I think of noodles. It's very distressing."

"The noodle is a favorite Chinese dish, too, is it not?" asked the old-like party in the golf pants.

"I prefer shark fins," said Doctor Lao.

The widow Mrs. Howard T. Cassan came to the circus in her flimsy brown dress and her low shoes and went direct to the fortuneteller's tent. She paid her mite and sat down to hear of her future. Apollonius warned her she was going to be disappointed.

"Not if you tell me the truth," said Mrs. Cassan. "I particularly want to know how soon oil is going to be found on that twenty acres of mine in New Mexico."

"Never," said the seer.

"Well, then, when shall I be married again?"

"Never," said the seer.

"Very well. What sort of man will next come into my life?"

"There will be no more men in your life," said the seer.

"Well, what in the world is the use of my living then, if I'm not going to be rich, not going to be married again, not going to know any more men?"

"I don't know," confessed the prophet. "I only read futures. I don't evaluate them."

"Well, I paid you. Read my future."

"Tomorrow will be like today, and day after tomorrow will be like the day before yesterday," said Apollonius. "I see your remaining days each as quiet, tedious collections of hours. You will not travel anywhere. You will think no new thoughts. You will experience no new passions. Older you will become but not wiser. Stiffer but not more dignified. Childless you are, and childless you shall remain. Of that suppleness you once commanded in your youth, of that strange simplicity which once attracted a few men to you, neither endures, nor shall you recapture any of them any more. People will talk to you and visit with you out of sentiment or pity, not because you have anything to offer them. Have you ever seen an old cornstalk turning brown, dying, but refusing to fall over, upon which stray birds alight now and then, hardly remarking what it is they perch on? That is you. I cannot fathom your place in life's economy. A living thing should either create or destroy according to its capacity and caprice, but you, you do neither. You only live on dreaming of the nice things you would like to have happen to you but which never happen; and you wonder vaguely why the young lives about you which you occasionally chide for a fancied impropriety never listen to you and seem to flee at your approach. When you die you will be buried and forgotten, and that is all. The morticians will enclose you in a worm-proof casket, thus sealing even

unto eternity the clay of your uselessness. And for all the good or evil, creation or destruction, that your living might have accomplished, you might just as well never have lived at all. I cannot see the purpose in such a life. I can see in it only vulgar, shocking waste."

"I thought you said you didn't evaluate lives," snapped Mrs. Cassan.

"I'm not evaluating; I'm only wondering. Now you dream of an oil well to be found on twenty acres of land you own in New Mexico. There is no oil there. You dream of some tall, dark, handsome man to come wooing you. There is no man coming, dark, tall, or otherwise. And yet you will dream on in spite of all I tell you; dream on through your little round of hours, sewing and rocking and gossiping and dreaming; and the world spins and spins and spins. Children are born, grow up, accomplish, sicken, and die; you sit and rock and sew and gossip and live on. And you have a voice in the government, and enough people voting the same way you vote could change the face of the world. There is something terrible in that thought. But your individual opinion on any subject in the world is absolutely worthless. No, I cannot fathom the reason for your existence."

"I didn't pay you to fathom me. Just tell me my future and let it go at that."

"I have been telling you your future! Why don't you listen? Do you want to know how many more times you will eat lettuce or boiled eggs? Shall I enumerate the instances you will yell good-morning to your neighbor across the fence? Must I tell you how many more times you will buy stockings, attend church, go to moving picture shows? Shall I make a list showing how many more gallons of water in the future you will boil making tea, how many more combinations of cards will fall to you at auction bridge, how often the telephone will ring in your remaining years? Do you want to know how many more times you will scold the paper-carrier for not leaving your copy in the spot that irks you least? Must I tell you how many more times you will become annoyed at the weather because it rains or fails to rain according to your wishes? Shall I compute the pounds of pennies you will save shopping at bargain centers? Do you want to know all that? For that is your future, doing the same small futile things you have done for the last fifty-eight years. You face a repetition of your past, a recapitulation of the digits in the adding machine of your days. Save only one bright numeral, perhaps: there was love of a sort in your past; there is none in your future."

"Well, I must say, you are the strangest fortuneteller I ever visited."

"It is my misfortune only to be able to tell the truth."

"Were you ever in love?"

"Of course. But why do you ask?"

"There is a strange fascination about your brutal frankness. I could imagine a girl, or an experienced woman, rather, throwing herself at your feet."

"There was a girl, but she never threw herself at my feet. I threw myself at hers."

"What did she do?"

"She laughed."

"Did she hurt you?"

"Yes. But nothing has hurt me very much since."

"I knew it! I knew a man of your terrible intenseness had been hurt by some woman sometime. Women can do that to a man, can't they?"

"I suppose so."

"You poor, poor man! You are not so very much older than I am, are you? I, too, have been hurt. Why couldn't we be friends, or more than friends, perhaps, and together patch up the torn shreds of our lives? I think I could understand you and comfort you and care for you."

"Madam, I am nearly two thousand years old, and all that time I have been a bachelor. It is too late to start over again."

"Oh, you are being so delightfully foolish! I love whimsical talk! We would get on splendidly, you and I; I am sure of it!"

"I'm not. I told you there were no more men in your life. Don't try to make me eat my own words, please. The consultation is ended. Good afternoon."

She started to say more, but there was no longer anyone to talk to. Apollonius had vanished with that suddenness commanded by only the most practiced magicians. Mrs. Cassan went out into the blaze of sunshine. There she encountered Luther and Kate. It was then precisely ten minutes before Kate's petrification.

"My dear," said Mrs. Cassan to Kate, "that fortuneteller is the most magnetic man I ever met in my whole life. I am going to see him again this evening."

"What did he say about the oil?" asked Luther.

"Oh, he was frightfully encouraging," said Mrs. Cassan.

Influenced by liquor as they had never been influenced by the Young Men's Christian Association, the two college youths from back East, Slick Bromiezchski and Paul Conrad Gordon, came into the circus uttering wisecracks and having a hell of a good time generally.

Doctor Lao saw them at long range and came dashing up. "Whatsah mattah Glod damn college punks come this place?" he demanded. "You no savvee nothing here. Glet to hell out! This my show, by Glod!"

They laughed at the little old man's frenzy, threatening to sic the Japs on him if he didn't pipe down. They quoted laws they made up on the spot to show him he couldn't prevent anyone who paid from looking at his circus. Advising him to give up trying to be a Barnum and to go back to washing the smells out of shirt-tails, they wended their way to the peepshow and forgot him.

The peepshow was within a small tent off by itself. A curtain in the tent had holes punched in it at various heights to accommodate the eyes of men of varying stature. Through one of the holes an old-like party in golf pants was staring; through another a quarantine inspector was trying to get his eyes focused; the remaining holes were vacant of peepers.

The college youths each slected a hole that suited his ocular altitude, hunched over, and stared and stared.

Around an old grass hut three Negro priests were dancing beneath a symbol of striking masculinity. It was a rain dance, and a drizzle accompanied their posturings. They threw off their grass skirts, dancing nude under the huge lingam, their black hides greasy with the rain.

Out of the hut five maidens came, black maidens, lean and virginal and luscious. The priests pounced upon them and stripped them, and flung away dancing; the double thud of drums came mumbling through the rain. The black girls danced among the priests, stumbling and limping as the chaff and stubble on the ground bit into their feet. Black bodies bounded in the grey wetness.

The double thud of drums drummed louder, and the priests danced more madly; but exceeding even their ardor, the wenches snatched long willow withes from trees and flailed the black priestly hides, the withes cutting pink stripes along the ordained backs and bellies; and the double thud of drums came roaring down through the pouring rain, and the black priests howled and postured from the hot, queer pain of the maidens' lashings.

The great lingam shook and trembled; the grey dust of the rain settled like ashes on the black skins; the wind laughed and screamed; the rain ceased; and out of the forest stalked Mumbo Jumbo thumping a tomtom.

Under an amorphously soft glowing rainbow came Mumbo Jumbo; and the black Corybants kotowed and groveled and salaamed and genuflected and hunkered down and made obeisance. He spat on their godpraising shoulders.

The wenches eyed him and wiggled at him, made coy signs to him and trembled lasciviously. Mumbo Jumbo examined them carefully, felt and prodded and punched and pinched them. And he squeezed and rubbed and tickled and bit them.

And he kissed them and rubbed their noses and pulled their ears and tasted their tongues and smelled their breaths and fingered them; and the wenches endured it all and snuggled up to him and warmed against him. But they pleased him not. He took up a club and beat them down into the mud; and he jabbed and poked the priests to their feet, and into their cowed faces he yelled his disapproval.

They huddled together and mumbled amongst themselves. One came cringing up to the god, making placating passes at him. Mumbo Jumbo struck him down beside the rejected virgins.

Then the other priests slunk into the grass temple and emerged carrying a cross upon which was bound a fair-haired Nordic girl. They dropped her at the god's feet and fled. Mumbo Jumbo looked down upon her and was pleased. He unloosed her from the cross, picked her up by the hair, and under the still amorphously soft glowing rainbow, disappeared into the forest.

"Whoopee!" yelled Paul Conrad. "Boy, do I envy that big coon!"

"Oh, shut up!" said the old-like party in the golf pants. "Can't you damned punks look at anything without yelling your fool heads off? Where the hell do you think you are, anyway; back on the campus?"

"Well, if you don't like our style, grampaw, why, you know what you can do about it," said Slick Bromiezchski.

"For once you said something intelligent," replied the old-like party. "I'm going to complain to the management." And he went barging out of the tent.

"Imagine complaining to the management of this outfit," chortled Paul.

"Just imagine," chortled Slick.

Laughing tranquilly, the college men returned to their peepholes.

Nymphs lay about on grey rocks, fat young nymphs with stomachs like washerwomen's and hips like horses'. Out in the rushes by the sea's edge the faun stood watching them.

Pink and white and young, and shy with the innocence of youth was the faun, pretty as a little choirboy without his cassock and hymnal. He stood amid the green rushes and watched the fat, lewd girls, who knew he was watching them. And they laughed and flounced about and did obscene things to one another, and the little faun parted the green rushes the better to watch them.

Two nymphs danced, the others laughing at them and urging them on; and all the nymphs watched the faun out of the corners of their eyes as he trembled among the rushes. But

he only watched; he would approach no closer; and they called jeeringly to him and dared him to come play with them. But he shook his head, remaining where he was.

The nymphs lolled about, pawing at each other; and each nymph hoped that the others would leave so that she alone might go down to the faun. Then he came out of the rushes and up on the sand a little way, and from behind a rock, ready to leap away, watched them. They pretended to disregard him, knotting flowers in their hair, tossing sand on one another's shoulders, squatting about awkwardly and laughing shrilly. One threw a bee on her sister, and the bee stung, and the sister wept and then rose furiously to her feet; and the two nymphs fought as girls fight, weeping and scratching and biting and clawing. And the others threw sand at them and laughed and urged them on. And the little faun crept up a little closer.

One of the girls took a bunch of grapes in her hand and, offering them to him, walked toward him slowly. Her soiled feet shuffled in the dry sand, her frowzy hair hung in knots and snarls, and there were smudges and bruises on her thick legs. She held out the shriveled, rotten grapes to him, and grinned with her fat mouth at him, but revulsion came over him and he retreated toward the sea. There was sadness in her eyes as she threw away the fruit and returned to her sisters.

Her sisters mocked her and mimicked her. Angry, she seized a stick and hit at them; they rolled away from her, laughing. But out of the corners of their eyes they watched the faun.

Then the prettiest of them, the slenderest, the cleanest, the most desirable, the freshest, left the others and walked off toward a far point of the sea. And her sisters, pretending not to notice her, started dancing again and singing, and now and then calling to the faun. On his haunches he sat and watched them uneasily; but he would not call back to them, and he would not join them.

They waved green branches at him, and tossed little shells to him, and called him names, and made faces at him. They joined hands, dancing in a circle round a flower bush.

The nymph that had left them skirted along the far beach. Then, hidden by the rushes, she entered the water and, knee-deep in the shallow sea, screened by the lush reeds, she waded up behind the faun. And the circle of nymphs, dancing with joined hands, danced slowly closer to him. He crouched there watching them, and he trembled.

She came out of the water softly without splashing and stole up behind him. The other girls broke the dance and sprang down at the faun. He leaped to make for the sea, but

the pretty nymph was upon him. She caught him by the hands.

And the fat, lewd girls enclosed him in a circle of their riotous flesh, touching their uncleanliness against his white skin, pawing him with their lascivious fingers, and snatching him from one another that they might kiss his mouth with a kiss of lust and shame.

He fought against them bitterly and boyishly, striking at them angrily, yet weakly, as though he were afraid of hurting them; and there was something in his face that was not bitterness or anger; and sometimes when his hands fell on them they felt a caress instead of a blow.

He dropped down on the sand. They knelt squealing and simpering about him. In the tangle of arms and legs one of the faun's hands crept up and palped the pretty nymph's round bosoms.

"Boyoboy," snickered Slick, "I wonder what word the Greeks had for that!"

Outside the tent the voice of the old-like party in the golf pants said complainingly, "They're in there, Doctor Lao, both of them. Half drunk and abusive. If you value the feelings of the rest of the people who want to look at your show, you'll chase them away from the grounds."

"Me fix 'em!" said the doctor. "Glod damn punks! Me fix 'em. Hey, Lube! Hey, Lube!"

"We're about to get the bum's rush," giggled Paul Conrad.

Into the tent something big and black and hairy came storming and grabbed the two college youths and yanked them out. Through the circus grounds it dragged them to the curb of Main Street, and out in the street on their ears it tossed them. And whether it was a man or a bear or a Russian no man could say, but plenty of men argued profanely about it.

"Damned best job of bouncing I ever saw in my life," commented the quarantine inspector to the old-like party in the golf pants. "Let's go back and look at that peepshow again, old-timer. Some of that stuff is kinda interesting."

Mr. Etaoin contemplated the sea serpent, and the sea serpent contemplated Mr. Etaoin. Mr. Etaoin lit a cigarette and blew grey smoke. The sea serpent exserted its tongue and flickered it; a long yellow naked nerve of a tongue, big as a man's hand, wrist, and arm, languidly sentient, gracefully forked, taster of sounds, feeler of vibrations, symbol of strange senses, silent and secret, suggestive of evil that harked back to Eden. Mr. Etaoin's eyes, circumscribed by rings of horn, looked at the snake through dust-speckled glass ovals. The serpent's eyes, lidless and fixed, regarded the proofreader with catlike pupils, thin black ellipses standing on end in fields

of copper. The proofreader's eyes were dull, muscle-bound green things. The snake's eyes were sombre, rare, and wicked jewels.

Bored with the mutual examination, the snake slowly looped about its enormous cage, the convolutions of its body and tail following through the invisible pathway previously described by its head. Head rearing, it tested the interstices and reticulations of the steel latticework that kept it captive, hoping listlessly to find an opening it had overlooked before, searching the confines of its jail world for freedom into the beyond, examining for the thousandth time the same old bars that hemmed it in.

Etaoin moved jerkily, startling the serpent. It faced him, vibrating its tail against the wooden floor of its cage so that a whirring arose like a woodsaw's song.

THE SNAKE: Why do you stand there staring at me? You and I have nothing in common except our hatred of each other.

ETAOIN: You fascinate me. But why do you buzz your tail that way, mimicking a rattlesnake?

THE SNAKE: Why not? It is my fondest atavism.

ETAOIN: Could it be that the instinctive urge which prompts me to seek a tree when a dog barks at me is the same one that prompts you to endeavor to rattle when you are alarmed?

THE SNAKE: No. Your urge is born of fear. Mine of hate. Your instinct is one of cowardice. Mine one of counter-attack. You wish to flee. I to fight back. You are afraid of your own shadow. I am afraid of nothing.

ETAOIN: The god who gave you bravery gave me cunning.

THE SNAKE: I would not trade with you.

ETAOIN: Nevertheless, you are in a cage, and I am free to walk about.

THE SNAKE: Oh, you have your cage, too. You test your bars just as often as I test mine.

ETAOIN: I understand you somewhat vaguely.

THE SNAKE: I shall not be more explicit.

ETAOIN: Why do you keep rubbing your chin against the floor?

THE SNAKE: Why do you stand there like a fool? I do it because I like the sensation; because the friction gives me sensual pleasure; because my face itches and the rubbing ameliorates the irritation. Hah! Would you call scratching a counter-irritant for itching? Have I made an epigram?

ETAOIN: I doubt it.

THE SNAKE: Why do you wear those things over your eyes?

ETAOIN: In order to see.

THE SNAKE: The god that made you cunning made my eyes

efficient enough to perceive objects without aid. In fact, the Lord of All Living dealt with me quite generously. Strength He gave me, and symmetry and endurance and patience. Viper and constrictor both He made me. My venom is more virulent than a cobra's. My coils are more terrible than a python's. I can slay with a single bite. I can kill with a single squeeze. And when I squeeze and bite at the same time, death comes galloping, I tell you. Heh, heh, heh! But look at you! You even have to hang rags on yourself to protect your weak skin. You have to hang things in front of your eyes in order to see. Look at yourself. Heh, heh, heh! God did well by you, indeed!

ETAOIN: I concede I am not His most perfect vessel.

THE SNAKE: What do you eat?

ETAOIN: I enjoy a catholicity of taste. I eat grapes and pig's feet, snails and fishes, proteins and carbohydrates. Also I am fond of gooseliver.

THE SNAKE: I eat only meat and fish and fowl. Once I ate a little brown boy. Shall I tell you about that?

ETAOIN: If you wish.

THE SNAKE: Well, my geography is not good, but it was on an island somewhere in some ocean, and it took a long time to swim there, and I swim fast. Notice how my tail is paddle-shaped. Well, I arrived at this island towards dawn of the seventh day; and there I decided to change my skin. It should have been changed days before, but one can't moult in mid-ocean. So I landed on a pretty little beach, steering through some treacherous rocks and breakers and only barely avoiding a dangerous stretch of shoal water. Out on the sand I glided, all eighty feet of me—at least, that is my length according to Doctor Lao, and he understands such matters—and I headed for some thick, trashy bushes I saw up on the bank a way. I tell you it is a bother to crawl about on land after swimming in the ocean. Well, I got in amongst the trashy bushes, sloughed and plowed my head around, and finally unhooked the epidermis from my upper and lower jaws. Then I snagged the ends of the old hide onto the bushes, and after that it was merely routine stuff wriggling out of the rest of it. The old skin bunches up under one's throat, you know, and gradually works back down off the rest of the body; and the faster you shag around in the bushes, the faster the old hide comes off. Well, I chased around and around, and off it came, and I was glad to see the last of it; it had become very uncomfortable the last day or so.

Now I have observed that every time I change my skin, immediately after the shedding I become hungry. So, gleaming and glistening and shining and sparkling and sleek

and colorful in my new skin, I started looking about the island for something to eat. I went over a hill and through a forest and across a valley and never saw anything at all. Then I came to a river and swam up into the current. And it was a small river and a wiggly one, and when I would look behind me, all I could see would be myself disappearing around some bend. Well, I went up that river; and I tell you, all the little fishes in it thought their millennium had come.

Pretty soon I came to a town, a town of mud shacks and darky people. They were all loafing around near the river bank, listening to one of their medicine men tell what I doubt not was a most astrocious lie. I came sluicing up near them; they screamed and fled, and like chickens they fled in circles; and though you may not believe it, some of them actually hopped in the river and tried to swim across.

And I watched them and looked them over and picked out the one I wanted for a meal. I chose a little coffee-colored fat boy. Ah, I'll wager his mother had fed him on duck eggs and roast bananas he was so fat. Why, his belly rolled out so far he couldn't see his own knees.

Anyway, he chose to climb a tree. You know how those natives climb trees: tie their hind feet together and go up a slanting trunk with silly froghops. That's what this brat did. I let him get clear to the top, up among the fronds and coconuts. He looked down at me like a monkey, and the way he bawled one would have thought something terrible was about to happen to him.

Well, sir, I reaches up real easy-like, you know, easing up along the trunk, slow, slow; my hide rippling and undulating, as with soft efforts I give my head more altitude. And my old tongue what scares folks so—for they think it's a stinger—well, sir, my old tongue was just in and out all the time, giving it hell, I tell you. Gawd! I thought that lil nigger would bust his voice box when he seen my old tongue a-lickin' up at him, giving it hell thataway.

Well, sir, I snags him by the leg; an', Jesus, did he bawl then! But I gets a good holt, an' I says between my teeth: "Come outa that, yuh lil bastard!" an' I gives one hell of a yank; and, boyoboy, he lets loose, and I sways way back with him in my mouth and loses my balance, and we come crashing down to the ground with a hell of a jar. Damned near knocked me cold.

I swallowed him much as you would swallow an oyster and with every bit of as much right, if you will pardon an ethical intrusion. And just when he was well down between my jaws, so that my head was all swelled out of shape and my eyes were bugging out like lamp globes, why, damn me,

if the kid's old pappy didn't come along with his fish spear and start to make trouble. Well, I couldn't do a hell of a lot of biting with the boy wedged in my mouth that way, but, believe me, fellah, I took care of the old man, all right. I got a hitch around him and his goddam fish spear with about the last third of my body; and when I got through squeezing him, he was ready to cry uncle, only he couldn't on account of his lungs being collapsed.

ETAOIN: You tell a vivid tale. What happened to the child's father?

THE SNAKE: Oh, I et him, too. And I looked around for the old lady, but I couldn't find her, so I just et the first vahine I came acrost. But the little fat boy was the best.

ETAOIN: You are a rare raconteur. Tell me of other of your meals.

THE SNAKE: No. It's your turn now. You tell me a story.

ETAOIN: There was a pig. A Duroc Jersey pig. It scampered about in its sty, eating slop and entertaining no spiritual conflicts. Fat it grew and fatter. Then one day its master loaded it into a wagon, took it to the depot, put it in a freight train, and sent it to a packing company. There it was slain, gralloched, and quartered after the manner of slaughterhouses. Some months later I went into a restaurant and ordered pork chops. And the chops they served me—may I die this instant if I lie—were from that very pig of which I have been talking. And the moral of this story is that the whole, sole, one and only and entire purpose of that pig's life, and the lives of its ancestors, and the lives of the things upon which pig and ancestors fed, and the climate and habitat that fostered their propagation and maturations, and the men who bred them and tended them and marketed them—the sole purpose of all that intermixed mass of threads and careers, I say—was to provide for me in that restaurant, at the moment I wanted them, a pair of savory pork chops.

THE SNAKE: There is merit in your contention. I philosophized along much the same lines when I was eating the little brown boy. Ah, I do so dearly love to talk about eating.

ETAOIN: There is but one subject more interesting.

THE SNAKE: I assume you refer to love.

ETAOIN: Yes. I do. Yes.

THE SNAKE: I still remember my first affair. It must have been eleven centuries ago. Ah, but she was lovely! Some twenty feet longer than I she must have been, for I was a yearling then; and her great fangs were like the blades of pickaxes. I was in the west; she was in the east. I smelled her all the way across the world. It was the first time I had ever smelled that smell, but I knew what it meant: funny how one knows

some things without ever being told. I steered through the ocean waters to the east where she dwelled.

ETAOIN: It must have been a great voyage.

THE SNAKE: It was. I saw the nautilus, the squid, the obelia, and the elasmobranch shark. Flying fish flew about my head, and a frigate bird sailed over me. Hungry, I snatched the frigate out of the air and devoured it without even missing a stroke of my tail.

ETAOIN: How did it taste?

THE SNAKE: Nasty and fishy. I never ate another one. Pelicans, however, are not bad, and snow geese are extremely palatable.

ETAOIN: Well, did you find your mate?

THE SNAKE: Aye. Up alongside a brown rock island. She was cold and coy. She slithered up on top of the rocks and hissed at me. I slithered after her; my passion warmed her; my ardor allayed her coyness. Tell me, do men bite women on the neck when they woo them?

ETAOIN: Sometimes.

THE SNAKE: So do we. I bit her in the neck, and she hooked onto my lower jaw, and I could feel her poison circulate into me. But it didn't hurt me any; nor did mine hurt her. Then I dragged her off that rocky island, threw a loop or two about her, and so we wrestled in the bouncing, nervous waves. I remember the sky clouded and thunder muttered, as though the elements were disturbed by our antics. Tell me, do men tire of women after they have lain with them?

ETAOIN: Sometimes:

THE SNAKE: So do we. I tired and left her and returned to the west, to a place of enormous turtles and volcanic stones. The turtles there eat only vegetables and fruits; they attain tremendous age; and though they have never been elsewhere than their little volcanic island, they are profoundly wise. I lay in the sand and talked to them. They asked me questions, and they told me many strange and beautiful things. Their feet are like the feet of elephants, and their voices slow and low. But tell me, after the period of surfeit wears off, do men again lust after women?

ETAOIN: Sometimes.

THE SNAKE: So do we. The following year I smelled her again, clear across the world again, too; and I heeded the call and went to her. And I went to her every year thereafter until . . .

ETAOIN: Until what?

THE SNAKE: Until Doctor Lao caught me and penned me up. Tell me, do men in cages . . . ?

ETAOIN: Sometimes.

THE SNAKE: So do we.

ETAOIN: People every now and again throughout maritime history have claimed to have seen you. Did you make a practice of sticking your head out of the waves and frightening people?

THE SNAKE: Oh, sometimes when I saw a boat, I'd swim over to it and look in it just for the fun of hearing the folks scream. I like to keep alive my legend, too, you know.

ETAOIN: Tell me how Doctor Lao managed to capture you.

THE SNAKE: It was on account of the mermaid. I had never seen anything like her before. Tell me, is she beautiful?

ETAOIN: Extremely so.

THE SNAKE: Well, I was puttering around off the China coast one day when Doctor Lao came along in his big old junk. The thing sailed right over me, as I was submerged at the time looking for cuttlefish. Directly, however, I came to the top to get some air, and I saw the doctor dragging what I took to be a big bright fish out of the water. He and all the coolies with him were yelling to beat the devil, so I swam up alongside to see what they had caught that excited them so. It was the mermaid. I just hung my head over the prow of that junk and stared at her. Then, while I was still in my trance, Doctor Lao threw a hawser loop about my neck and took a bight around the windlass with the other end. Just like a goddam rope, those Chinks hauled me up on deck. The damn hawser choked me unconscious, and when I came to I was in a cage. I've been in one ever since. That was nine years ago. But my day is coming. I don't forget.

ETAOIN: What will you do?

THE SNAKE: I shall dine, and Doctor Lao will furnish the meat course.

ETAOIN: Contingent, of course, upon your escape from this cage.

THE SNAKE: Exactly.

ETAOIN: After the meal, then what?

THE SNAKE: Oh, I shall get the mermaid, load her on my back —I think she can hold on if she uses her hands and fishtail at the same time—and then I shall get into the nearest river and swim to the sea. And nothing better try to stop me, either.

ETAOIN: Why take the mermaid?

THE SNAKE: She is a daughter of the sea just as I am a son of it. She yearns for it as much as I do. Besides, she is beautiful. You said so yourself. I will take her to the sea and free her there. Do you suppose she will wave her hand at me when she gets out into the tide? Do you suppose she will smile at me as she swims away?

ETAOIN: Of course she will.

THE SNAKE: I hope so. Then I will get upon the tide myself and go east to that brown, rocky island. My mate will still be there; I know she will. I shall go east to her. Obelia and nautilus and squid and elasmobranch shark—I shall see them all again.

ETAOIN: I'd like to go with you.

Mr. Etaoin wandered through the circus grounds waiting for the main performance to open. He encountered the lady reporter from the *Tribune* coming out of another tent.

"I'll bet you envy me," she said. "I've just had an interview with Doctor Lao himself!"

"Piffle," said Etaoin. "I've just had an interview with his snake."

Pleasantly saturated with Harry Martinez's good beer, Larry Kamper and his companion sat at the bar conversing and sipping and smoking. They had found interest and friendship each in the other, and had watered the seeds of their camaraderie with plentiful drenches of cool, mellow beer. Weather, hard times, and the parade having been talked out thin, the matter of Larry's career in the Orient in the service of his country's flag was now attached.

"Man and boy," said Larry, "I put in six goddam years among the heathen and I come home to get civilized all over again. Jees, I was like a little farmer kid in a city fer the first time when I got to Frisco."

"Whereabouts was you in China, Larry?"

"Up in Tientsin most of the time. That's where the Fifteenth is stationed. Course we did a lot of chasing around, too."

"Wot kinda beer they got over there?" asked Harry Martinez.

"Oh, Asahi an' Sakura an' Gold Bottle an' Five Star an' Kupper an' Chess an' Spatenbrau an' Munchen an' a hell of a lot of other kinds. The Kupper was the best, though. Gawd, I drunk enough of it to float a battleship. Sure was fine beer."

"Well, wot kinda women was there?"

"Oh, there was all kinds—Koreans an' Manchurians an' Japs an' Russians an' Cantonese an' Annamites an' Jews an' Latvians an' Slavs an' French an' Alsatians an' Filipinos. Hell of a lot of women. The Manchurians was the best, though. Big old cowlike girls with soft eyes an' big feet what they didn't never bind. They wore trousers an' jackets like men; and their hair was like black smoke, black, greasy smoke."

"I always heard," said his friend, "that them Chinese women was made different. Is that a fack?"

"Nah," said Larry, "they're just like any other women. Funny thing, though, a lot of Chink men think the same thing

about white women. Wonder how that damn idea started, anyhow?"

Neither his friend nor Harry Martinez could help him in his bewilderment.

"Lord God," Larry's friend said, "I sure would like to travel around over the world and see funny people and queer places like you have. I all time wanted to travel, but I never will, I reckon; I'll just stick here in Abalone with the wife an' the kids and scratch along till I die. I was just thinking the other day why couldn't I slip off an' beat my way to the coast an' stow away on a boat goin' to Australia, maybe; anywhere so long as it was a hell of a ways off. And when I got there I could change my name an' start in all over again an' maybe have some fun some more. But I reckon I'll just stay here in Abalone with the wife an' kids till I rot."

"Ever see 'em do any beheading over there, Larry?" asked Harry Martinez.

"Oh, sure. Back in '27 they done a lot of it when the bandits got so bad. Us guys used to go to the native city every time there'd be an execution an' take pictures of the goddam thing. I got some good ones in my trunk what's in hock back in Frisco.

"One time down at a burg called Tongshan where we were doing guard while a revolution was going on, the Chink soldiers rounded up a bunch of deserters an' took a notion to have a public killing. They staged it in a rock quarry, an' all us guys went down to watch.

"They shot 'em that time instead of using the big knife. They'd take a guy out an' make him kneel down, an' then one of the Chink non-coms would come up with a big Mauser pistol an' let him have it between the horns.

"There was a hell of a big crowd of people standing around watching. Looking at executions was about the only thing there was to do in Tongshan anyway, except dig coal.

"Well, the Chinks they haul out the last guy, a great big bozo, an' fixes to bump him off an' call it a day. The non-com he snaps back the slide of his Mauser an' sees he's got a live shell in the chamber, an' then he steps over to plug the big boy. Well, the big guy he's awful nervous, an' he watches that Mauser out of the corner of his eye, an' just about the time the non-com pulls the trigger, the big boy jerks his head to one side, an' the non-com misses. It was the first time he'd missed a shot all day, too.

"But that doggone Mauser bullet it wanted blood, an' it hits a flat rock an' ricochets up into the crowd of onlookers an' smacks a little kid right in the temple an' drops him in his tracks.

"An', damn me, if them Chinks didn't think that was a hell

of a good joke. Why, they laughed an' laughed till they like to bust a gut. Sure are screwy people."

"I seen Pancho Villa 'dobe wall a bunch of guys once," said Harry Martinez. "But there didn't nobody laugh."

"Well, sir, the Chinese are a great outfit, all right," said Larry. "I kinda like 'em at that. Hey! Aint that circus run by a Chink?"

"Yeah."

"Well, come on; let's go. It oughtta be good."

All the way down Main Street Larry kept shuffling his feet, trying to keep step with his companion.

"Look at this damn town," mourned his friend. "I been stuck here since nineteen nineteen. Come here fer the wife's health, an' I reckon I'll always be stuck here. Good Gawd! The rest of my life in Abalone. Damn place was dead when I got here, an' it's been getting deader. You been to China an' Japan an' the Philippines an' all them places, but I aint been nowhere 'cept Abalone, Arizona. Good Gawd!"

"Yeah, it's tough, all right," said Larry.

"What are you figgering on doing, Larry, when you pull out of this place?"

"Oh, I reckon I'll hunt up a recruiting station somewhere and enlist for the 11th Engineers in Panama. That's supposed to be a good outfit, an' it'll be a change from the infantry at any rate. After I get done with that hitch, I reckon I'll try the coast artillery in Hawaii, an' after that the air corps in the Islands, an' then maybe I'll go back to China. I dunno; there's a hell of a lot of places I want to see yet."

"You don't believe in settlin' down in one spot, do you?"

"Hell, no! I never did see the layout I didn't get sick of inside of a few years. That's the good thing about the army. When yer time's up you can get to hell out an' go somewhere else. 'Taint like holdin' down a civilian job."

"No," said his friend, "by God, I'll say it aint!"

They reached the circus grounds just as the two college youths landed on their ears in the middle of Main Street. Larry and his friend went over and helped them up.

"What's the matter, boys; get bounced?"

"Something of the sort," said Paul Conrad. "No matter; it's a lousy circus, anyway." He and Slick climbed into their old automobile, ground on the starter awhile and then swept away. On the back of the car was a painted legend:

FLAMING YOUTH . . . MIND OUR SMOKE

"Great guys, them college punks," said Larry admiringly. "They don't give a damn about nothin'."

People laughed when Doctor Lao went up to Larry Kamper and addressed him in Chinese, but their laughs turned to stupefaction when Larry replied in the vowel-fluid music of High Mandarin. He sang the four-tone monosyllables as shrilly as did the doctor, and they talked as talk two strangers finding themselves in a foreign land with the bridge of a common language between them.

Their talking done, the doctor and Larry bowed and scraped and parted. And Larry went over to his friend and said: "Come on, the doc tipped me off to something hot. It's in this tent over here. Come on, you been wanting to see things. This ought to satisfy you."

They scuttled into a little dark tent. The doctor was already there. In a low cage a great grey bitch wolf whined and belched.

"I can't understand how it happened," said Doctor Lao. "Usually she's so regular about her periods. She wasn't due until October. Now right here in the middle of the circus she has to metamorphose. The equinox has something to do with it, I'm sure."

"Wot's he talking about?" whispered Larry's friend.

"The doggone old wolf's gonna change into a gal," said Larry. "Watch her; you never seen anything like it before, I'll bet."

"Aw, hell," said the man; "wotcha trying to feed me?"

"I aint feeding you nothing," protested Larry. "Aint you ever heard of werewolves? They change all the time. This here's one, an' she's fixing to change any minute now. Gawd, listen to her groan!"

"Well, I won't believe it till I see it," said the man. "An' then I dunno whether I'll believe it or not."

The wolf's guard coat, inturning, slipped under her wool. Across her belly her dugs marched, uniting as fat twins. Her canines blunted and recessed. Her tail shrunk.

"By gosh, something is happening to her," agreed Larry's friend. "Wotsa matter; is she sick?"

"No, no," said Doctor Lao, "just the usual preliminaries. Directly, you'll see her hind legs undergo drastic elongation. After that she changes very rapidly. Interesting, if you are interested in mutable morphology."

The wolf voiced sounds of agony, but not the sounds wolves customarily voice.

"You see," said Doctor Lao, "when a pollywog, for instance, metamorphoses into a frog, it is a long-drawn-out process, and any physical pain attendant to the change is counteracted by the very slowness of it all. But when a wolf changes into a woman, she does it in a very few minutes, and, hence, the pain is perceptibly intensified. Notice that as she

changes she flits through the semblance of every animal figure that forms a link in the evolutionary chain between hers and the human form. I often think that the phenomenon of lycanthropy is nothing more than an inversion of the evolutionary laws, anyway."

There was a gasp and a moan and a sob, and a woman lay shuddering in the cage.

"Aw, doc!" said Larry in disgust, "why didn't you tell us she was going to be so goddam old? Jees! That old dame's like somebody's great-grandmother. Hell, I thought we was going to see a chicken. Fer crying out loud, put some clothes on her quick!"

"Sensualist," said the doctor. "I might have known your only interest in this would be carnal. You have seen a miracle, by any standard sacred or profane, but you are disappointed because it gives no fillip to your lubricity."

"I'm a soldier, not a scientist," said Larry. "I thought I was going to see something hot. How old's that old girl, anyway—a hundred?"

"Her age is about three hundred years," said the doctor. "Werewolves command a remarkable longevity."

"A three-hundred-year-old woman! Wow! An' I thought I was going to see a chicken. Gawd, let's go, pal."

Sonorously the great bronze gong banged and rang; and from all over the circus ground the people, red and black and white, left the little sideshow tents and shuffled through the dust. The midway was thick with them for a minute or two as they crowded toward the big tent. Then the midway was desolate, save for its wreath of dust, as the people all disappeared beneath the canvas. And the ringing of the bronze gong diminuendoed and died.

The big tent was a dull creamy lacquer within. Black swastikas were painted on it and winged serpents and fish eyes. There were no circus rings. In the center of the floor was a big triangle instead, a pedestal adorning each angle. Doctor Lao, in full showman's dress of tails and high hat and cracking whip, attained the top of one of the pedestals and blew on a whistle. At a far entrance a seething and a rustling was heard. Chinese music, monotonous as bagpiping, teetled through the tent. Figures could be seen massing at the far entrance. The grand march was starting. The main performance had begun.

Snorting and damping, the unicorn came leading the grand march. Its hoofs had been gilded and its mane combed.

"Notice it!" screamed Doctor Lao. "Notice the unicorn. The giraffe is the only antlered animal that does not shed its antlers. The pronghorn antelope is the only horned animal that sheds its horns. Unique they are among the deciduous

beasts. But what of the unicorn? Is it not unique? A horn is hair; an antler is bone; but that thing on the unicorn's head is metal. Think that over, will you?"

Then came the sphinx, ponderous and stately, shaking its curls.

"Say something to them!" hissed Majordomo Lao.

"What walks on four legs, two legs, three legs?" simpered the androgyne.

Mumbo Jumbo and his retinue came. The satyr syrinxed. The nymphs danced. The sea serpent coiled and glided. Fluttering its wings, the chimera filled the tent with smoke. Two shepherdesses drove their sheep. A thing that looked like a bear carried the kiss-blowing mermaid in its arms. The hound of the hedges barked and played. Apollonius cast rose petals. Her eyes blindfolded, her snakes awrithe, the medusa was led by the faun. Cheeping, the roc chick gamboled. On the golden ass an old woman rode. A two-headed turtle, unable to make up either of its minds, wandered vaguely. It was the damnedest collection Abalone, Arizona, had ever seen.

Mr. Etaoin, sitting behind Larry Kamper, said to Miss Agnes Birdsong: "Well, that's the whole outfit, I guess, except for the werewolf. I wonder where it is?"

Larry turned around. "See that old woman on the donkey's back? There's yer goddam werewolf."

Round and round the great triangle the animals walked, danced, pranced, fluttered, and crawled, Master of Ceremonies Lao directing them from his pedestal. They roared and screamed and coughed; rising from strings and reeds the Chinese music teetled monotonously and waveringly whined. Too close upon the fastidious unicorn, the sphinx accidentally nuzzled its rump; and the unicorn exploded with a tremendous kick, crashing its heels into the sphinx's side. The hermaphrodite shrieked. With its great paws it struck and roweled the unicorn's neck and back. The unicorn leaped like a mad stallion, whirled and centered its horn in the sphinx's lungs. Nervous, the chimera dodged about, its flapping wings fanning up dust clouds. The sea serpent reared into a giant S, launched a fifty-foot strike, caught the chimera by a forefoot, and flung seven loops about its wings and shoulders. The hound of the hedges curled in a tight ball, looking like a stray grass hummock. The Russian passionately kissed the mermaid. Lowering his horns, taking a short run for it, the satyr spiked Mumbo Jumbo in the rump when the black god's back was turned. The old woman changed back into a wolf and ravened at the roc chick. The little faun threw stones at Doctor Lao. The nymphs and shepherdesses and lambs hid and whimpered. From the face of the medusa the blindfold fell; eleven people turned to stone.

"Oh, misery!" screamed the doctor. "Why do they have to fight so when there is nothing to fight about? They are as stupid as humans. Stop them, Apollonius, quickly, before someone gets hurt!"

The thaumaturge hurled spell after spell among the hysterical beasts. Spells of peace, mediation, rationality, arbitration, and calmness flashed through the feverish air and fell like soft webs about the battlers. The din lessened. Withdrawing his horn from the sphinx's lungs, the unicorn trotted away and cropped at sparse grass. The sphinx licked at its lacerated side. The sea serpent loosed the chimera, yawned his jaws back into place. Shaking itself, the hound of the hedges arose and whined. The mermaid patted the bear. Mumbo Jumbo forgave the satyr. The werewolf remetamorphosed. The faun stopped throwing rocks. Back came the nymphs and shepherdesses and lambs. Once again the medusa assumed her blindfold.

After the storm, tranquillity. Peace after battle. Forgiveness after hate. The animals stood idle, panting, caressing their traumatized flesh. But in the eyes of one the heat of combat still burned. Blazing in its body, the lust to kill still flared; and the great snake coiled suddenly, struck like a catapult, and snatched Doctor Lao from his perch. All the way across the triangle the snake struck, nor could the eye follow the lightning flash of his head.

"Ah, my old implacable enemy!" gasped the doctor. "Only you would never become tame. Only you could never forgive. Help me, Apollonius, quick, lest he slay me!"

About the serpent the mage sent a haze of coldness; as the frost bit into the reptile's skin, its writhings slowed and its hot eyes glazed. Colder, colder, colder grew the haze; and the great snake grew sluggish as his blood thickened in the icy air. At length he lay still, a great grey ribbon, seeing but perceiving not, quiescent; rage still twisting his coils, but frozenly, not actively, twisting them.

Doctor Lao crawled away. "Keep him chilly until we get him back in his cage," he ordered. "Luckily I am immune to his poison. But he is treacherous and vindictive. I should have known better than to have let him out."

The show went on.

All others withdrawing, the sphinx was left in the triangle to perform solo—an acrobatic dance. Flinging tail, rump, hind feet into the air, it waltzed and schottisched and morrised on its forepaws, keeping time to indifferent dance music. Elegantly it curtsied upside down, dancing clumsily, humming and grinning.

"Ef it's gonna dance it oughtta have a partner," said someone.

"Heh, heh," laughed a quarantine inspector. "That there animal don't need no partner, does it, Al?"

"Nope," said Al. "It's Pierrot and Columbine all at the same time, by golly."

A huge boar trotted into the triangle.

"This is one you all haven't seen before," yelled the Chinaman. "The Gadarene swine itself. Fiend-infested, it searches the earth for salvation, but finds it not. Biblical beast, it symbolizes the uncleanliness of all flesh. Hence, sacramental butchery—to drive out latent devils; that is the purpose of the mummery of the priest-butchers."

Grunting and mumbling, the boar stopped to root. Out of its ear popped the head and shoulders of the devil that infested it. The little beelzebub waved his trident at Doctor Lao. "It's hotter than hell in this tent," he said.

"You ought to know," submitted the doctor.

The little ass of gold came forth. Ass and boar tripped a minuet.

"Why in the world," asked Mrs. Howard T. Cassan, "is it that everything in this circus dances all the time? I never saw anything like it."

"It's the dance of life, madam," said the old-like party in the golf pants. "You'll find plenty of precedent for it, if you look far enough."

The triangle cleared. Doctor Lao whistled; the hound of the hedges trotted out. It walked on its hind legs and flipped to its forelegs. It played dead and counted with laconic barks. Doctor Lao flung it lettuce leaves as a reward.

"Hell, I've seen better trained dogs than that'n," commented one of the policemen.

"So've I, mother," whispered Alice Rogers.

"Mother thinks it's very smart, Alice," said Mrs. Rogers, frowning at the cop.

"Why aint they got no elephants?" Edna Rogers wanted to know.

"Now, Edna, don't say 'aint,' " said mama.

"Well, I like tuh see elephants grab each other's tails," said Edna.

Mrs. Rogers said: "Oh, children, watch the funny bird. Look, it's so comical."

Imperfectly trained, the baby roc was walking a tightrope. It lacked balance and grace, but in its talons it commanded a terrific grip, and it walked the rope as one would walk on vises instead of feet. Doctor Lao flung it hunks of ham as it reached the end of the rope. Snatching at the hocks and shreds, the chick fell forward; but its feet hung on and, describing a flapping half-circle, the roc swung over and hung

head down from the rope. Nor would it let go. Doctor Lao gave it another bit of ham and tempted it with others to loosen its grip, but the huge red clumsy feet, bulging like knots around the rope, stuck fast. The upsidedown fledgling wept at its topsy-turviness and pleaded for more meat. Its thin-feathered wings drooped dismally; its great red-rimmed eyes regarded fearfully the sawdust in the triangle.

"Well, let go, you fool," stormed the doctor, "and we'll put you back in your nest. . . . I ask your forgiveness, good people; the unmanageableness of this incorrigible bird has spoiled the act."

"Give it a fishin' worm, doc," somebody suggested.

"Good heavens, man!" said the doctor, "rocs are raptorial birds, not vermivorous. They won't touch angleworms."

Mumbo Jumbo came from the dressing room, his tremendous blackness bringing a touch of color to the bareness. In one hand he carried a machete. With the other hand he grasped the tightrope. With the machete he hacked the rope in twain. The roc fell on its face. Mumbo Jumbo picked it up like a turkey and carried the squawking thing out of the tent.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," said Doctor Lao, "it gives me great pleasure to announce that Apollonius of Tyana, greatest magician of all the world, will present to you his conception of the Witches' Sabbath. . . . Apollonius of Tyana . . ."

Catcalling "Louder and funnier!" from somebody in the unreserved section.

"Did them damn college punks slip back in?" asked Al.

"Apollonius of Tyana," repeated the ringmaster.

All in black, drowned in thought, the mage walked slowly to the triangle, waving away the murmur of applause.

Raising his hands, the left pointing straight up, the right pointing straight down, he intoned sombrely: "Let there be darkness."

And a pall of darkness came into the tent, opaque and not to be seen through; and it crept into every angle and corner of the tent, so that one could not tell beside whom one sat; and even lovers had to touch and fondle each the other in that darkness for reassurance.

"Moonlight," commanded the mage. "Moonlight. Soft music on the piccolo."

Into the black pall crept a beam of moon silver, furtive and uneasy, as though it felt it did not belong there, and soft music on the piccolo accompanied its creeping. And the moonlight spread and illumined a meadow, in the center of which was a pig-wallow, fat with mud, thin with water. Idle weeds grew all about with thislets and ragspurs among them; and from the thin water of the wallow came the high concupiscent minstrelsy of the frogs singing their frantic nuptial songs.

Brighter turned the waters of the wallow, till the wallow became a disk of moonbeams, a dishful of lambency. Eyes gleamed in the water; fish eyes, toad eyes and frog eyes, salamander eyes, turtle eyes, and crustacean eyes. They palpitated in the moonbeams.

Scurrying through the meadow came small animals: badgers, minks, and hedgehogs, squirrels, rats, and marmots, cats, stoats, and kit foxes. Their eyes made a circle of blue points as they amassed about the wallow. They knew not why they gathered there, but there they were from forest and fen and hill and hunt; and they all came and gathered there, nor did they bicker and squabble but gathered silently; and silently they waited, wondering why they waited, beside the pig-wallow in the moonlight.

In the thin water the turtles swam unceasingly, the keels of their shells rippling the water with soft swishes. And the salamanders crawled out on the bank and into the water again, over and over; while the frogs stilled their love songs, ceased their egg-laying. A water moccasin seized a green bullfrog; the frog screamed his death scream in the moonlight. And all the other frogs moaned and huddled greenly under weed leaves.

"Silence!" roared Apollonius.

"The snakes attack us," whimpered the minstrels.

"Silence!" said the magician.

Then the witches came. Straight from the mountains of the moon they came, riding on their broomsticks down the highway of moonbeams to the pig-wallow and the waiting hosts. Lovely some, ugly others, thin and rancid, fat and nasty, old and youthful, repulsive and divine, they came and came. Some were ill from their rapid flight and vomited strange fluids, and some spat blood. Some were cowled like nuns. In lavish circles whirling, broomstick-borne, they skittered over the water top; weird women flying, their snarls and tatters streaming, laughing profanely like bawds; circling, circling, then alighting. The wallow banks blackened with the thronging of the sisters; sisters of temptation, sisters of falsehood, sisters of decay. A convocation of garrulous crow-women, unwashed, unshriven, undesirable, and sterile, they hopped about in the mud and cackled.

"Dance," said Apollonius. "The master cometh."

In the middle of the water, on the back of a huge turtle, a fire flared in an iron brazier. Firelight fought moonlight, and the moonlight died; and the gold of the firelight washed away from the wallow the silver of the moonlight. The batrachians, turtles, and salamanders raised their wet heads, marshaling like troops to form a living bridge to the fire. And

the witches, raising their skirts, tripped out upon the water over the pathway of the water dwellers' heads. Ringaround-about the flaring fire they danced.

Croaking, the frogs marked the measures of the steps. And bats came, night-borne, to greet the dancing sisters. Like wavering, restless flakes of soot the bats came; hovering about the witches' ears they squeaked at them; alighting in their hair they bit their ears with friendly bites and chided them and told them secret things.

From the brazier on the fire-bearing turtle a red-hot flaming coal fell. Before it reached the water a toad, taking it for a brilliant bug, snapped it up with his agile tongue and swallowed it, and then writhed convulsively as its belly burned. And the great turtle, watching his flame, now and again drove his head down into the muck to bring up in his jaws shreds of peat and snags of wood to toss over his head into the flames and so replenish the fire. And as the wet dripping fuel fell into the flames a hissing would arise on wings of steam.

The stoats and minks loosened the drawstrings of their scent sacs; the viscous stinks flooded the pond air. And the tomcats yelled, their soprano voices higher and keener and in contrast to the bass belling of the bullfrogs. And the kit foxes barked. And the hedgehogs made uncomfortable, small squealing noises. The badgers sat on their haunches watching, their masklike faces quizzical, their stripes awry, their coats damp and muddy.

And the witches whirled and danced and giggled and coughed and grimaced as the stink of the minks smote them. And the animals made their grotesque noises, singing the music for the dance.

"More vigor!" called the thaumaturge. "The master cometh!"

The animal calls increased; staccato, they crackled in the pond air. And the witches whirled the faster, danced the madder, while the fire sparkled, surged, and roared.

Then above the flames, bored, fat, over-sexed, nervous, smoking a cigarette, Satan Mekratrig appeared. Green he was, with black patches of mildew on his face and shoulders. He blew grey rings and studied the dancing.

"Terrible," he said. "Terrible. I never saw such terrible dancing. Pick it up! Pick it up!" And Satan snatched a whip out of the air and flogged the witches. With long lash snapping, the whip danced about the dancing sisters, the tongue of it swirling among them, slashing them and stinging them. And among them the whiplash lit the oftenest upon the youngest witch, a pale slender supple witch, a nude ivory dark-haired witch, Demisara, witch of incest, witch of shame. And the old burnt-out sisters were envious of this mark of favor; they jerked and hissed at her, and covertly they spat at her; but the

whip of Satan lit ever and again on the young desirable shoulders of Demisara and curled about her waist and crackled over her back; and the shriveled old harridans sneered to see that Mekratrig had him a new favorite.

The animals all slipped into the water and joined the dance, wallowing through the mud, trampling down the crayfish, minnows, and tadpoles, leaping among the frogs. Hovering in his flame, Satan laughed at the careful bedraggled cats afraid of wetting their feet, afraid not to dance, loathing the water and the mud, and stepping about as on hot rocks. He grabbed hunks of flame from the fire and tossed them upon the water where they burned among the furry things, igniting coats, singeing whiskers, racing through tails. The animals bawled as they burned and scorched, but danced on and on and on.

And Satan Mekratrig reached over and caught Demisara by the hair and jerked her free of the other sisters and snatched her to him in the flames and loved her there. Starshine was in her eyes; drops of dew gleamed upon her shoulders.

"Better stop it, Apollonius," Doctor Lao warned, "or it will be getting out of hand in a minute."

"Moonlight!" called the mage. "Shrill music on the piccolo!"

With a rush the moonlight returned, blotting out the blaze of the fire. The screeching of the piccolo drowned the noise of the animal calls. Satan Mekratrig howled out an oath; it lingered like blue smoke in the air. The rhythm of the dance wavered and broke. The visibility faded. The fire died. The animals disappeared. Back to the mountains of the moon streamed the witches on their broomsticks. And the moonlight crept away, and only the pall of darkness remained.

"Let there be light," commanded the magician.

Light came, the daylight of Abalone, Arizona, to illuminate the tent. But in the center of the tent above the tanbark, suspended in air, Satan Mekratrig still remained, and struggling in his arms was Demisara. The devil screamed at Apollonius, defying banishment. Froth formed on his lips from the vehemence of his screaming.

Reaching into his robe, the magician drew out a crucifix. Holding on high the little Jesus quartered on a cross, he advanced beneath the fiend. There was a burst of flame in the center of the tent, and witch and devil disappeared. Apollonius kissed and put away the artifact.

The applause was sparse and unconvincing. Apollonius and Doctor Lao bowed gravely to each other. Then, drowned in thought, the magician plodded back to his quarters.

Rapidly thereafter the animals went through the remaining portions of the repertory. Golden ass and hound of the hedges put on a dog and pony show. In purple tights and scarlet sash the satyr came grinning; with his sharp, sure horns he spiked

balloons which Doctor Lao inflated and flung to him. Ungaubwa, the high priest of the Negroes, using one of the black girls for a target, threw knives and hatchets, pinning her by her clothing to a shield. From a high ladder the mermaid dived into a tiny tank. In gay Grecian robes the nymphs came, singing the Sirens' Song, the same song that Doctor Browne asserted was not difficult of divination but which, nevertheless, he did not hazard to name, contenting himself merely with the claim he could do so any time he got around to it.

Shepherdesses and lambkins followed the Siren Song singers. They cavorted in an afternoon full of the fresh lissomeness of the time of May. Like figures on thin old chinaware were these shepherdesses and lambkins, almost as ideal, almost as tenuous. The audience relaxed drowsily while watching them. Then a cruel, bitter, black cloud came roaring from nowhere; and over the edge of the cloud the sweating face of Satan Mekratrig was thrust, greenly grinning down at the sweet shepherdesses and gamboling lambkins. And lambkins and shepherdesses shuddered and cringed.

"Oh, why does the symbol of evil come into everything and every scene in this circus?" cried Miss Agnes Birdsong. "That cynical old Chinaman, that's all he knows! There is purity and there is simplicity and there is goodness without any hint of bad about them. I know there is! Oh, he's wrong!"

"It's only a circus," said Mr. Etaoin. "Don't let it disturb you."

Doctor Lao heard her, too.

"The world is my idea," he said. "The world is my idea; as such I present it to you. I have my own set of weights and measures and my own table for computing values. You are privileged to have yours."

He waved away the shepherdesses and the fiend and the time of May. Climbing back on his pedestal, he announced:

"The afternoon grows late. On some of your faces I detect symptoms of an awful ennui. Well, there is but one more scene to this circus: it is the spectacle of the people of that ancient city Woldercan worshiping their god Yottle, who was the first and mightiest and least forgiving of all the gods.

"Piety such as theirs exists no more. Such simple, trusting faith is lost to the world. When you folks here in Abalone worship your god, I understand you do it in a church wired for sound, so that every pleasure automobile, radio-equipped, can, even at sixty miles an hour, hear you at your prayers. But does your god? Ah, well . . . what does it matter?

"For your better understanding of this Woldercan episode, it is necessary that I tell you Woldercan was in the midst of a drought. Rich and poor alike there had nothing to eat, for such was the dryness that nothing could grow. That was a

calamity Woldercan had never before been called upon to face; for, while the poor had always been with them and chronically starving, after the fashion of the poor, theretofore the rich had always lived, after the custom of the rich, off the fat of the land. Yet now there was no food for anyone, not even the rich; nor could all the coin of the realm buy even a rotten turnip.

"Terror, the great leveler, swept into the city. The politicians could do nothing; the police could do nothing; the scholars could do nothing; the rich could do nothing. The people stood around in small fearful groups, waiting for death to come slowly via the route of starvation.

"But one man among them did something. That man was he who was the high priest of Yottle. He walked rapidly among them, and:

" 'Come,' he said. 'Gather in the temple. We will pray to Yottle. Yottle will protect his own.'

"So then all Woldercan, having naught else to do, went to Yottle's temple to pray.

"Now that episode of the starving Woldercanese, in Yottle's temple, praying to him for relief, is surely one of the great and vivid and dramatic scenes of all recorded history; and it is with pride that I bring it to you with my circus. As a little hint as to what happens, I want to recall to you that they sacrifice a virgin to their god. Piety. That was real piety. When you people here of Abalone pray to your god for a drought's end, do you go to such extremes in your protestations of faith? Would you sacrifice Abalone's fairest virgin? Ah, well . . ."

Then Doctor Lao left his pedestal and sidled away a little. He doffed his showman's hat. "Ladies and gentlemen," he called, "I give you Yottle's temple in ancient Woldercan!"

And the rear of the tent curled up and back, and there before the eyes of Abalone, Arizona, was the interior of the great somber towering temple of the great god Yottle. And, somber, too, the music of the spheres welled in rolls up from nave and chancel, lingered about the giant beams, and rose higher, ever higher, even to the gold bar of Heaven itself.

Above the altar on an ivory dais Yottle sat. One hand was upraised; the other caressed his throat. His eyes, peering from jeweled eyelids, contemplated things far off from earth. Incense pots smoked about his ankles. He was bigger than a mastodon, fleshier than a hippopotamus, and more terrifying than either. Bronze was Yottle's flesh, and his fat was a brazen fatness. In a coign beneath his dais rested his sacred stone ax, the sacrificial tool, the brutal mace of death.

The tattered, starveling Woldercanese, eleven thousand strong, were forlornly moaning piteously and some of them were chaunting low hymns of lost hope. Gray were the faces

of the Woldercanese, and it was the grayness of hunger and the grayness of fear which tinted them.

Out of the gray mass the high priest arose; there was a sort of holy glowing about his head. He blessed them with his hands, and:

"Peace," he said. "Patience and peace."

Then the high priest turned to Yottle, making mystic, cabalistic signs.

He knelt. He prayed.

"Glory unto thy name, Yottle; homage before thy eyes, Yottle; Yottle the all-knowing, Yottle the omnipotent. Sinners all, we come before thee, foul with the sins of sloth and greed and hate and lust. Weary, we cannot sin more. Surfeited, we sicken and are afraid. Despairing and ashamed, we turn to thee. Dying, we remember our forgotten prayers. Hopeless, we plead: Lord of our world, forgive us; Light of our gloom, enlighten us; Creator of the spheres, aid us; Yottle, great Yottle, forgive us now, forgive."

But one of the men stood up in the rear of the temple and protested:

"Why do you pray like that? We assuredly are not ashamed of ourselves. We are not foul with sin and lust. The only reason we are here at all is because Yottle has seen fit to withhold rain from our crops. We don't want forgiveness. We want rain and something to eat. Tell Yottle so. Your business is to intercede for us, not tattletale about us." He turned to the people.

"Am I not right?" he asked.

"You certainly are," they said. And to the priest they said: "Of course he is right. We have sinned; yes. But we are not entirely without virtue. In the next period of your prayer, minimize our bad points and accentuate our good ones. Don't make us out a troop of pindling sinners wading through a manure mire of our frailties. Tell Yottle of the straits we are in, if you like, but don't be so anxious to admit we merit them, because we don't believe we do."

Bitterly, the high priest answered them:

"So! You criticize me and humiliate me here before the very eyes of Yottle! You tell me, your high priest, how to pray! Very well."

He turned to Yottle, shouting:

"Hey, thou lump of bronze and shining stones! Look upon us and marvel that such magnificent people do not throw you down and melt you up and make trinkets of your metal. We do not fear. We are great. Woldercan does not petition; she ordains. Hear us and act:

"Food we must have immediately. And immediately, too, we must have rain that we may raise more food. So out of thy

cosmic kitchen, Yottle, throw us down some pie from heaven, and with thy sprinkling pot wet down our dead grain fields. Feed us, Yottle, well and quickly; fill our——"

But before the priest could say more, a high keen passionate rush of words drowned out his own. And the words came from everywhere at once, as the hurricane comes; and flood-like the words came from all sides; then they ceased.

The Woldercanese fell down on their faces. That had been Yottle's voice, and they knew it.

The priest was the first to arise. With his hands he blessed them.

"Peace," he said to his flock. "Peace and fear nothing. Yottle has spoken. He is indignant, but he is willing to be mollified. He says he doubts our faith in him, but he is willing to put it to test. But he says he is so angry now that we must sacrifice our fairest virgin to him before we do anything else. He says sacrifice her first, then talk to him later about rain. He is very angry. He will not allow us much time. Haste is paramount, my children. So, quickly, let us sacrifice the virgin and appease him. Let us immediately placate our infuriated god."

"How are you going to find the fairest virgin, though?" demanded the man who had interrupted before.

"We will hold a beauty contest here and now," said the priest. "Let all our virgins line up; we will choose the loveliest by popular acclaim. It will be a great honor for her. Besides, it is better that only one should die than the whole populace. That is the theory of sacrifice. So let all the virgins line up here. Please, now! Quickness is essential. Yottle is very angry. Hurry! Hurry!"

A dozen girls formed a nervous row.

"Acgh!" said the priest in disgust, "there are more girls than this in Woldercan. I can see more with my own eyes. Come! Come!"

Some realist reminded him one of the specifications was on the count of true maidenhood.

"Gracious," said the priest. "Of course. That explains it. Very well. As I walk behind these girls, my children, and hold my hand over their respective heads, you will, by your applause, indicate the one you wish for the bride of Yottle."

Facing the faces of the people of Woldercan, the twelve lumps of ripe but untasted sex stood posing, stood waiting for the accolade that would bring to one of them the crown of beauty, the caress of death. The old trembly priest doddered behind the girls, holding over their fair, triumphant heads—fair with grace and charm, triumphant with youth and life—his wrinkled hands. And throbs in greater and lesser volumes of applause spread through the congregation as over each

head in turn the priestly hands were questioningly poised. And over the twelfth head, a dark little, proud little, exquisite little head, as the aged hands were raised, the applause became thunderously loud, ever increasing, rising, and echoing; and the bride of Yottle had been chosen.

But from the throng there came a great choking cry. And the man who had interrupted the high priest's prayer knelt in sudden, sunken, awful misery. For Woldercan had chosen his sweetheart, his betrothed.

The priest consoled him ineffectually. "Yottle's ways are not always to be understood, brother," he said. "And Yottle doubtless inspired the people to choose her. Peace, brother, and fear nothing. Glory awaits her."

The people were keyed to a tottering pitch. "Come!" they called. "Come. Never mind him. Let's have the sacrifice."

"Yes," said the priest. "Now bow your heads."

Acolytes in an honor guard hush-hushed the congregation as, a little behind them, the virgin walked to the altar. A strange dark light was on her face, and above her head a faint pallid halo hung. She was of Woldercan no more; they knew it. Staring at her with twisted, side glancing eyes, they wondered, now that she was consecrate, why they had not perceived her holiness before. And the temple of her flesh moved through the throng in the temple of Yottle, a sweeter, holier temple, more mysterious and provocative of a greater adoration than the stone temple through which she walked.

Her lover flung up his head pathetically, and he screamed tragically:

"Oh, stop her! Stop her! Good God Almighty, stop her! Let me die instead. Let us all die rather than let her even be touched. That brazen image; this lovely girl; kill the one to placate the other? Madness! Oh, hell and heaven, do not slay her for that idol!"

"Be still!" said the people. "Sit down! You are hysterical. Yottle has spoken and we will sacrifice her to him. Glory to Yottle's name! From him all wisdom stems and flowers. Do your duty, priest."

From the coign beneath the dais of ivory, the high priest lifted the sacred stone ax. He directed the virgin to unclothe herself that she might go to Yottle unhampered by linen and cotton coverings. The Woldercanese were shaking and roaring with excitement. The temple itself seemed to quiver.

The old priest expectorated in his thin palms and hoisted the ax.

Then did the lover spring up like a hind and dash through the multitude to the side of his loved one. Shrieking "No, no!" and "Stop, stop!" he grappled with the high priest, fighting furiously for the monolithic tool. The people of Woldercan

bellowed ferociously as a fury fell upon them. It seemed that, mob-like, they would storm the altar.

But very quietly, yet with a horrid, impatient suddenness, Yottle fell forward off his ivory dais. His upraised hand caught the battling lover on the head, cracking it like a nut. Unable to escape, priest and virgin, too, were crushed by the fall of his great brazen body. There beneath the altar lay three corpses and the great god Yottle.

High from the fair heaven came loaves of manna, falling to the hungry Woldercanese. And for their crops a thin wispy rain came weeping into the wind, drizzling and dripping.

Then the ends of the tent fell outward and down, and the circus of Doctor Lao was over. And into the dust and the sunshine the people of Abalone went homewards or wherever else they were going.

THE CATALOGUE

(An explanation of the obvious which must be read to be appreciated.)

1. THE MALE CHARACTERS

DOCTOR LAO: A Chinese.
MR. ETAOIN: A corrector of errors.
APOLLONIUS OF TYANA: A legend.
AN OLD-LIKE PARTY IN GOLF PANTS: A bore.
A QUARANTINE INSPECTOR: A good party man.
ANOTHER QUARANTINE INSPECTOR: A good party man.
ISKANDER: A legend.
ISKANDER'S CAPTAIN: Diogenes of Damos. An expert with a longbow; could hit an obolus three out of seventeen tries at nineteen paces.
KUBLAI KHAN: In his day he was China.
LUTHER: A voice, not a face; likewise a harried homunculus; likewise ultimately the owner of a fine statue.
A RAILROAD TRAFFIC OFFICER: Described in the text.
UNGAUBWA: A black priest, differing from that other black priest, Montanus, both as to creed and virility.
JOHN ROGERS: Learned the plumbing trade at fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen. Never made a hell of a lot of money at it, however. A good union man.
PAUL CONRAD GORDON: His father was way up in the bond business back in Detroit. Paul majored in mechanical engineering but after he graduated got a job as an aluminum salesman. It paid more.
SLICK BROMIEZCHSKI: His old man was a Polish immigrant, but Slick was so hot at football in high school that one of the temples of higher education made it worth his while to keep on with his culture. Mentioned as all-America end in some of the lesser sporting journals during his junior year.
CLOWNS: Pantaloons whose hearts are bursting.
CROWD OF MEXICANS LARRY KAMPER SHOULDERED HIS WAY THROUGH: Peons, agrarians, hacendados, padrones, prizefighters, bullfighters, laborers.

BILL: William R. Johnston. He had been drinking the night before he saw the parade and didn't feel so good that morning. Shot a good game of golf.

BILL'S FRIEND: Murray R. Kaldwell. In the ready-to-wear business. A sound merchandise man and a good window-dresser. Didn't like at all the kind of ads Steele would lay out for him in the *Tribune*.

TEDDY ROOSEVELT: An American President.

A RUSSIAN.

HARVEY: Harvey R. Todd. When Frank Tull told him and Helen what he had seen at the circus, Harvey and Helen always regretted they hadn't gone.

A FAUN: See Praxiteles.

JOE: A voice, not a face. Tenor, but rasping.

FRANK TULL: Described in the text. A good man before a jury.

PETTY CHINESE PRINCES: Wang Wei, Wang Foo, Wang Goo, Wang Chow. Not even legends any more.

LARRY KAMPER: Described in the text. After he got to Panama, he got into trouble and stood special court-martial for violation of Article of War Number ninety-six. They sent him up for nine months in the guardhouse, and while Larry was there he became awfully efficient at policing up around the post. Awfully nice chap, if you didn't expect too much of him. Good guy to go on a drunk with. The dirtier the story you told him, the louder he'd laugh. Old Larry didn't give a damn whether school kept or not and was the first to tell you so.

HARRY MARTINEZ: His forefathers came to this country a little after Hernando Cortez. His foremothers, Mayans, Toltecs, and Aztecs, were already here.

LARRY KAMPER'S FRIEND: Walter R. Dones. A truckdriver, temporarily out of employment. He wasn't so good at spotting a truck, but he could keep one running, and that was more than most of the other guys could do.

POLICE FORCE OF ABALONE: Ex-cowpunchers, ex-railroad men, ex-bootleggers, ex-sheriffs, ex-contractors, ex-farmers. Mighty good policemen, too. Of course, they'd cut one another's throats now and then playing politics and all, but, hell, a guy's got to look out for himself these days. It's a goddam cinch no one else will.

"TRIBUNE" AD MANAGER: Everybody liked him, and those who were under him said he was the best boss they'd ever had.

STEELE: Just dumb enough so that most merchants would listen to him when he wanted to sell them a little display space.

"TRIBUNE" CITY EDITOR: An able man. Should have been on a better paper, but his health kept him in Abalone.

CHINESE TROOPS IN TONGSHAN, CHINA: Members of Chang Tsolin's Manchurian forces. Coolies dressed in scarecrow

uniforms, handed guns they didn't know how to shoot, and dubbed soldiers. No pay. Rations, a couple of doughballs every day. None regretted he had only one life to give for China.

PANCHO VILLA: A legend.

THE DEAD MAN APOLLONIUS BROUGHT BACK TO LIFE: Arnold R. Todhunter. A homesteader. Later on, when a *Tribune* reporter interviewed him about the hours he spent in the arms of death, he testified he was just on the point of being issued a harp and a gown when Apollonius reclaimed his clay. He said Heaven reminded him more than anything else of an advertisement he had once read of Southern California.

A CONDEMNED CHINESE DESERTER: Lin Tin Ho. Age thirty. Survived by his wife and two daughters. A Shanhaikwan farmer. Impressed into the service on May 11. Shipped to Tongshan May 18. Deserted May 19. Captured May 20. Tried and sentenced May 21. Executed May 22. Pictures of his execution still may be purchased in Tientsin and Peiping. Lots of tourists and missionaries have them. The thing to do is buy one of those snapshots showing Lin getting pistoled, take it home with you carelessly intermixed with pictures of temples and canals, and then when your friends, who are looking over your Chinese album, run across it, why, just nonchalantly pass it off as a little thing you took yourself. There's no way to check up on you, unless someone you show it to has seen it before.

RED, BLACK, AND WHITE PEOPLE OF ABALONE: American Indians such as Papagos, Pimas, Apaches, Yaquis, and Yumas. Aframericans such as quadroons, high yallers, octoroons, seal-skin browns, and mulattoes. Whites such as Spanish Americans, Texans, Easterners, Californians, and health-seekers and dude ranchers.

NEBULOUS PEOPLE SOME DAY TO BURY MRS. CASSAN: A minister, an undertaker, a gravedigger, some mourners, and some morbid curiosity-seekers.

NEBULOUS PEOPLE SOME DAY TO EXHUME FRANK TULL: A contractor, a straw boss, and seven laborers. They didn't do it on purpose. They were fixing to dig the holes for the foundation of a new T.B. sanatorium and didn't know they were scratching into sepulchral ground.

DOCTOR BROWNE: He found some pots in an arable field between Buxton and Brampton but belonging to Brampton; burial urns they were.

PHINEAS TAYLOR BARNUM: See his autobiography.

CIGARETTE FIENDS: Serfs of the narcotic lady nicotine.

GAUTAMA: Wherever he sat, ultimately a bo tree flourished.

GLASSBLOWERS: Artisans.

RESURRECTED SUPERMEN: Usually disappointments, for their legends have towered higher than they are able to reach.

DARK MEN IN MRS. CASSAN'S LIFE: Wops, Spicks, Frawgs, and furriners.

TURBANED MYSTIC: Swami. Yogi. Mahatma. Krishna.

UNSCRUPULOUS FINANCIERS AND POLITICIANS: Bankers. Aldermen.

HERMES: A legend.

CITY CLERK: A voice over the telephone.

MEN THAT STAYED OUT ON THE HILLS WITH THEIR FLOCKS: This was before the cattle-sheep feuds of the West. But, anyway, these men and their followers are largely responsible for the wealth of sheepherder stories that flood the world today. And where there is fire, there must be smoke. The Book of Leviticus contains many a specific warning, Godspoken to Moses, about the penalties of loving your live-stock unwisely and too well.

RAILROAD TRAFFIC OFFICER'S FELLOW-WORKER: Howard R. Ginter. He looked like he might be a prizefighter, but in reality he was just a bookkeeper. He made very good home brew.

ASTROLOGERS OF CHALDEA: Starwatchers.

GEOLOGIST FROM THE UNIVERSITY: Understood cleavages and erosion and, from a single jawbone, he could tell what the hind foot and the fundament of the beast were like.

ROUGH-LOOKING MEN WHO LOADED KATE ON THE TRUCK: Leslie R. Stevens, George R. Smith, Peter R. Summerton, and Claude R. Watson. They never did figure out just what the hell Kate was, but they complained to Luther that the thing was awful damn heavy.

FORGOTTEN EGYPTIAN TAXIDERMIST: Originally an embalmer of princes, hakims, bashas, chosroeses, and effendis, he extended his art to the preservation of dead animals. He knew about the circulation of blood long before Harvey did.

MONK FROM TIBET: He lived in a yurt, ate tea thick with butter, wondered a lot about life, took a vow of chastity but broke it when he was in Alexandria, discovered the Ovis poli and the spectacled bear, not knowing what he had discovered, knew some good jokes, and died without ever being really satisfied.

SIMPLE FOLK BY A LAKESIDE WHO SAW THE YOUNG SATYR: Greek agriculturalists.

THE LITTLE FAT BROWN BOY'S FATHER: A spearer of fishes and a good husbandman. When he planted rice seeds rice came up. When he planted plantain seeds plantain came up. When he planted his own seed the little fat brown boy came up.

MASTER OF THE DUROC JERSEY PIG: James R. Sawyer, a small

farmer in Missouri. If it hadn't been for his eyes seeing things and his belly wanting them, the money that he might have saved would have made a considerable pile.

THE CHINESE TRAVELER FROM THE NORTHERN CAPITAL: Liu Beaow. A scholar, but a secret apostate to the teachings of both Gautama and Con Fu Tze.

THE GUYS PANCHO VILLA 'DOBE-WALLED: There were two outstanding ones. One had been a notorious killer himself, and when he stood there facing the Villa rifles and looking at the sun and sky for the last time, he broke down and cried as no baby ever cried. The other was an unfortunate who had never killed anyone nor even hurt anyone, but he belonged to the wrong party. He faced the rifles with calmness and waved a good-by to his friends.

THE NOBODY THAT DIDN'T LAUGH WHEN PANCHO VILLA 'DOBE-WALLED THE GUYS: Harry Martinez, Felix Bustamante, Carlos Villalobos, Carlos Delgado, Michael Pierpont, Pierre Maeyer, Pancho Villa, the seven members of the firing squad, and the guys that got killed.

THE BELVEDERIAN DOCTOR: He taught his students that it was better to live a life rather than earn a living.

HIGH PRIEST OF YOTTLE: Converted to the faith at the age of forty-seven. Ordained at fifty-seven. Went on an evangelical mission which lasted seven years. Saved and baptized the heathen right and left. Succeeded to the high-priestship in his ninety-seventh year. Died steadfast in the faith.

MAN WHO INTERRUPTED THE HIGH PRIEST: A lowborn, argumentative, vulgar, deceitful fellow.

A REALIST IN WOLDERCAN: He had that sort of thing on his mind all the time.

II. THE FEMALE CHARACTERS

KATE: A sad memory.

THE RAILROAD MAN'S WIFE: Martha. Calm, sad, insecure; sometimes she laughed; laughing, she wondered; wondering, she wanted to cry.

MISS AGNES BIRDSONG: The boys all said she was damned good company after she learned to smoke and drink. Doctor Lao's circus broadened her outlook, gave her things to think about when sleepless she tossed on her couch of nights, when bored she listened to her pupils botch syntax of days.

MRS. HOWARD T. CASSAN: Described in the text.

THE WIFE OF PLUMBER ROGERS: Sarah. Loved her children, liked her husband, was content in Abalone, cooked good things to eat, kept a neat home, dreamed of no miracles, de-

sired no victories, fretted when it was time to fret, laughed when it was time to laugh.

TWO SHEPHERDESSES: Dora Beaulais and Dulce Bonaventura.

A CHORUS OF NYMPHS: Dorothy, Louise, Hilda, Elsie, Laura, Dorothy, Opal, Eva. Dorothy, Isabel, Helen, and Hildegarde; Dorothy, Dorothy, Dorothy.

FIVE COLORED GIRLS: Quintet of pigmented maidens. Pigmented quintet of girls. Girlish quintet of pigmentation.

MRS. FRANK TULL: Before her marriage Valerie Jones. Frank was a disappointment to her. She was a disappointment to Frank. There were in her life other disappointments, too. For instance, Nature had not endowed her with all the lovely beauty she thought her due, so, in order to augment what little which she had, she covered herself with objects themselves lovely and beautiful, and strove through theirs to add to her lack. From tiny holes in her ears she hung gold and jeweled pendants. Into the pores of her cheeks she rubbed ointments and greases of suave colors. Over her legs she drew stockings of sheer silk. Around her wrists she placed gauds of silver and bright stones. Up her fingers she slid little hoops of metal embossed with carbon. Upon her lips she dabbed rouge. Her abdomen she upheld with a belt and a corset. Her breasts she fitted into pert pouches. Over her feet she laced tight little shoes. Around her shoulders she flung animal skins. Her hair she had permanently waved. Powder she put on her neck and upon her throat; and under her arms, previously shaven smooth, she syringed a deodorant. Thus she managed to change her color, her figure, and her smell, and at the same time gleam with bright metal and glossy fur and dull silk and brilliant stones. Yet, by heaven, even then she still did not attain that beauty she so much desired; and because of that failure of attainment she would occasionally fall sick, and naught would cure the sickness save that Frank buy her more bright stones.

HELEN: Wife of Harvey. Was afflicted with the vice of lying.

"TRIBUNE" LADY REPORTER: Ardath Williams. A better newspaperperson than the men she competed with. At the same time a mother. At the same time a daughter.

A SCULLION MAID: She was for sale. She could be had.

THE WEREWOLF WOMAN: Maggy Szdolny. There was a curse on her.

FEMALE VOICE RELAYING BEAR-MAN INFORMATION TO JOE: The possession of Maxine McCourtney: a contralto voice, throaty, with a hint of adenoids and beer.

THE WITCHES: Hecate, Belre, Demisara, Pamphile, Haut Roman, Lilith, Alicia Robinette, Vignoche de la Stewart, Salome of Bessarabia, and Perpetua of Galt. The witch Drusye of the Carpathians, the five sisters of Nagasaki, the

Sybil of Panzoust, the Klawtawnamam witch of Fettiss Island, Sister Anthony St. Villanova, Atropis, Mary Cornwall, and the two witches of Skaldaeniry Forest. Mugissowri, Kate de Brille, and Tlectholeme. Proserpine van Antwerp, Dutch Annie, and Helen Panacea.

THE SIRENS: Tall, light-haired girls with pale tapering legs and big fruity breasts. Their voices harmonized well together.

GYPSY (UNGRAMMATICAL): Cecily de Brault.

FAT BLONDE: Madame Stradella.

A COUNTRY LASS: Twenty-four years old. Lived out on a chicken ranch. Got up in the morning about the time most dances were breaking up. Milked three cows while Frank Tull was shaving. Had a brother and three younger sisters. Liked picture shows if they were Westerns. Drove a car not very skillfully. Was at her best with a dishtowel. Awfully friendly. After talking with her a little, one always thought what a pity she wasn't a little better-looking. She gave one the impression that whatever one might suggest to her she would be perfectly willing to do. But she was frightfully plain, and one never knew but what she might do a lot of running off at the mouth about it afterwards. Even against those two detriments, however, one of the boys went pretty far with her on a couple of occasions, but he let everything drop when it came to scratch.

ELDERLY LADY: A grandmother. Later a great-grandmother. Like a tree looking at little trees grow up all about it; looking at them proudly, but powerless to help them if they grew warped.

ONE OF THE LORELEI: Her hands and feet and other things were calloused from so much sitting around on the Felsen waiting for mariners to navigate past her on the Rhine. A soprano.

CIRCE: She changed men into swine.

FOOTBOUND CHINESE MAIDENS: Unquestionably it improved their walking; that is, it improved the æsthetics of their walking. It gave them a lilting, stiltlike walk, not designed for long distance, not designed for utility, but designed only to please the eyes of their masters. The deformation fell into critical disrepute when the daughters of the poor adopted it, the daughters who had to work instead of charm.

FRANK TULL'S STENOGRAPHER: A commercial college graduate of the ovarian type.

GIRL FORMERLY A SHE-GOAT: Time after time these transformations are decried in the Old Testament. Today, we live more simply; love less ardently.

VAHINE THAT THE SEA SERPENT ATE: A Polynesian girl. She ate fish and fruit and vegetables. When the sea serpent ate

her, she liked it even less than the fish liked it when she ate them.

A FAIR-HAIRED NORDIC GIRL: Elisabeth Poudre.

A GIRL IN APOLLONIUS'S LIFE: A memory.

THE BRIDE OF YOTTLE: Data as to her measurements are lacking. But after the nuptials, after she had left them, after her marriage had been consummated in heaven, the male Woldercanese still thought of her, remembering her beauty. And when they took brides, and kissed them, they made believe it was Yottle's bride they were kissing instead of their own.

THE WOLDERCAN VIRGINS: A dozen green, untasted girls.

III. THE CHILD CHARACTERS

SONS OF THE RAILROAD MAN: (a) Ed junior. Barefoot boy with cheeks of tan, except that his cheeks were pale and his mother wouldn't let him go barefoot. (b) Little Howard. Papa spanked him oftener than he did Ed junior.

THE ROGERS CHILDREN: (a) Alice. She stood first in her class all through the public schools but married while still so young that she never amounted to anything. (b) Willie. He operated a filling station after reaching his majority. (c) Little Edna. She died two months after the circus in a traffic accident. She was the prettiest of the Rogers children.

THE LITTLE FAT BROWN BOY: For seven years he was a diner; then for a few minutes he was a dinner. Ultimately he was incorporated into the cell structure of the sea serpent, a distinction he did not enjoy.

ELDERLY LADY'S GRANDSON: Peter R. Roberts. He took his Ph.D. at Harvard years later. Taught history in a southern school for boys. Married Miss Calanthe Devereau. Achieved the deanship of his department in his fortieth year. Never did he forget Doctor Lao's circus.

LITTLE BOY EVICTED FROM THE CIRCUS GROUNDS BY THE COPS: Gonzalo Pedregon. At nineteen he founded the later-to-be-famous collegiate dance orchestra, "Chalo's Chile Pickers," which through radio broadcasts and movie contracts made a neat bit of change for its director.

LITTLE BOY SLAIN BY THE MAUSER BULLET: A Tongshan kid named Da Go. He would have laughed as readily as the other bystanders had he not been the one who was laughed at.

FROGBOYS: Cretins.

IV. THE ANIMALS

POLAR BEAR: White like the ice floes among which it wanders. Great Mother Nature—she created snowfields for polar bears and pinewoods for black bears and mountains for grizzly bears and toyshops for teddy bears.

MONKEYS: The little brown brothers. From their cages they stare at us staring at them; then leaning over sniff at clots of their own dung.

HYENA: Africa echoes with its laughter.

SONORAN GRIZZLY: The country cousin living in Mexico of the great family Ursus horribilis.

HERMAPHRODITE GOATS: Resemble fishing worms. Nanny and Billy living together in the same husk.

PONY STALLION: Once in a Middle Western state a show of this sort was going on. The framework broke; the pony stallion fell through and killed the woman. There followed a terrible rumpus. The city aldermen met and argued. Finally, they decided that unless those frameworks were made stronger in the future that sort of show would have to be done away with entirely.

HORSES: Anachronisms less speedy, less beautiful, less efficient than the machines which have replaced them.

GOLDEN ASS: Wolves turn into women, mud into turtles, brown boys into snakes, fish into vahines, goats into girls, men into swine. And Lucius Apuleius, with the aid of Fotis, turned into an ass.

HOUND OF THE HEDGES: A dream.

BURRO: Not a white man's animal.

GILA MONSTERS: Pink and black, clumsy and poisonous, egg-layers, egg-eaters.

BEAST OF THE APOCALYPSE: A legend.

IGUANAS: The nuts from which the dragon stories sprouted.

KIT FOXES: Furry, fugitive, pretty little things.

BADGERS: Hole-diggers.

NAUTILUS: Sometimes chambered. Seabeasts. Speechless, sightless, thoughtless. They sail around on the waves and eat and reproduce and die.

SQUID: Adolescent octopi.

OBELIA: Baby jellies. Medusas. Stingers. Transparent umbrellas.

ELASMOBRANCH SHARK: Mankillers.

ENORMOUS TURTLES: The tortoises on the Galápagos and Aldabra Islands.

SEA SERPENT'S MATE: She knew what he wanted when she saw him coming through the waves.

SCORPIONS: Very ancient bugs glorified in heaven every night.

CRUSTACEANS: Crawdads. Cornpaffies. You catch them when you are fishing for catfish sometimes. Dangling from your hook they wave their claws and feelers at you, and you wonder at the fantasies that dwell in muddy waters.

LAMBKINS: Food and clothing for the master, man.

COCKROACH: La Cucaracha, the kitchendweller. Decently dressed in brown or black, discreet and humble, he lives in hovels as readily as in grand hotels. He has been with us a long time. He crawled about the middenheaps of the Neanderthal just as he still crawls about the middenheaps of the Parisian. He is fit and he survives. He watched the dinosaur and the pterodactyl die, and he saw Babylon flourish.

SPHINX: The icon of Africa.

STOAT: A stinkpot.

LION: A symbol.

HIPPOPOTAMUS: God must have loved ugly animals, he made so many of them.

CHIMERA: Described by Rabelais, Flaubert, and Finney.

TIGER: Color scheme somewhat the same as that of an Arizona Gila monster. Life cycle somewhat different.

WEREWOLF: Not the American lobo. Probably some species from the Carpathians or Urals.

MINKS: Fierce and beautiful hunters who, when they ease up on their vigilance, find themselves converted into coats and collars.

CATS: They are wild in the heart of a city, but they are tame and frightened in the heart of the woods. They don't fit anywhere any more.

RATTLESNAKES: Killed on sight, hunted and stamped down, they won't last much longer. Probably they wish along with the Aztec Indians that Columbus's boats had all sunk in the middle of the Atlantic.

TANTILLAS: Sonoran tantillas. They have small eyes, but rather large rostrals. Atop their heads they bear a pair of internasals, a pair of prefrontals, a frontal, a supraocular on each side and a pair of parietals. Furthermore, the posterior nasal is in contact with the preocular; and, it is alleged, their anterior genials are longer than their posterior genials.

SPOTTED NIGHT SNAKES: Hypsiglena ochrorhynchus ochrorhynchus. A very small snake. A very pretty snake. A very secretive snake. Mother Nature has provided for its diet very small, very pretty, and very secretive lizards. So down among the grasses of the irrigated fields the secretive, pretty little snakes chase and catch and eat the secretive, pretty little lizards. And the lizards which do not get caught breed and reproduce more pretty little lizards so that the oncoming generations of Hypsiglena may have plenty to eat. Furthermore, the little lizards eat little bugs, which in turn eat

littler bugs, themselves eating vegetation of a sort which has reared its flowers among the decay of animal flesh; and round and round and roundabout the merry dance of eating goes on till each little live thing knows not whether he was designed to be the diner or the dinner.

FADED SNAKES: Lizard-eaters, too; and they also eat each other.

SEA SERPENT: No one has counted his genials and gastroteges yet, nor computed his parietals and described his supra-oculars, though there's plenty would like to and pickle him to boot and stick him in a museum for people to peer at.

FRIGATE BIRD: They rove and roam the whole wide ocean with hardly a wing-flap, yet a little canary threshes its wings a thousand times to rise to a perch in a tree.

MERMAID: Described in the text.

SATYR: Described in the text.

ROC: Really not as big as Sinbad thought it was, but plenty big enough to do all that he said it did.

UNICORN: A decorative device on a mustard pot.

MEDUSA: As frigid herself as the stone figures into which she converted men.

WALRUS: Eskimo food.

CAMELS: The daughters of the desert throw sand in their eyes; a curious reaction follows, and the daughters laugh.

BOA: A little snake that squeezes.

ANACONDA: A giant snake that squeezes.

GRASS SNAKE: The one which ornamented the hound of the hedges was of the Coronella group.

GNATS: Mother Nature's tiniest flying machines.

RATS: They fight with cockroaches for the crust left under the table. And once they knew glory: they ate a bishop.

KATYDIDS: Remnants of an Egyptian plague.

BATS: Unsurpassed as small game. The only time one can hunt them is at dusk when the light is poor and fleeting. It takes a good shot to bring one of them down.

TURTLES (SNAPPING): They like to lie buried in the mud with only their noseholes sticking out. So Nature generously arranged nice sloughs of mud wherever there were any snapping turtles; and there they lie buried with only their noseholes sticking out. Nature always provides things for the comfort of her children.

TURTLE (TWO-HEADED): It died shortly. It could never stop quarreling with itself at feeding time, each head desiring to do all the eating. Once Apollonius, to test its reactions, placed two little lady turtles a few inches away from either head. The thing thereupon nearly tore itself in two.

CRICKETS: Ethiopian grasshoppers.

SALAMANDERS: The little water-lizards, not the water-fairies; though they, too, are interesting. Baby salamanders are gluey white and from their cheeks dangle atrocious-looking gills. Grown-up salamanders are muddy-looking, and as mud puppies are cut up by co-eds in comparative anatomy classes for some purpose never clearly explained. However, it is safe to say that the whole, sole, one and only purpose of salamanders living at all is that in the guise of mud puppies they may be cut into pieces by co-eds in colleges for some purpose never clearly explained. Though it may also be argued that the whole, sole, one and only purpose of co-eds being alive is that in comparative anatomy classes in college they may cut up mud puppies for some reason never clearly explained.

FROGS: The minstrels.

TOADS: Minstrels, too, in their fashion, but not such virtuosi as their more edible relatives.

MINNOWS: Baby fishes on which their aunts and uncles feed.

COLONY OF PARASITES: Lowly life forms. Ciliated and amorphous and equipped with contractile vacuoles.

TICKS: Paradoxes. When they are not feeding on blood, they are blood-red. When they are feeding on blood, they are grey as soap.

POLAND CHINA SHOAT: Food for man.

DUROC JERSEY PIG: Food for man.

GADARENE SWINE: Food for sermons.

HEDGEHOGS: Quiet little pincushions that hate the rain and are unimpressed by the revolutions among the men whose countrysides they adorn.

ELEPHANTS: Grandchildren of the mastodons.

SIDEWINDERS: They walk sideways as a measuring worm walks longways, although not exactly. On their brows they bear the ancient device of cuckoldry. On their tails is a toy. They are yellow as the sands they prowl about in, and from their fangs a venomous syrup drips.

GEESE: They please something in man's palate and therefore are permitted to live.

JERSEY CATTLE: They survive for the same reason the geese survive.

SNAILS: Make their own roads of slime and enjoy the sensation of travel without going anywhere.

STRAY SONGBIRDS GASPING IN THE HEAT: Six sparrows. One thrush.

MARMOTS: Groundhogs.

FISHING WORMS: Sometimes along with the mud puppies the co-eds cut up fishing worms, too. The fishing worms used in zoology classes are great big fat fellows. There is some-

thing pathetic about them, for in order to attain such size a worm has to be slated for dissection. The wild worms never get enough to eat to grow that big.

SURINAM TOAD: A slender-fingered, slender-nosed, poisonous toad that likes to loaf under water. It is poisonous in the same manner that a toadstool is poisonous: you have to bite the toad to be poisoned. Probably the nadir of all poison systems. A confined Surinam toad in an interesting condition is more instructive to observe than a Cæsarian section. The babies pop out of mama's back and go off immediately about their business.

V. THE GODS AND GODDESSES

YOTTLE: An omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent lump of bronze.

LARES DOMESTICI: The household gods.

PAN: Physically the largest of all the gods. In his troupe were lemures, ægipanes, bassarides, bacchides, evantes, mænades, fauns, and sylvans. They all adored him.

JESUS OF NAZARETH: Born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. But on the third day He rose again from the dead, and now He sitteth in Heaven on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth.

BEL-MARDUK: The one to whom the Babylonians prayed.

BALDER: The Adonis of the north.

ADONIS: The Balder of the south.

APHRODITE: The beautiful goddess.

MUMBO JUMBO: Lord of the Congo.

SATAN MEKRATRIG: Our old enemy.

VI. THE CITIES

TU-JENG: Solid brick. All about it are red brick kilns breathing reddish smoke into the dead air. And the road past Tu-jeng is red for it is made of chips and slivers of brick. And the water in the canal near Tu-jeng is red and runs through red clay banks. But everything is a dead red, not the cool red of wine, nor the hot red of blood, nor the blood-red of hate.

ABALONE: A desert town founded by the Conquistadores.

ALEXANDRIA: Still glorifies the name of its maker.

TONGSHAN: A Chinese mining town with a railroad station and army barracks.

TIENTSIN: One of the monster cities of the world. Scene of much war. But whenever its buildings are shot down, Tientsin builds bigger and finer ones to replace them.

BEESWAX: A mining town in Arizona.

SEDALIA: A railroad town in the heart of the Missouri farmlands.
PEIPING: Peking. The Northern Capital. Tientsin's huge old sister.
SHANHAIKWAN: The town at the northern end of the Great Wall.
PLACE OF MUD SHACKS AND DARKY PEOPLE: Unidentified.
WOLDERCAN: A hieroglyph on a potsherd.

VII. THE STATUETTES, FIGURINES, ICONS, ARTIFACTS, AND IDOLS

YOTTLE: Bronze.
KATE: Carnelian chalcedony.
SPHINX (MRS. ROGERS'S): Terra cotta.
SPHINX (WINKELMANN'S): Ivory.
SPHINX (EGYPTIAN): Sandstone.
ONE ANONYMOUS MAN: Sandstone.
ELEVEN ANONYMOUS ONLOOKERS: Chert.
TEN DRUNKEN SAILORS: Chert and schist.
THE BUDDHA: Jade.
CRUCIFIX: Gold.
CHIMERA (ALEXANDRIAN): Rags and clay and hide and bones.
CHIMERA (TIBETAN): Porcelain.
CHIMERA (KUBLAI'S): Bronze.
EPHESIAN DIANA: Rosewood.
LINGAM: Second growth black walnut.
YOTTLE'S SACRED STONE AX: Basalt.

VIII. THE QUESTIONS AND CONTRADICTIONS AND OBSCURITIES

1. Was it a bear or a Russian or what?
2. If the sea serpent was as poisonous as it claimed to be, why didn't it kill the chimera when it bit him?
3. Why, after all the discussion between himself and his wife, didn't Frank Tull hunt up the bear and see what it really was?
4. Why should Apollonius of Tyana, who claimed superiority to Christ, fall back on the crucifix to banish Satan?
5. Why didn't the two college punks get sore when they were thrown out?
6. Why didn't Doctor Lao notice anything unusual when he found Miss Agnes Birdsong and the satyr in such a compromising posture?
7. What was the business that the dead man whom Apollonius resurrected had to attend to?

8. What did Mumbo Jumbo do with the fair-haired Nordic girl?
9. If the circus didn't come to Abalone on the railroad and didn't come on trucks, how did it get there?
10. What happened to the eleven people who were turned to stone when the medusa dropped her blindfold?
11. If Apollonius was such a great magician, why did he waste his time fooling around with a little circus?
12. Inasmuch as legend tells us that chimeras were invariably females, how did it happen that Doctor Lao's was a male?
13. Was it for this same reason that Tu-jeng, when Doctor Lao caught the satyr there, was a hamlet near the Great Wall, whereas it is now a suburb of Tientsin?

IX. THE FOODSTUFFS

Pork chops. Lettuce. Ham hocks. Lamb chops. Persimmons. Hay. Soda pop. Duck eggs. Garlic. Little fat brown boy. Candy. Onion seeds. Pie. Pelicans. Grapes. Proteins. Snails. Beer. Snow geese. Sea foods. Carbohydrates. Frigate bird. Butterfat. Chicken. Gooseliver. Fish. Vahine. Frogs. Bananas. Oysters. Brown boy's old pappy. Bugs. Plantain. Fishing worms. Little plants. Lizards. Grub worms. Hot dogs. Rattlesnakes. Noodles. Slop. Nuts.

Tientsin-Tucson, 1929-1934.

THE POND

It was deeply scooped from a corner of the field, a green stagnant hollow with thorn bushes on its banks.

From time to time something moved cautiously beneath the prickly branches that were laden with red autumn berries. It whistled and murmured coaxingly.

"Come, come, come, come," it whispered. An old man, squatting frog-like on the bank. His words were no louder than the rustling of the dry leaves above his head. "Come now. Sssst—ssst! Little dear—here's a bit of meat for thee." He tossed a tiny scrap of something into the pool. The weed rippled sluggishly.

The old man sighed and shifted his position. He was crouching on his haunches because the bank was damp.

He froze.

The green slime had parted on the far side of the pool. The disturbance travelled to the bank opposite, and a large frog drew itself half out of the water. It stayed quite still, watching; then with a swift crawl it was clear of the water. Its yellow throat throbbed.

"Oh!—little dear," breathed the old man. He did not move.

He waited, letting the frog grow accustomed to the air and slippery earth. When he judged the moment to be right, he made a low grating noise in his throat.

He saw the frog listen.

The sound was subtly like the call of its own kind. The old man paused, then made it again.

This time the frog answered. It sprang into the pool, sending the green weed slopping, and swam strongly. Only its eyes showed above the water. It crawled out a few feet distant from the old man and looked up the bank, as if eager to find the frog it had heard.

The old man waited patiently. The frog hopped twice, up the bank.

His hand was moving, so slowly that it did not seem to move, towards the handle of the light net at his side. He gripped it, watching the still frog.

Suddenly he struck.

A sweep of the net, and its wire frame whacked the ground about the frog. It leaped frantically, but was helpless in the green mesh.

"Dear! Oh, my dear!" said the old man delightedly.

He stood with much difficulty and pain, his foot on the thin rod. His joints had stiffened and it was some minutes before he could go to the net. The frog was still struggling desperately. He closed the net round its body and picked both up together.

"Ah, big beauty!" he said. "Pretty. Handsome fellow, you!"

He took a darning needle from his coat lapel and carefully killed the creature through the mouth, so that its skin would not be damaged, then put it in his pocket.

It was the last frog in the pond.

He lashed the water with the net rod, and the weed swirled and bobbed: there was no sign of life now but the little flies that flitted on the surface.

He went across the empty field with the net across his shoulder, shivering a little, feeling that the warmth had gone out of his body during the long wait. He climbed a stile, throwing the net over in front of him to leave his hands free. In the next field, by the road, was his cottage.

Hobbling through the grass with the sun striking a long shadow from him, he felt the weight of the dead frog in his pocket, and was glad.

"Big beauty!" he murmured again.

The cottage was small and dry, and ugly and very old. Its windows gave little light, and they had coloured panels, dark-blue and green, that gave the rooms the appearance of being under the sea.

The old man lit a lamp, for the sun had set; and the light became more cheerful. He put the frog on a plate, and poked the fire, and when he was warm again, took off his coat.

He settled down close beside the lamp and took a sharp knife from the drawer of the table. With great care and patience, he began to skin the frog.

From time to time he took off his spectacles and rubbed his eyes. The work was tiring; also the heat from the lamp made them sore. He would speak aloud to the dead creature, coaxing and cajoling it when he found his task difficult. But in time he had the skin neatly removed, a little heap of tumbled, slippery film. He dropped the stiff, stripped body into a pan of boiling water on the fire, and sat again, humming and fingering the limp skin.

"Pretty," he said. "You'll be so handsome."

There was a stump of black soap in the drawer and he took it out to rub the skin, with the slow, overcareful motion that showed the age in his hand. The little mottled thing

began to stiffen under the curing action. He left it at last, and brewed himself a pot of tea, lifting the lid of the simmering pan occasionally to make sure that the tiny skull and bones were being boiled clean without damage.

Sipping his tea, he crossed the narrow living-room. Well away from the fire stood a high table, its top covered by a square of dark cloth supported on a frame. There was a faint smell of decay.

"How are you, little dears?" said the old man.

He lifted the covering with shaky scrupulousness. Beneath the wire support were dozens of stuffed frogs.

All had been posed in human attitudes; dressed in tiny coats and breeches to the fashion of an earlier time. There were ladies and gentlemen and bowing flunkeys. One, with lace at his yellow, waxen throat, held a wooden wine-cup. To the dried forepaw of its neighbour was stitched a tiny glassless monocle, raised to a black button eye. A third had a midget pipe pressed into its jaws, with a wisp of wool for smoke. The same coarse wool, cleaned and shaped, served the ladies for their miniature wigs; they wore long skirts and carried fans.

The old man looked proudly over the stiff little figures.

"You, my lord—what are you doing, with your mouth so glum?" His fingers prized open the jaws of a round-bellied frog dressed in satins; shrinkage must have closed them. "Now you can sing again, and drink up!"

His eyes searched the banqueting, motionless party.

"Where now—? Ah!"

In the middle of the table three of the creatures were fixed in the attitude of a dance.

The old man spoke to them. "Soon we'll have a partner for the lady there. He'll be the handsomest of the whole company, my dear, so don't forget to smile at him and look your prettiest!"

He hurried back to the fireplace and lifted the pan; poured off the steaming water into a bucket.

"Fine, shapely brain-box you have." He picked with his knife, cleaning the tiny skull. "Easy does it." He put it down on the table admiringly; it was like a transparent flake of ivory. One by one he found the delicate bones in the pan, knowing each for what it was.

"Now, little duke, we have all of them that we need," he said at last. "We can make you into a picture indeed. The beau of the ball. And such an object of jealousy for the lovely ladies!"

With wire and thread he fashioned a stiff little skeleton, binding in the bones to preserve the proportions. At the top went the skull.

The frog's skin had lost its earlier flaccidness. He threaded

a needle, eyeing it close to the lamp. From the table drawer he now brought a loose wad of wool. Like a doctor reassuring his patient by describing his methods, he began to talk.

"This wool is coarse, I know, little friend. A poor substitute to fill that skin of yours, you may say: wool from the hedges, snatched by the thorns from a sheep's back." He was pulling the wad into tufts of the size he required. "But you'll find it gives you such a springiness that you'll thank me for it. Now, carefully does it—"

With perfect concentration he worked his needle through the skin, drawing it together round the wool with almost untraceable stitches.

"A piece of lace in your left hand, or shall it be a quizzing-glass?" With tiny scissors he trimmed away a fragment of skin. "But—wait, it's a dance and it is your right hand that we must see, guiding the lady."

He worked the skin precisely into place round the skull. He would attend to the empty eye-holes later.

Suddenly he lowered his needle.

He listened.

Puzzled, he put down the half-stuffed skin and went to the door and opened it.

It was dark now. He heard the sound more clearly. He knew it was coming from the pond. A far-off, harsh croaking, as of a great many frogs.

He frowned.

In the wall cupboard he found a lantern ready trimmed, and lit it with a flickering splinter. He put on an overcoat and hat: the evening was chilly. Lastly he took his net.

He went very cautiously. His eyes saw nothing at first, after working so close to the lamp. Then, as the croaking came to him more clearly and he became accustomed to the darkness, he hurried.

He climbed the stile as before, throwing the net ahead. This time, however, he had to search for it in the darkness, tantalized by the sounds from the pond. When it was in his hand again, he began to move stealthily.

About twenty yards from the pool he stopped and listened.

There was no wind and the noise astonished him. Hundreds of frogs must have travelled through the fields to this spot; perhaps from other water where danger had arisen, perhaps, or drought. He had heard of such instances.

Almost on tiptoe he crept towards the pond. He could see nothing yet. There was no moon, and the thorn bushes hid the surface of the water.

He was a few paces from the pond when, without warning, every sound ceased.

He froze again. There was absolute silence. Not even a

watery plop or splashing told that one frog out of all those hundreds had dived for shelter into the weed. It was strange.

He stepped forward, and heard his boots brushing the grass.

He brought the net up across his chest, ready to strike if he saw anything move. He came to the thorn bushes, and still heard no sound. Yet, to judge by the noise they had made, they should be hopping in dozens from beneath his feet.

Peering, he made the throaty noise which had called the frog that afternoon. The hush continued.

He looked down at where the water must be. The surface of the pond, shadowed by the bushes, was too dark to be seen. He shivered, and waited.

Gradually, as he stood, he became aware of a smell.

It was wholly unpleasant. Seemingly it came from the weed, yet mixed with the vegetable odour was one of another kind of decay. A soft, oozy bubbling accompanied it. Gases must be rising from the mud at the bottom. It would not do to stay in this place and risk his health.

He stooped, still puzzled by the disappearance of the frogs, and stared once more at the dark surface. Pulling his net to a ready position, he tried the throaty call for the last time.

Instantly he threw himself backwards with a cry.

A vast, belching bubble of foul air shot from the pool. Another gushed up past his head; then another. Great patches of slimy weed were flung high among the thorn branches.

The whole pond seemed to boil.

He turned blindly to escape, and stepped into the thorns. He was in agony. A dreadful slobbering deafened his ears: the stench overcame his senses. He felt the net whipped from his hand. The icy weeds were wet on his face. Reeds lashed him.

Then he was in the midst of an immense, pulsating softness that yielded and received and held him. He knew he was shrieking. He knew there was no one to hear him.

An hour after the sun had risen, the rain slackened to a light drizzle.

A policeman cycled slowly on the road that ran by the cottage, shaking out his cape with one hand, and half-expecting the old man to appear and call out a comment on the weather. Then he caught sight of the lamp, still burning feebly in the kitchen, and dismounted. He found the door ajar, and wondered if something was wrong.

He called to the old man. He saw the uncommon handiwork lying on the table as if it had been suddenly dropped; and the unused bed.

For half an hour the policeman searched in the neighbourhood of the cottage, calling out the old man's name at

intervals, before remembering the pond. He turned towards the stile.

Climbing over it, he frowned and began to hurry. He was disturbed by what he saw.

On the bank of the pond crouched a naked figure.

The policeman went closer. He saw it was the old man, on his haunches; his arms were straight; the hands resting between his feet. He did not move as the policeman approached.

"Hallo, there!" said the policeman. He ducked to avoid the thorn bushes catching his helmet. "This won't do, you know. You can get into trouble—"

He saw green slime in the old man's beard, and the staring eyes. His spine chilled. With an unprofessional distaste, he quickly put out a hand and took the old man by the upper arm. It was cold. He shivered, and moved the arm gently.

Then he groaned and ran from the pond.

For the arm had come away at the shoulder: reeds and green water-plants and slime tumbled from the broken joint.

As the old man fell backwards, tiny green stitches glistened across his belly.

THE HOUR OF LETDOWN

When the man came in, carrying the machine, most of us looked up from our drinks, because we had never seen anything like it before. The man set the thing down on top of the bar near the beerpulls. It took up an ungodly amount of room and you could see the bartender didn't like it any too well, having this big, ugly-looking gadget parked right there.

"Two rye-and-water," the man said.

The bartender went on puddling an Old-Fashioned that he was working on, but he was obviously turning over the request in his mind.

"You want a double?" he asked, after a bit.

"No," said the man. "Two rye-and-water, please." He stared straight at the bartender, not exactly unfriendly but on the other hand not affirmatively friendly.

Many years of catering to the kind of people that come into saloons had provided the bartender with an adjustable mind. Nevertheless, he did not adjust readily to this fellow, and he did not like the machine—that was sure. He picked up a live cigarette that was idling on the edge of the cash register, took a drag out of it, and returned it thoughtfully. Then he poured two shots of rye whiskey, drew two glasses of water, and shoved the drinks in front of the man. People were watching. When something a little out of the ordinary takes place at a bar, the sense of it spreads quickly all along the line and pulls the customers together.

The man gave no sign of being the center of attention. He laid a five-dollar bill down on the bar. Then he drank one of the ryes and chased it with water. He picked up the other rye, opened a small vent in the machine (it was like an oil cup) and poured the whiskey in, and then poured the water in.

The bartender watched grimly. "Not funny," he said in an even voice. "And furthermore, your companion takes up too

much room. Why'n you put it over on that bench by the door, make more room here."

"There's plenty of room for everyone here," replied the man.

"I ain't amused," said the bartender. "Put the goddam thing over near the door like I say. Nobody will touch it."

The man smiled. "You should have seen it this afternoon," he said. "It was magnificent. Today was the third day of the tournament. Imagine it—three days of continuous brainwork! And against the top players in the country, too. Early in the game it gained an advantage; then for two hours it exploited the advantage brilliantly, ending with the opponent's king backed in a corner. The sudden capture of a knight, the neutralization of a bishop, and it was all over. You know how much money it won, all told, in three days of playing chess?"

"How much?" asked the bartender.

"Five thousand dollars," said the man. "Now it wants to let down, wants to get a little drunk."

The bartender ran his towel vaguely over some wet spots. "Take it somewheres else and get it drunk there!" he said firmly. "I got enough troubles."

The man shook his head and smiled. "No, we like it here." He pointed at the empty glasses. "Do this again, will you, please?"

The bartender slowly shook his head. He seemed dazed but dogged. "You stow the thing away," he ordered. "I'm not ladling out whiskey for jokestersmiths."

" 'Jokesmiths,' " said the machine. "The word is 'jokesmiths.' "

A few feet down the bar, a customer who was on his third highball seemed ready to participate in this conversation to which we had all been listening so attentively. He was a middle-aged man. His necktie was pulled down away from his collar, and he had eased the collar by unbuttoning it. He had pretty nearly finished his third drink, and the alcohol tended to make him throw his support in with the underprivileged and the thirsty.

"If the machine wants another drink, give it another drink," he said to the bartender. "Let's not have haggling."

The fellow with the machine turned to his new-found friend and gravely raised his hand to his temple, giving him a salute of gratitude and fellowship. He addressed his next remark to him, as though deliberately snubbing the bartender.

"You know how it is when you're all fagged out mentally, how you want a drink?"

"Certainly do," replied the friend. "Most natural thing in the world."

There was a stir all along the bar, some seeming to side with the bartender, others with the machine group. A tall, gloomy man standing next to me spoke up.

"Another whiskey sour, Bill," he said. "And go easy on the lemon juice."

"Picric acid," said the machine, sullenly. "They don't use lemon juice in these places."

"That does it!" said the bartender, smacking his hand on the bar. "Will you put that thing away or else beat it out of here. I ain't in the mood, I tell you. I got this saloon to run and I don't want lip from a mechanical brain or whatever the hell you've got there."

The man ignored this ultimatum. He addressed his friend, whose glass was now empty.

"It's not just that it's all tuckered out after three days of chess," he said amiably. "You know another reason it wants a drink?"

"No," said the friend. "Why?"

"It cheated," said the man.

At this remark, the machine chuckled. One of its arms dipped slightly, and a light glowed in a dial.

The friend frowned. He looked as though his dignity had been hurt, as though his trust had been misplaced. "Nobody can cheat at chess," he said. "Simpossible. In chess, everything is open and above the board. The nature of the game of chess is such that cheating is impossible."

"That's what I used to think, too," said the man. "But there *is* a way."

"Well, it doesn't surprise me any," put in the bartender. "The first time I laid my eyes on that crummy thing I spotted if for a crook."

"Two rye-and-water," said the man.

"You can't have the whiskey," said the bartender. He glared at the mechanical brain. "How do I know it ain't drunk already?"

"That's simple. Ask it something," said the man.

The customers shifted and stared into the mirror. We were all in this thing now, up to our necks. We waited. It was the bartender's move.

"Ask it what? Such as?" said the bartender.

"Makes no difference. Pick a couple big figures, ask it to multiply them together. You couldn't multiply big figures together if you were drunk, could you?"

The machine shook slightly, as though making internal preparations.

"Ten thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, multiply it by ninety-nine," said the bartender, viciously. We could tell that he was throwing in the two nines to make it hard.

The machine flickered. One of its tubes spat, and a hand changed position, jerkily.

"One million seventy-five thousand three hundred and thirty-eight," said the machine.

Not a glass was raised all along the bar. People just stared gloomily into the mirror; some of us studied our own faces, others took carom shots at the man and the machine.

Finally, a youngish, mathematically minded customer got out a piece of paper and a pencil and went into retirement. "It works out," he reported, after some minutes of calculating. "You can't say the machine is drunk!"

Everyone now glared at the bartender. Reluctantly he poured two shots of rye, drew two glasses of water. The man drank his drink. Then he fed the machine its drink. The machine's light grew fainter. One of its cranky little arms wilted.

For a while the saloon simmered along like a ship at sea in calm weather. Every one of us seemed to be trying to digest the situation, with the help of liquor. Quite a few glasses were refilled. Most of us sought help in the mirror—the court of last appeal.

The fellow with the unbuttoned collar settled his score. He walked stiffly over and stood between the man and the machine. He put one arm around the man, the other arm around the machine. "Let's get out of here and go to a good place," he said.

The machine glowed slightly. It seemed to be a little drunk now.

"All right," said the man. "That suits me fine. I've got my car outside."

He settled for the drinks and put down a tip. Quietly and a trifle uncertainly he tucked the machine under his arm, and he and his companion of the night walked to the door and out into the street.

The bartender stared fixedly, then resumed his light housekeeping. "So he's got his car outside," he said, with heavy sarcasm. "Now isn't that nice!"

A customer at the end of the bar near the door left his drink, stepped to the window, parted the curtains, and looked out. He watched for a moment, then returned to his place and addressed the bartender. "It's even nicer than you think," he said. "It's a Cadillac. And which one of the three of them d'ya think is doing the driving?"

THE WISH

Under the palm of one hand the child became aware of the scab of an old cut on his knee-cap. He bent forward to examine it closely. A scab was always a fascinating thing; it presented a special challenge he was never able to resist.

Yes, he thought, I will pick it off, even if it isn't ready, even if the middle of it sticks, even if it hurts like anything.

With a fingernail he began to explore cautiously around the edges of the scab. He got the nail underneath it, and when he raised it, but ever so slightly, it suddenly came off, the whole hard brown scab came off beautifully, leaving an interesting little circle of smooth red skin.

Nice. Very nice indeed. He rubbed the circle and it didn't hurt. He picked up the scab, put it on his thigh and flipped it with a finger so that it flew away and landed on the edge of the carpet, the enormous red and black and yellow carpet that stretched the whole length of the hall from the stairs on which he sat to the front door in the distance. A tremendous carpet. Bigger than the tennis lawn. Much bigger than that. He regarded it gravely, settling his eyes upon it with mild pleasure. He had never really noticed it before, but now, all of a sudden, the colours seemed to brighten mysteriously and spring out at him in a most dazzling way.

You see, he told himself, I know how it is. The red parts of the carpet are red-hot lumps of coal. What I must do is this: I must walk all the way along it to the front door without touching them. If I touch the red I will be burnt. As a matter of fact, I will be burnt up completely. And the black parts of the carpet . . . yes, the black parts are snakes, poisonous snakes, adders mostly, and cobras, thick like tree-trunks round the middle, and if I touch one of *them,* I'll be bitten and I'll die before tea time. And if I get across safely, without being burnt and without being bitten, I will be given a puppy for my birthday tomorrow.

He got to his feet and climbed higher up the stairs to obtain a better view of this vast tapestry of colour and death. Was it possible? Was there enough yellow? Yellow was the only

colour he was allowed to walk on. Could it be done? This was not a journey to be undertaken lightly; the risks were too great for that. The child's face—a fringe of white-gold hair, two large blue eyes, a small pointed chin—peered down anxiously over the banister. The yellow was a bit thin in places and there were one or two widish gaps, but it did seem to go all the way along to the other end. For someone who had only yesterday triumphantly travelled the whole length of the brick path from the stables to the summer-house without touching the cracks, this carpet thing should not be too difficult. Except for the snakes. The mere thought of snakes sent a fine electricity of fear running like pins down the backs of his legs and under the soles of his feet.

He came slowly down the stairs and advanced to the edge of the carpet. He extended one small sandaled foot and placed it cautiously upon a patch of yellow. Then he brought the other foot up, and there was just enough room for him to stand with the two feet together. There! He had started! His bright oval face was curiously intent, a shade whiter perhaps than before, and he was holding his arms out sideways to assist his balance. He took another step, lifting his foot high over a patch of black, aiming carefully with his toe for a narrow channel of yellow on the other side. When he had completed the second step he paused to rest, standing very stiff and still. The narrow channel of yellow ran forward unbroken for at least five yards and he advanced gingerly along it, bit by bit, as though walking a tight-rope. Where it finally curled off sideways, he had to take another long stride, this time over a vicious looking mixture of black and red. Halfway across he began to wobble. He waved his ams around wildly, windmill fashion, to keep his balance, and he got across safely and rested again on the other side. He was quite breathless now, and so tense he stood high on his toes all the time, arms out sideways, fists clenched. He was on a big safe island of yellow. There was lots of room on it, he couldn't possibly fall off, and he stood there resting, hesitating, waiting, wishing he could stay for ever on this big safe yellow island. But the fear of not getting the puppy compelled him to go on.

Step by step, he edged further ahead, and between each one he paused to decide exactly where next he should put his foot. Once, he had a choice of ways, either to left or right, and he chose the left because although it seemed the more difficult, there was not so much black in that direction. The black was what made him nervous. He glanced quickly over his shoulder to see how far he had come. Nearly halfway. There could be no turning back now. He was in the middle and he couldn't turn back and he couldn't jump off sideways either because it was too far, and when he looked at all the red and all the

black that lay ahead of him, he felt that old sudden sickening surge of panic in his chest—like last Easter time, that afternoon when he got lost all alone in the darkest part of Piper's Wood.

He took another step, placing his foot carefully upon the only little piece of yellow within reach, and this time the point of the foot came within a centimetre of some black. It wasn't touching the black, he could see it wasn't touching, he could see the small line of yellow separating the toe of his sandal from the black; but the snake stirred as though sensing the nearness, and raised its head and gazed at the foot with bright beady eyes, watching to see if it was going to touch.

"I'm not touching you! You mustn't bite me! You know I'm not touching you!"

Another snake slid up noiselessly beside the first, raised its head, two heads now, two pairs of eyes staring at the foot, gazing at a little naked place just below the sandal strap where the skin showed through. The child went high up on his toes and stayed there, frozen stiff with terror. It was minutes before he dared to move again.

The next step would have to be a really long one. There was this deep curling river of black that ran clear across the width of the carpet, and he was forced by his position to cross it at its widest part. He thought first of trying to jump it, but decided he couldn't be sure of landing accurately on the narrow band of yellow the other side. He took a deep breath, lifted one foot, and inch by inch he pushed it out in front of him, far far out, then down and down until at last the tip of his sandal was across and resting safely on the edge of the yellow. He leaned forward, transferring his weight to this front foot. Then he tried to bring the back foot up as well. He strained and pulled and jerked his body, but the legs were too wide apart and he couldn't make it. He tried to get back again. He couldn't do that either. He was doing the splits and he was properly stuck. He glanced down and saw this deep curling river of black underneath him. Parts of it were stirring now, and uncoiling and sliding and beginning to shine with a dreadful oily glister. He wobbled, waved his arms frantically to keep his balance, but that seemed to make it worse. He was starting to go over. He was going over to the right, quite slowly he was going over, then faster and faster, and at the last moment, instinctively he put out a hand to break the fall and the next thing he saw was this bare hand of his going right into the middle of a great glistening mass of black and he gave one piercing cry of terror as it touched.

Outside in the sunshine, far away behind the house, the mother was looking for her son.

THE SUMMER PEOPLE

The Allisons' country cottage, seven miles from the nearest town, was set prettily on a hill; from three sides it looked down on soft trees and grass that seldom, even at midsummer, lay still and dry. On the fourth side was the lake, which touched against the wooden pier the Allisons had to keep repairing, and which looked equally well from the Allisons' front porch, their side porch or any spot on the wooden staircase leading from the porch down to the water. Although the Allisons loved their summer cottage, looked forward to arriving in the early summer and hated to leave in the fall, they had not troubled themselves to put in any improvements, regarding the cottage itself and the lake as improvement enough for the life left to them. The cottage had no heat, no running water except the precarious supply from the backyard pump and no electricity. For seventeen summers, Janet Allison had cooked on a kerosene stove, heating all their water; Robert Allison had brought buckets full of water daily from the pump and read his paper by kerosene light in the evenings and they had both, sanitary city people, become stolid and matter-of-fact about their backhouse. In the first two years they had gone through all the standard vaudeville and magazine jokes about backhouses and by now, when they no longer had frequent guests to impress, they had subsided to a comfortable security which made the backhouse, as well as the pump and the kerosene, an indefinable asset to their summer life.

In themselves, the Allisons were ordinary people. Mrs. Allison was fifty-eight years old and Mr. Allison sixty; they had seen their children outgrow the summer cottage and go on to families of their own and seashore resorts; their friends were either dead or settled in comfortable year-round houses, their nieces and nephews vague. In the winter they told one another they could stand their New York apartment while waiting for the summer; in the summer they told one another that the winter was well worth while, waiting to get to the country.

Since they were old enough not to be ashamed of regular habits, the Allisons invariably left their summer cottage the Tuesday after Labor Day, and were as invariably sorry when the months of September and early October turned out to be pleasant and almost insufferably barren in the city; each year they recognized that there was nothing to bring them back to New York, but it was not until this year that they overcame their traditional inertia enough to decide to stay at the cottage after Labor Day.

"There isn't really anything to take us back to the city," Mrs. Allison told her husband seriously, as though it were a new idea, and he told her, as though neither of them had ever considered it, "We might as well enjoy the country as long as possible."

Consequently, with much pleasure and a slight feeling of adventure, Mrs. Allison went into their village the day after Labor Day and told those natives with whom she had dealings, with a pretty air of breaking away from tradition, that she and her husband had decided to stay at least a month longer at their cottage.

"It isn't as though we had anything to take us back to the city," she said to Mr. Babcock, her grocer. "We might as well enjoy the country while we can."

"Nobody ever stayed at the lake past Labor Day before," Mr. Babcock said. He was putting Mrs. Allison's groceries into a large cardboard carton, and he stopped for a minute to look reflectively into a bag of cookies. "Nobody," he added.

"But the city!" Mrs. Allison always spoke of the city to Mr. Babcock as though it were Mr. Babcock's dream to go there. "It's so hot—you've really no idea. We're always sorry when we leave."

"Hate to leave," Mr. Babcock said. One of the most irritating native tricks Mrs. Allison had noticed was that of taking a trivial statement and rephrasing it downwards, into an even more trite statement. "I'd hate to leave myself," Mr. Babcock said, after deliberation, and both he and Mrs. Allison smiled. "But I never heard of anyone ever staying out at the lake after Labor Day before."

"Well, we're going to give it a try," Mrs. Allison said, and Mr. Babcock replied gravely, "Never know till you try."

Physically, Mrs. Allison decided, as she always did when leaving the grocery after one of her inconclusive conversations with Mr. Babcock, physically, Mr. Babcock could model for a statue of Daniel Webster, but mentally . . . it was horrible to think into what old New England Yankee stock had degenerated. She said as much to Mr. Allison when she got into the car, and he said, "It's generations of inbreeding. That and the bad land."

Since this was their big trip into town, which they made only once every two weeks to buy things they could not have delivered, they spent all day at it, stopping to have a sandwich in the newspaper and soda shop, and leaving packages heaped in the back of the car. Although Mrs. Allison was able to order groceries delivered regularly, she was never able to form any accurate idea of Mr. Babcock's current stock by telephone, and her lists of odds and ends that might be procured was always supplemented, almost beyond their need, by the new and fresh local vegetables Mr. Babcock was selling temporarily, or the packaged candy which had just come in. This trip Mrs. Allison was tempted, too, by the set of glass baking dishes that had found themselves completely by chance in the hardware and clothing and general store, and which had seemingly been waiting there for no one but Mrs. Allison, since the country people, with their instinctive distrust of anything that did not look as permanent as trees and rocks and sky, had only recently begun to experiment in aluminum baking dishes instead of ironware, and had, apparently within the memory of local inhabitants, discarded stoneware in favor of iron.

Mrs. Allison had the glass baking dishes carefully wrapped, to endure the uncomfortable ride home over the rocky road that led up to the Allisons' cottage, and while Mr. Charley Walpole, who, with his younger brother Albert, ran the hardware-clothing-general store (the store itself was called Johnson's, because it stood on the site of the old Johnson cabin, burned fifty years before Charley Walpole was born), laboriously unfolded newspapers to wrap around the dishes, Mrs. Allison said, informally, "Course, I *could* have waited and gotten those dishes in New York, but we're not going back so soon this year."

"Heard you was staying on," Mr. Charley Walpole said. His old fingers fumbled maddeningly with the thin sheets of newspaper, carefully trying to isolate only one sheet at a time, and he did not look up at Mrs. Allison as he went on, "Don't know about staying on up there to the lake. Not after Labor Day."

"Well, you know," Mrs. Allison said, quite as though he deserved an explanation, "it just seemed to us that we've been hurrying back to New York every year, and there just wasn't any need for it. You know what the city's like in the fall." And she smiled confidingly up at Mr. Charley Walpole.

Rythmically he wound string around the package. He's giving me a piece long enough to save, Mrs. Allison thought, and she looked away quickly to avoid giving any sign of impatience. "I feel sort of like we belong here, more," she said. "Staying on after everyone else has left." To prove this, she

smiled brightly across the store at a woman with a familiar face, who might have been the woman who sold berries to the Allisons one year, or the woman who occasionally helped in the grocery and was probably Mr. Babcock's aunt.

"Well," Mr. Charley Walpole said. He shoved the package a little across the counter, to show that it was finished and that for a sale well made, a package well wrapped, he was willing to accept pay. "Well," he said again. "Never been summer people before, at the lake after Labor Day."

Mrs. Allison gave him a five-dollar bill, and he made change methodically, giving great weight even to the pennies. "Never after Labor Day," he said, and nodded at Mrs. Allison, and went soberly along the store to deal with two women who were looking at cotton house dresses.

As Mrs. Allison passed on her way out she heard one of the women say acutely, "Why is one of them dresses one dollar and thirty-nine cents and this one here is only ninety-eight?"

"They're great people," Mrs. Allison told her husband as they went together down the sidewalk after meeting at the door of the hardware store. "They're so solid, and so reasonable, and so *honest.*"

"Makes you feel good, knowing there are still towns like this," Mr. Allison said.

"You know, in New York," Mrs. Allison said, "I might have paid a few cents less for these dishes, but there wouldn't have been anything, sort of *personal* in the transaction."

"Staying on to the lake?" Mrs. Martin, in the newspaper and sandwich shop, asked the Allisons. "Heard you was staying on."

"Thought we'd take advantage of the lovely weather this year," Mr. Allison said.

Mrs. Martin was a comparative newcomer to the town; she had married into the newspaper and sandwich shop from a neighboring farm, and had stayed on after her husband's death. She served bottled soft drinks, and fried egg and onion sandwiches on thick bread, which she made on her own stove at the back of the store. Occasionally when Mrs. Martin served a sandwich it would carry with it the rich fragrance of the stew or the pork chops cooking alongside for Mrs. Martin's dinner.

"I don't guess anyone's ever stayed out there so long before," Mrs. Martin said. "Not after Labor Day, anyway."

"I guess Labor Day is when they usually leave," Mr. Hall, the Allisons' nearest neighbor, told them later, in front of Mr. Babcock's store, where the Allisons were getting into their car to go home. "Surprised you're staying on."

"It seemed a shame to go so soon," Mrs. Allison said. Mr. Hall lived three miles away; he supplied the Allisons with

butter and eggs, and occasionally, from the top of their hill, the Allisons could see the lights in his house in the early evening before the Halls went to bed.

"They usually leave Labor Day," Mr. Hall said.

The ride home was long and rough; it was beginning to get dark, and Mr. Allison had to drive very carefully over the dirt road by the lake. Mrs. Allison lay back against the seat, pleasantly relaxed after a day of what seemed whirlwind shopping compared with their day-to-day existence; the new glass baking dishes lurked agreeably in her mind, and the half bushel of red eating apples, and the package of colored thumbtacks with which she was going to put up new shelf edging in the kitchen. "Good to get home," she said softly as they came in sight of their cottage, silhouetted above them against the sky.

"Glad we decided to stay on," Mr. Allison agreed.

Mrs. Allison spent the next morning lovingly washing her baking dishes, although in his innocence Charley Walpole had neglected to notice the chip in the edge of one; she decided, wastefully, to use some of the red eating apples in a pie for dinner, and, while the pie was in the oven and Mr. Allison was down getting the mail, she sat out on the little lawn the Allisons had made at the top of the hill, and watched the changing lights on the lake, alternating gray and blue as clouds moved quickly across the sun.

Mr. Allison came back a little out of sorts; it always irritated him to walk the mile to the mail box on the state road and come back with nothing, even though he assumed that the walk was good for his health. This morning there was nothing but a circular from a New York department store, and their New York paper, which arrived erratically by mail from one to four days later than it should, so that some days the Allisons might have three papers and frequently none. Mrs. Allison, although she shared with her husband the annoyance of not having mail when they so anticipated it, pored affectionately over the department store circular, and made a mental note to drop in at the store when she finally went back to New York, and check on the sale of wool blankets; it was hard to find good ones in pretty colors nowadays. She debated saving the circular to remind herself, but after thinking about getting up and getting into the cottage to put it away safely somewhere, she dropped it into the grass beside her chair and lay back, her eyes half closed.

"Looks like we might have some rain," Mr. Allison said, squinting at the sky.

"Good for the crops," Mrs. Allison said laconically, and they both laughed.

The kerosene man came the next morning while Mr. Allison was down getting the mail; they were getting low on kerosene and Mrs. Allison greeted the man warmly; he sold kerosene and ice, and, during the summer, hauled garbage away for the summer people. A garbage man was only necessary for improvident city folk; country people had no garbage.

"I'm glad to see you," Mrs. Allison told him. "We were getting pretty low."

The kerosene man, whose name Mrs. Allison had never learned, used a hose attachment to fill the twenty-gallon tank which supplied light and heat and cooking facilities for the Allisons; but today, instead of swinging down from his truck and unhooking the hose from where it coiled affectionately around the cab of the truck, the man stared uncomfortably at Mrs. Allison, his truck motor still going.

"Thought you folks'd be leaving," he said.

"We're staying on another month," Mrs. Allison said brightly. "The weather was so nice, and it seemed like—"

"That's what they told me," the man said. "Can't give you no oil, though."

"What do you mean?" Mrs. Allison raised her eyebrows. "We're just going to keep on with our regular—"

"After Labor Day," the man said. "I don't get so much oil myself after Labor Day."

Mrs. Allison reminded herself, as she had frequently to do when in disagreement with her neighbors, that city manners were no good with country people; you could not expect to overrule a country employee as you could a city worker, and Mrs. Allison smiled engagingly as she said, "But can't you get extra oil, at least while we stay?"

"You see," the man said. He tapped his finger exasperatingly against the car wheel as he spoke. "You see," he said slowly, "I order this oil. I order it down from maybe fifty, fifty-five miles away. I order back in June, how much I'll need for the summer. Then I order again . . . oh, about November. Round about now it's starting to get pretty short." As though the subject were closed, he stopped tapping his finger and tightened his hands on the wheel in preparation for departure.

"But can't you give us *some?*" Mrs. Allison said. "Isn't there anyone else?"

"Don't know as you could get oil anywheres else right now," the man said consideringly. "*I* can't give you none." Before Mrs. Allison could speak, the truck began to move; then it stopped for a minute and he looked at her through the back window of the cab. "Ice?" he called. "I could let you have some ice."

Mrs. Allison shook her head; they were not terribly low on

ice, and she was angry. She ran a few steps to catch up with the truck, calling, "Will you try to get us some? Next week?"

"Don't see's I can," the man said. "After Labor Day, it's harder." The truck drove away, and Mrs. Allison, only comforted by the thought that she could probably get kerosene from Mr. Babcock or, at worst, the Halls, watched it go with anger. "Next summer," she told herself. "Just let *him* try coming around next summer!"

There was no mail again, only the paper, which seemed to be coming doggedly on time, and Mr. Allison was openly cross when he returned. When Mrs. Allison told him about the kerosene man he was not particularly impressed.

"Probably keeping it all for a high price during the winter," he commented. "What's happened to Anne and Jerry, do you think?"

Anne and Jerry were their son and daughter, both married, one living in Chicago, one in the far west; their dutiful weekly letters were late; so late, in fact, that Mr. Allison's annoyance at the lack of mail was able to settle on a legitimate grievance. "Ought to realize how we wait for their letters," he said. "Thoughtless, selfish children. Ought to know better."

"Well, dear," Mrs. Allison said placatingly. Anger at Anne and Jerry would not relieve her emotions toward the kerosene man. After a few minutes she said, "Wishing won't bring the mail, dear. I'm going to go call Mr. Babcock and tell him to send up some kerosene with my order."

"At least a postcard," Mr. Allison said as she left.

As with most of the cottage's inconveniences, the Allisons no longer noticed the phone particularly, but yielded to its eccentricities without conscious complaint. It was a wall phone, of a type still seen in only few communities; in order to get the operator, Mrs. Allison had first to turn the side-crank and ring once. Usually it took two or three tries to force the operator to answer, and Mrs. Allison, making any kind of telephone call, approached the phone with resignation and a sort of desperate patience. She had to crank the phone three times this morning before the operator answered, and then it was still longer before Mr. Babcock picked up the receiver at his phone in the corner of the grocery behind the meat table. He said "Store?" with the rising inflection that seemed to indicate suspicion of anyone who tried to communicate with him by means of this unreliable instrument.

"This is Mrs. Allison, Mr. Babcock. I thought I'd give you my order a day early because I wanted to be sure and get some—"

"What say, Mrs. Allison?"

Mrs. Allison raised her voice a little; she saw Mr. Allison,

out on the lawn, turn in his chair and regard her sympathetically. "I said, Mr. Babcock, I thought I'd call in my order early so you could send me—"

"Mrs. Allison?" Mr. Babcock said. "You'll come and pick it up?"

"Pick it up?" In her surprise Mrs. Allison let her voice drop back to its normal tone and Mr. Babcock said loudly, "What's that, Mrs. Allison?"

"I thought I'd have you send it out as usual," Mrs. Allison said.

"Well, Mrs. Allison," Mr. Babcock said, and there was a pause while Mrs. Allison waited, staring past the phone over her husband's head out into the sky. "Mrs. Allison," Mr. Babcock went on finally, "I'll tell you, my boy's been working for me went back to school yesterday, and now I got no one to deliver. I only got a boy delivering summers, you see."

"I thought you *always* delivered," Mrs. Allison said.

"Not after Labor Day, Mrs. Allison," Mr. Babcock said firmly. "You never been here after Labor Day before, so's you wouldn't know, of course."

"Well," Mrs. Allison said helplessly. Far inside her mind she was saying, over and over, can't use city manners on country folk, no use getting mad.

"Are you *sure?*" she asked finally. "Couldn't you just send out an order today, Mr. Babcock?"

"Matter of fact," Mr. Babcock said, "I guess I couldn't, Mrs. Allison. It wouldn't hardly pay, delivering, with no one else out at the lake."

"What about Mr. Hall?" Mrs. Allison asked suddenly, "the people who live about three miles away from us out here? Mr. Hall could bring it out when he comes."

"Hall?" Mr. Babcock said. "John Hall? They've gone to visit her folks upstate, Mrs. Allison."

"But they bring all our butter and eggs," Mrs. Allison said, appalled.

"Left yesterday," Mr. Babcock said. "Probably didn't think you folks would stay on up there."

"But I told Mr. Hall . . ." Mrs. Allison started to say, and then stopped. "I'll send Mr Allison in after some groceries tomorrow," she said.

"You got all you need till then," Mr. Babcock said, satisfied; it was not a question, but a confirmation.

After she hung up, Mrs. Allison went slowly out to sit again in her chair next to her husband. "He won't deliver," she said. "You'll have to go in tomorrow. We've got just enough kerosene to last till you get back."

"He should have told us sooner," Mr. Allison said.

It was not possible to remain troubled long in the face of the day; the country had never seemed more inviting, and the lake moved quietly below them, among the trees, with the almost incredible softness of a summer picture. Mrs. Allison sighed deeply, in the pleasure of possessing for themselves that sight of the lake, with the distant green hills beyond, the gentleness of the small wind through the trees.

The weather continued fair; the next morning Mr. Allison, duly armed with a list of groceries, with "kerosene" in large letters at the top, went down the path to the garage, and Mrs. Allison began another pie in her new baking dishes. She had mixed the crust and was starting to pare the apples when Mr. Allison came rapidly up the path and flung open the screen door into the kitchen.

"Damn car won't start," he announced, with the end-of-the-tether voice of a man who depends on a car as he depends on his right arm.

"What's wrong with it?" Mrs. Allison demanded, stopping with the paring knife in one hand and an apple in the other. "It was all right on Tuesday."

"Well," Mr. Allison said between his teeth, "it's not all right on Friday."

"Can you fix it?" Mrs. Allison asked.

"No," Mr. Allison said, "I can not. Got to call someone, I guess."

"Who?" Mrs. Allison asked.

"Man runs the filling station, I guess." Mr. Allison moved purposefully toward the phone. "He fixed it last summer one time."

A little apprehensive, Mrs. Allison went on paring apples absentmindedly, while she listened to Mr. Allison with the phone, ringing, waiting, ringing, waiting, finally giving the number to the operator, then waiting again and giving the number again, giving the number a third time, and then slamming down the receiver.

"No one there," he announced as he came into the kitchen.

"He's probably gone out for a minute," Mrs. Allison said nervously; she was not quite sure what made her so nervous, unless it was the probability of her husband's losing his temper completely. "He's there alone, I imagine, so if he goes out there's no one to answer the phone."

"That must be it," Mr. Allison said with heavy irony. He slumped into one of the kitchen chairs and watched Mrs. Allison paring apples. After a minute, Mrs. Allison said soothingly, "Why don't you go down and get the mail and then call him again?"

Mr. Allison debated and then said, "Guess I might as well."

He rose heavily and when he got to the kitchen door he turned and said, "But if there's no mail—" and leaving an awful silence behind him, he went off down the path.

Mrs. Allison hurried with her pie. Twice she went to the window to glance at the sky to see if there were clouds coming up. The room seemed unexpectedly dark, and she herself felt in the state of tension that preceded a thunderstorm, but both times when she looked the sky was clear and serene, smiling indifferently down on the Allisons' summer cottage as well as on the rest of the world. When Mrs. Allison, her pie ready for the oven, went a third time to look outside, she saw her husband coming up the path; he seemed more cheerful, and when he saw her, he waved eagerly and held a letter in the air.

"From Jerry," he called as soon as he was close enough for her to hear him, "at last—a letter!" Mrs. Allison noticed with concern that he was no longer able to get up the gentle slope of the path without breathing heavily; but then he was in the doorway, holding out the letter. "I saved it till I got here," he said.

Mrs. Allison looked with an eagerness that surprised her on the familiar handwriting of her son; she could not imagine why the letter excited her so, except that it was the first they had received in so long; it would be a pleasant, dutiful letter, full of the doings of Alice and the children, reporting progress with his job, commenting on the recent weather in Chicago, closing with love from all; both Mr. and Mrs. Allison could, if they wished, recite a pattern letter from either of their children.

Mr. Allison slit the letter open with great deliberation, and then he spread it out on the kitchen table and they leaned down and read it together.

"Dear Mother and Dad," it began, in Jerry's familiar, rather childish, handwriting, *"Am glad this goes to the lake as usual, we always thought you came back too soon and ought to stay up there as long as you could. Alice says that now that you're not as young as you used to be and have no demands on your time, fewer friends, etc., in the city, you ought to get what fun you can while you can. Since you two are both happy up there, it's a good idea for you to stay."*

Uneasily Mrs. Allison glanced sideways at her husband; he was reading intently, and she reached out and picked up the empty envelope, not knowing exactly what she wanted from it. It was addressed quite as usual, in Jerry's handwriting, and was postmarked "Chicago." Of course it's postmarked Chicago, she thought quickly, why would they want to postmark it anywhere else? When she looked back down at the letter, her husband had turned the page, and she read on with him: "——

and of course if they get measles, etc., now, they will be better off later. Alice is well, of course, me too. Been playing a lot of bridge lately with some people you don't know, named Carruthers. Nice young couple, about our age. Well, will close now as I guess it bores you to hear about things so far away. Tell Dad old Dickson, in our Chicago office, died. He used to ask about Dad a lot. Have a good time up at the lake, and don't bother about hurrying back. Love from all of us, Jerry."

"Funny," Mr. Allison commented.

"It doesn't sound like Jerry," Mrs. Allison said in a small voice. "He never wrote anything like . . ." she stopped.

"Like what?" Mr Allison demanded. "Never wrote anything like what?"

Mrs. Allison turned the letter over, frowning. It was impossible to find any sentence, any word, even, that did not sound like Jerry's regular letters. Perhaps it was only that the letter was so late, or the unusual number of dirty fingerprints on the envelope.

"I don't *know,"* she said impatiently.

"Going to try that phone call again," Mr. Allison said.

Mrs. Allison read the letter twice more, trying to find a phrase that sounded wrong. Then Mr. Allison came back and said, very quietly, "Phone's dead."

"What?" Mrs. Allison said, dropping the letter.

"Phone's dead," Mr. Allison said.

The rest of the day went quickly; after a lunch of crackers and milk, the Allisons went to sit outside on the lawn, but their afternoon was cut short by the gradually increasing storm clouds that came up over the lake to the cottage, so that it was as dark as evening by four o'clock. The storm delayed, however, as though in loving anticipation of the moment it would break over the summer cottage, and there was an occasional flash of lightning, but no rain. In the evening Mr. and Mrs. Allison, sitting close together inside their cottage, turned on the battery radio they had brought with them from New York. There were no lamps lighted in the cottage, and the only light came from the lightning outside and the small square glow from the dial of the radio.

The slight framework of the cottage was not strong enough to withstand the city noises, the music and the voices, from the radio, and the Allisons could hear them far off echoing across the lake, the saxophones in the New York dance band wailing over the water, the flat voice of the girl vocalist going inexorably out into the clean country air. Even the announcer, speaking glowingly of the virtues of razor blades, was no more than an inhuman voice sounding out from the Allisons' cottage

and echoing back, as though the lake and the hills and the trees were returning it unwanted.

During one pause between commercials, Mrs. Allison turned and smiled weakly at her husband. "I wonder if we're supposed to . . . *do* anything," she said.

"No," Mr. Allison said consideringly. "I don't think so. Just wait."

Mrs. Allison caught her breath quickly, and Mr. Allison said, under the trivial melody of the dance band beginning again, "The car had been tampered with, you know. Even I could see that."

Mrs. Allison hesitated a minute and then said very softly, "I suppose the phone wires were cut."

"I imagine so," Mr. Allison said.

After a while, the dance music stopped and they listened attentively to a news broadcast, the announcer's rich voice telling them breathlessly of a marriage in Hollywood, the latest baseball scores, the estimated rise in food prices during the coming week. He spoke to them, in the summer cottage, quite as though they still deserved to hear news of a world that no longer reached them except through the fallible batteries on the radio, which were already beginning to fade, almost as though they still belonged, however tenuously, to the rest of the world.

Mrs. Allison glanced out the window at the smooth surface of the lake, the black masses of the trees, and the waiting storm, and said conversationally, "I feel better about that letter of Jerry's."

"I knew when I saw the light down at the Hall place last night," Mr. Allison said.

The wind, coming up suddenly over the lake, swept around the summer cottage and slapped hard at the windows. Mr. and Mrs. Allison involuntarily moved closer together, and with the first sudden crash of thunder, Mr. Allison reached out and took his wife's hand. And then, while the lightning flashed outside, and the radio faded and sputtered, the two old people huddled together in their summer cottage and waited.

EARTH'S HOLOCAUST

Once upon a time—but whether in the time past or time to come is a matter of little or no moment—this wide world had become so overburdened with an accumulation of wornout trumpery that the inhabitants determined to rid themselves of it by a general bonfire. The site fixed upon at the representation of the insurance companies, and as being as central a spot as any other on the globe, was one of the broadest prairies of the West, where no human habitation would be endangered by the flames, and where a vast assemblage of spectators might commodiously admire the show. Having a taste for sights of this kind, and imagining, likewise, that the illumination of the bonfire might reveal some profundity of moral truth heretofore hidden in mist or darkness, I made it convenient to journey thither and be present. At my arrival, although the heap of condemned rubbish was as yet comparatively small, the torch had already been applied. Amid that boundless plain, in the dusk of the evening, like a far off star alone in the firmament, there was merely visible one tremulous gleam, whence none could have anticipated so fierce a blaze as was destined to ensue. With every moment, however, there came foot travellers, women holding up their aprons, men on horseback, wheelbarrows, lumbering baggage wagons, and other vehicles, great and small, and from far and near laden with articles that were judged fit for nothing but to be burned.

"What materials have been used to kindle the flame?" inquired I of a by-stander; for I was desirous of knowing the whole process of the affair from beginning to end.

The person whom I addressed was a grave man, fifty years old or thereabout, who had evidently come thither as a looker on. He struck me immediately as having weighed for himself the true value of life and its circumstances, and therefore as feeling little personal interest in whatever judgment the world might form of them. Before answering my question, he looked me in the face by the kindling light of the fire.

"Oh, some very dry combustibles," replied he, "and extremely suitable to the purpose—no other, in fact, than yester-

day's newspapers, last month's magazines, and last year's withered leaves. Here now comes some antiquated trash that will take fire like a handful of shavings."

As he spoke some rough-looking men advanced to the verge of the bonfire, and threw in, as it appeared, all the rubbish of the herald's office—the blazonry of coat armor, the crests and devices of illustrious families, pedigrees that extended back, like lines of light, into the mist of the dark ages, together with stars, garters, and embroidered collars, each of which, as paltry a bawble as it might appear to the uninstructed eye, had once possessed vast significance, and was still, in truth, reckoned among the most precious of moral or material facts by the worshippers of the gorgeous past. Mingled with this confused heap, which was tossed into the flames by armfuls at once, were innumerable badges of knighthood, comprising those of all the European sovereignties, and Napoleon's decoration of the Legion of Honor, the ribbons of which were entangled with those of the ancient order of St. Louis. There, too, were the medals of our own society of Cincinnati, by means of which, as history tells us, an order of hereditary knights came near being constituted out of the king quellers of the revolution. And besides, there were the patents of nobility of German counts and barons, Spanish grandees, and English peers, from the worm-eaten instruments signed by William the Conqueror down to the brand new parchment of the latest lord who has received his honors from the fair hand of Victoria.

At sight of the dense volumes of smoke, mingled with vivid jets of flame, that gushed and eddied forth from this immense pile of earthly distinctions, the multitude of plebeian spectators set up a joyous shout, and clapped their hands with an emphasis that made the welkin echo. That was their moment of triumph, achieved, after long ages, over creatures of the same clay and the same spiritual infirmities, who had dared to assume the privileges due only to Heaven's better workmanship. But now there rushed towards the blazing heap a grayhaired man, of stately presence, wearing a coat, from the breast of which a star, or other badge of rank, seemed to have been forcibly wrenched away. He had not the tokens of intellectual power in his face; but still there was the demeanor, the habitual and almost native dignity, of one who had been born to the idea of his own social superiority, and had never felt it questioned till that moment.

"People," cried he, gazing at the ruin of what was dearest to his eyes with grief and wonder, but nevertheless with a degree of stateliness—"people, what have you done? This fire is consuming all that marked your advance from barbarism, or that could have prevented your relapse thither.

We, the men of the privileged orders, were those who kept alive from age to age the old chivalrous spirit; the gentle and generous thought; the higher, the purer, the more refined and delicate life. With the nobles, too, you cast off the poet, the painter, the sculptor—all the beautiful arts; for we were their patrons, and created the atmosphere in which they flourish. In abolishing the majestic distinctions of rank, society loses not only its grace, but its steadfastness—"

More he would doubtless have spoken; but here there arose an outcry, sportive, contemptuous, and indignant, that altogether drowned the appeal of the fallen nobleman, insomuch that, casting one look of despair at his own half-burned pedigree, he shrunk back into the crowd, glad to shelter himself under his new-found insignificance.

"Let him thank his stars that we have not flung him into the same fire!" shouted a rude figure, spurning the embers with his foot. "And henceforth let no man dare to show a piece of musty parchment as his warrant for lording it over his fellows. If he have strength of arm, well and good; it is one species of superiority. If he have wit, wisdom, courage, force of character, let these attributes do for him what they may; but from this day forward no mortal must hope for place and consideration by reckoning up the mouldy bones of his ancestors. That nonsense is done away."

"And in good time," remarked the grave observer by my side, in a low voice, however, "if no worse nonsense comes in its place; but, at all events, this species of nonsense has fairly lived out its life."

There was little space to muse or moralize over the embers of this time-honored rubbish; for, before it was half burned out, there came another multitude from beyond the sea, bearing the purple robes of royalty, and the crowns, globes, and sceptres of emperors and kings. All these had been condemned as useless bawbles, playthings at best, fit only for the infancy of the world or rods to govern and chastise it in its nonage, but with which universal manhood at its full-grown stature could no longer brook to be insulted. Into such contempt had these regal insignia now fallen that the gilded crown and tinselled robes of the player king from Drury Lane Theatre had been thrown in among the rest, doubtless as a mockery of his brother monarchs on the great stage of the world. It was a strange sight to discern the crown jewels of England glowing and flashing in the midst of the fire. Some of them had been delivered down from the time of the Saxon princes; others were purchased with vast revenues, or perchance ravished from the dead brows of the native potentates of Hindostan; and the whole now blazed with a dazzling lustre,

as if a star had fallen in that sport and been shattered into fragments. The splendor of the ruined monarchy had no reflection save in those inestimable precious stones. But enough on this subject. It were but tedious to describe how the Emperor of Austria's mantle was converted to tinder, and how the posts and pillars of the French throne became a heap of coals, which it was impossible to distinguish from those of any other wood. Let me add, however, that I noticed one of the exiled Poles stirring up the bonfire with the Czar of Russia's sceptre, which he afterwards flung into the flames.

"The smell of singed garments is quite intolerable here," observed my new acquaintance, as the breeze enveloped us in the smoke of a royal wardrobe. "Let us get to windward and see what they are doing on the other side of the bonfire."

We accordingly passed around, and were just in time to witness the arrival of a vast procession of Washingtonians—as the votaries of temperance call themselves nowadays—accompanied by thousands of the Irish disciples of Father Mathew, with that great apostle at their head. They brought a rich contribution to the bonfire—being nothing less than all the hogsheads and barrels of liquor in the world, which they rolled before them across the prairie.

"Now, my children," cried Father Mathew, when they reached the verge of the fire, "one shove more, and the work is done. And now let us stand off and see Satan deal with his own liquor."

Accordingly, having placed their wooden vessels within reach of the flames, the procession stood off at a safe distance, and soon beheld them burst into a blaze that reached the clouds and threatened to set the sky itself on fire. And well it might; for here was the whole world's stock of spirituous liquors, which, instead of kindling a frenzied light in the eyes of individual topers as of yore, soared upwards with a bewildering gleam that startled all mankind. It was the aggregate of that fierce fire which would otherwise have scorched the hearts of millions. Meantime numberless bottles of precious wine were flung into the blaze, which lapped up the contents as if it loved them, and grew, like other drunkards, the merrier and fiercer for what it quaffed. Never again will the insatiable thirst of the fire fiend be so pampered. Here were the treasures of famous bon vivants—liquors that had been tossed on ocean, and mellowed in the sun, and hoarded long in the recesses of the earth—the pale, the gold, the ruddy juice of whatever vineyards were most delicate—the entire vintage of Tokay—all mingling in one stream with the vile fluids of the common pothouse, and contributing to heighten the selfsame blaze. And while it rose in a gigantic spire that seemed to wave

against the arch of the firmament and combine itself with the light of stars, the multitude gave a shout as if the broad earth were exulting in its deliverance from the curse of ages.

But the joy was not universal. Many deemed that human life would be gloomier than ever when that brief illumination should sink down. While the reformers were at work, I overheard muttered expostulations from several respectable gentlemen with red noses and wearing gouty shoes; and a ragged worthy, whose face looked like a hearth where the fire is burned out, now expressed his discontent more openly and boldly.

"What is this world good for," said the last toper, "now that we can never be jolly any more? What is to comfort the poor man in sorrow and perplexity? How is he to keep his heart warm against the cold winds of this cheerless earth? And what do you propose to give him in exchange for the solace that you take away? How are old friends to sit together by the fireside without a cheerful glass between them? A plague upon your reformation! It is a sad world, a cold world, a selfish world, a low world, not worth an honest fellow's living in, now that good fellowship is gone forever!"

This harangue excited great mirth among the bystanders; but, preposterous as was the sentiment, I could not help commiserating the forlorn condition of the last toper, whose boon companions had dwindled away from his side, leaving the poor fellow without a soul to countenance him in sipping his liquor, nor indeed any liquor to sip. Not that this was quite the true state of the case; for I had observed him at a critical moment filch a bottle of fourth-proof brandy that fell beside the bonfire and hide it in his pocket.

The spirituous and fermented liquors being thus disposed of, the zeal of the reformers next induced them to replenish the fire with all the boxes of tea and bags of coffee in the world. And now came the planters of Virginia, bringing their crops and tobacco. These, being cast upon the heap of inutility, aggregated it to the size of a mountain, and incensed the atmosphere with such potent fragrance that methought we should never draw pure breath again. The present sacrifice seemed to startle the lovers of the weed more than any that they had hitherto witnessed.

"Well, they've put my pipe out," said an old gentleman flinging it into the flames in a pet. "What is this world coming to? Everything rich and racy—all the spice of life—is to be condemned as useless. Now that they have kindled the bonfire, if these nonsensical reformers would fling themselves into it, all would be well enough!"

"Be patient," responded a stanch conservative; "it will come

to that in the end. They will first fling us in, and finally themselves."

From the general and systematic measures of reform I now turned to consider the individual contributions to this memorable bonfire. In many instances these were of a very amusing character. One poor fellow threw in his empty purse, and another a bundle of counterfeit or insolvable bank notes. Fashionable ladies threw in their last season's bonnets, together with heaps of ribbons, yellow lace, and much other half-worn milliner's ware, all of which proved even more evanescent in the fire than it had been in the fashion. A multitude of lovers of both sexes—discarded maids or bachelors and couples mutually weary of one another—tossed in bundles of perfumed letters and enamored sonnets. A hack politician, being deprived of bread by the loss of office, threw in his teeth, which happened to be false ones. The Rev. Sydney Smith—having voyaged across the Atlantic for that sole purpose—came up to the bonfire with a bitter grin and threw in certain repudiated bonds, fortified though they were with the broad seal of a sovereign state. A little boy of five years old, in the premature manliness of the present epoch, threw in his playthings; a college graduate his diploma; an apothecary, ruined by the spread of homœopathy, his whole stock of drugs and medicines; a physician his library; a parson his old sermons; and a fine gentleman of the old school his code of manners, which he had formerly written down for the benefit of the next generation. A widow, resolving on a second marriage, slyly threw in her dead husband's miniature. A young man, jilted by his mistress, would willingly have flung his own desperate heart into the flames, but could find no means to wrench it out of his bosom. An American author, whose works were neglected by the public, threw his pen and paper into the bonfire, and betook himself to some less discouraging occupation. It somewhat startled me to overhear a number of ladies, highly respectable in appearance, proposing to fling their gowns and petticoats into the flames, and assume the garb, together with the manners, duties, offices, and responsibilities, of the opposite sex.

What favor was accorded to this scheme I am unable to say, my attention being suddenly drawn to a poor, deceived, and half-delirious girl, who, exclaiming that she was the most worthless thing alive or dead, attempted to cast herself into the fire amid all that wrecked and broken trumpery of the world. A good man, however, ran to her rescue.

"Patience, my poor girl!" said he, as he drew her back from the fierce embrace of the destroying angel. "Be patient, and abide Heaven's will. So long as you possess a living soul, all

may be restored to its first freshness. These things of matter and creations of human fantasy are fit for nothing but to be burned when once they have had their day; but your day is eternity!"

"Yes," said the wretched girl, whose frenzy seemed now to have sunk down into deep despondency—"yes and the sunshine is blotted out of it!"

It was now rumored among the spectators that all the weapons and munitions of war were to be thrown into the bonfire, with the exception of the world's stock of gunpowder, which, as the safest mode of disposing of it, had already been drowned in the sea. This intelligence seemed to awaken great diversity of opinion. The hopeful philanthropist esteemed it a token that the millennium was already come; while persons of another stamp, in whose view mankind was a breed of bulldogs, prophesied that all the old stoutness, fervor, nobleness, generosity, and magnanimity of the race would disappear—these qualities, as they affirmed, requiring blood for their nourishment. They comforted themselves, however, in the belief that the proposed abolition of war was impracticable for any length of time together.

Be that as it might, numberless great guns, whose thunder had long been the voice of battle—the artillery of the Armada, the battering trains of Marlborough, and the adverse cannon of Napoleon and Wellington—were trundled into the midst of the fire. By the continual addition of dry combustibles, it had now waxed so intense that neither brass nor iron could withstand it. It was wonderful to behold how these terrible instruments of slaughter melted away like playthings of wax. Then the armies of the earth wheeled around the mighty furnace, with their military music playing triumphant marches, and flung in their muskets and swords. The standard-bearers, likewise, cast one look upward at their banners, all tattered with shot holes and inscribed with the names of victorious fields; and, giving them a last flourish on the breeze, they lowered them into the flame, which snatched them upward in its rush towards the clouds. This ceremony being over, the world was left without a single weapon in its hands, except possibly a few old king's arms and rusty swords and other trophies of the Revolution in some of our state armories. And now the drums were beaten and the trumpets brayed all together, as a prelude to the proclamation of universal and eternal peace and the announcement that glory was no longer to be won by blood, but that it would henceforth be the contention of the human race to work out the greatest mutual good, and that beneficence, in the future annals of the earth, would claim the praise of valor. The blessed tidings were accordingly promulgated, and caused infinite rejoicings among

those who had stood aghast at the horror and absurdity of war.

But I saw a grim smile pass over the seared visage of a stately old commander—by his warworn figure and rich military dress, he might have been one of Napoleon's famous marshals—who, with the rest of the world's soldiery, had just flung away the sword that had been familiar to his right hand for half a century.

"Ay! ay!" grumbled he. "Let them proclaim what they please; but, in the end, we shall find that all this foolery has only made more work for the armorers and cannon founders."

"Why, sir," exclaimed I, in astonishment, "do you imagine that the human race will ever so far return on the steps of its past madness as to weld another sword or cast another cannon?"

"There will be no need," observed, with a sneer, one who neither felt benevolence nor had faith in it. "When Cain wished to slay his brother, he was at no loss for a weapon."

"We shall see," replied the veteran commander. "If I am mistaken, so much the better; but in my opinion, without pretending to philosophize about the matter, the necessity of war lies far deeper than these honest gentlemen suppose. What! is there a field for all the petty disputes of individuals? and shall there be no great law court for the settlement of national difficulties? The battle-field is the only court where such suits can be tried."

"You forget, general," rejoined I, "that, in this advanced stage of civilization, Reason and Philanthropy combined will constitute just such a tribunal as is requisite."

"Ah, I had forgotten that, indeed!" said the old warrior, as he limped away.

The fire was now to be replenished with materials that had hitherto been considered of even greater importance to the well being of society than the warlike munitions which we had already seen consumed. A body of reformers had travelled all over the earth in quest of the machinery by which the different nations were accustomed to inflict the punishment of death. A shudder passed through the multitude as these ghastly emblems were dragged forward. Even the flames seemed at first to shrink away, displaying the shape and murderous contrivance of each in a full blaze of light, which of itself was sufficient to convince mankind of the long and deadly error of human law. Those old implements of cruelty; those horrible monsters of mechanism; those inventions which seemed to demand something worse than man's natural heart to contrive, and which had lurked in the dusky nooks of ancient prisons, the subject of terror-stricken legend—were now brought forth to view. Headsmen's axes, with the rust

of noble and royal blood upon them, and a vast collection of halters that had choked the breath of plebeian victims, were thrown in together. A shout greeted the arrival of the guillotine, which was thrust forward on the same wheels that had borne it from one to another of the blood-stained streets of Paris. But the loudest roar of applause went up, telling the distant sky of the triumph of the earth's redemption, when the gallows made its appearance. An ill-looking fellow, however, rushed forward, and, putting himself in the path of the reformers, bellowed hoarsely, and fought with brute fury to stay their progress.

It was little matter of surprise, perhaps, that the executioner should thus do his best to vindicate and uphold the machinery by which he himself had his livelihood and worthier individuals their death; but it deserved special note that men of a far different sphere—even of that consecrated class in whose guardianship the world is apt to trust its benevolence—were found to take the hangman's view of the question.

"Stay, my brethren!" cried one of them. "You are misled by a false philanthropy; you know not what you do. The gallows is a Heaven-ordained instrument. Bear it back, then, reverently, and set it up in its old place, else the world will fall to speedy ruin and desolation!"

"Onward! onward!" shouted a leader in the reform. "Into the flames with the accursed instrument of man's blood policy! How can human law inculcate benevolence and love while it persists in setting up the gallows as its chief symbol? One heave more, good friends, and the world will be redeemed from its greatest error."

A thousand hands, that nevertheless loathed the touch, now lent their assistance, and thrust the ominous burden far, far into the centre of the raging furnace. There its fatal and abhorred image was beheld, first black, then a red coal, then ashes.

"That was well done!" exclaimed I.

"Yes, it was well done," replied, but with less enthusiasm than I expected, the thoughtful observer who was still at my side; "well done, if the world be good enough for the measure. Death, however, is an idea that cannot easily be dispensed with in any condition between the primal innocence and that other purity and perfection which perchance we are destined to attain after travelling round the full circle; but, at all events, it is well that the experiment should now be tried."

"Too cold! too cold!" impatiently exclaimed the young and ardent leader in this triumph. "Let the heart have its voice here as well as the intellect. And as for ripeness, and as for progress, let mankind always do the highest, kindest, noblest thing that, at any given period, it has attained the

perception of; and surely that thing cannot be wrong nor wrongly timed."

I know not whether it were the excitement of the scene, or whether the good people around the bonfire were really growing more enlightened every instant; but they now proceeded to measures in the full length of which I was hardly prepared to keep them company. For instance, some threw their marriage certificates into the flames, and declared themselves candidates for a higher, holier, and more comprehensive union than that which had subsisted from the birth of time under the form of the connubial tie. Others hastened to the vaults of banks and to the coffers of the rich—all of which were open to the first comer on this fated occasion—and brought entire bales of paper money to enliven the blaze, and tons of coin to be melted down by its intensity. Henceforth, they said, universal benevolence, uncoined and exhaustless, was to be the golden currency of the world. At this intelligence the bankers and speculators in the stocks grew pale, and a pickpocket, who had reaped a rich harvest among the crowd, fell down in a deadly fainting fit. A few men of business burned their daybooks and ledgers, the notes and obligations of their creditors, and all other evidences of debts due to themselves; while perhaps a somewhat larger number satisfied their zeal for reform with the sacrifice of any uncomfortable recollection of their own indebtment. There was then a cry that the period was arrived when the title deeds of landed property should be given to the flames, and the whole soil of the earth revert to the public, from whom it had been wrongfully abstracted and most unequally distributed among individuals. Another party demanded that all written constitutions, set forms of government, legislative acts, statute books, and everything else on which human invention had endeavored to stamp its arbitrary laws, should at once be destroyed, leaving the consummated world as free as the man first created.

Whether any ultimate action was taken with regard to these propositions is beyond my knowledge; for, just then, some matters were in progress that concerned my sympathies more nearly.

"See! see! What heaps of books and pamphlets!" cried a fellow, who did not seem to be a lover of literature. "Now we shall have a glorious blaze!"

"That's just the thing!" said a modern philosopher. "Now we shall get rid of the weight of dead men's thought, which has hitherto pressed so heavily on the living intellect that it has been incompetent to any effectual self-exertion. Well done, my lads! Into the fire with them! Now you are enlightening the world indeed!"

"But what is to become of the trade?" cried a frantic bookseller.

"Oh, by all means, let them accompany their merchandise," coolly observed an author. "It will be a noble funeral pile!"

The truth was, that the human race had now reached a stage of progress so far beyond what the wisest and wittiest men of former ages had ever dreamed of that it would have been a manifest absurdity to allow the earth to be any longer encumbered with their poor achievements in the literary line. Accordingly a thorough and searching investigation had swept the booksellers' shops, hawkers' stands, public, and private libraries, and even the little book-shelf by the country fireside, and had brought the world's entire mass of printed paper, bound or in sheets, to swell the already mountain bulk of our illustrious bonfire. Thick, heavy folios, containing the labors of lexicographers, commentators and encyclopedists, were flung in, and falling among the embers with a leaden thump, smouldered away to ashes like a rotten wood. The small, richly gilt French tomes of the last age, with the hundred volumes of Voltaire among them, went off in a brilliant shower of sparkles and little jets of flame; while the current literature of the same nation burned red and blue, and threw an infernal light over the visages of the spectators, converting them all to the aspect of party-colored fiends. A collection of German stories emitted a scent of brimstone. The English standard authors made excellent fuel, generally exhibiting the properties of sound oak logs. Milton's works, in particular, sent up a powerful blaze, gradually reddening into a coal, which promised to endure longer than almost any other material of the pile. From Shakespeare there gushed a flame of such marvellous splendor that men shaded their eyes as against the sun's meridian glory; nor even when the works of his own elucidators were flung upon him did he cease to flash forth a dazzling radiance from beneath the ponderous heap. It is my belief that he is blazing as fervidly as ever.

"Could a poet but light a lamp at that glorious flame," remarked I, "he might then consume the midnight oil to some good purpose."

"That is the very thing which modern poets have been too apt to do, or at least to attempt," answered a critic. "The chief benefit to be expected from this conflagration of past literature undoubtedly is, that writers will henceforth be compelled to light their lamps at the sun or stars."

"If they can reach so high," said I; "but that task requires a giant, who may afterwards distribute the light among inferior men. It is not every one that can steal the fire from heaven like Prometheus; but, when once he had done the deed, a thousand hearths were kindled by it."

It amazed me much to observe how indefinite was the proportion between the physical mass of any given author and the property of brilliant and long-continued combustion. For instance, there was not a quarto volume of the last century—nor, indeed, of the present—that could compete in that particular with a child's little gilt-covered book, containing Mother Goose's Melodies. The Life and Death of Tom Thumb outlasted the biography of Marlborough. An epic, indeed a dozen of them, was converted to white ashes before the single sheet of an old ballad was half consumed. In more than one case, too, when volumes of applauded verse proved incapable of anything better than a stifling smoke, an unregarded ditty of some nameless bard—perchance in the corner of a newspaper—soared up among the stars with a flame as brilliant as their own. Speaking of the properties of flame, methought Shelley's poetry emitted a purer light than almost any other productions of his day, contrasting beautifully with the fitful and lurid gleams and gushes of black vapor that flashed and eddied from the volumes of Lord Byron. As for Tom Moore, some of his songs diffused an odor like a burning pastil.

I felt particular interest in watching the combustion of American authors, and scrupulously noted by my watch the precise number of moments that changed most of them from shabbily printed books to indistinguishable ashes. It would be invidious, however, if not perilous, to betray these awful secrets; so that I shall content myself with observing that it was not invariably the writer most frequent in the public mouth that made the most splendid appearance in the bonfire. I especially remember that a great deal of excellent inflammability was exhibited in a thin volume of poems by Ellery Channing; although, to speak the truth, there were certain portions that hissed and spluttered in a very disagreeable fashion. A curious phenomenon occurred in reference to several writers, native as well as foreign. Their books, though of highly respectable figure, instead of bursting into a blaze, or even smouldering out their substance in smoke, suddenly melted away in a manner that proved them to be ice.

If it be no lack of modesty to mention my own works, it must here be confessed that I looked for them with fatherly interest, but in vain. Too probably they were changed to vapor by the first action of the heat; at best, I can only hope that, in their quiet way, they contributed a glimmering spark or two to the splendor of the evening.

"Alas! and woe is me!" thus bemoaned himself a heavy-looking gentleman in green spectacles. "The world is utterly ruined, and there is nothing to live for any longer. The business of my life is snatched from me. Not a volume to be had for love or money!"

"This," remarked the sedate observer beside me, "is a bookworm—one of those men who are born to gnaw dead thoughts. His clothes, you see, are covered with the dust of libraries. He has no inward fountain of ideas; and, in good earnest, now that the old stock is abolished, I do not see what is to become of the poor fellow. Have you no word of comfort for him?"

"My dear sir," said I to the desperate bookworm, "is not Nature better than a book? Is not the human heart deeper than any system of philosophy? Is not life replete with more instruction than past observers have found it possible to write down in maxims? Be of good cheer. The great book of Time is still spread wide open before us; and, if we read it aright, it will be to us a volume of eternal truth."

"Oh, my books, my books, my precious printed books!" reiterated the forlorn bookworm. "My only reality was a bound volume; and now they will not leave me even a shadowy pamphlet!"

In fact, the last remnant of the literature of all the ages was now descending upon the blazing heap in the shape of a cloud of pamphlets from the press of the New World. These likewise were consumed in the twinkling of an eye, leaving the earth, for the first time since the days of Cadmus, free from the plague of letters—an enviable field for the authors of the next generation.

"Well, and does anything remain to be done?" inquired I somewhat anxiously. "Unless we set fire to the earth itself, and then leap boldly off into infinite space, I know not that we can carry reform to any farther point."

"You are vastly mistaken, my good friend," said the observer. "Believe me, the fire will not be allowed to settle down without the addition of fuel that will startle many persons who have lent a willing hand thus far."

Nevertheless there appeared to be a relaxation of effort for a little time, during which, probably, the leaders of the movement were considering what should be done next. In the interval, a philosopher threw his theory into the flames—a sacrifice which, by those who knew how to estimate it, was pronounced the most remarkable that had yet been made. The combustion, however, was by no means brilliant. Some indefatigable people, scorning to take a moment's ease, now employed themselves in collecting all the withered leaves and fallen boughs of the forest, and thereby recruited the bonfire to a greater height than ever. But this was mere by-play.

"Here comes the fresh fuel that I spoke of," said my companion.

To my astonishment the persons who now advanced into the vacant space around the mountain fire bore surplices

and other priestly garments, mitres, crosiers, and a confusion of Popish and Protestant emblems, with which it seemed their purpose to consummate the great act of faith. Crosses from the spires of old cathedrals were cast upon the heap with as little remorse as if the reverence of centuries, passing in long array beneath the lofty towers, had not looked up to them as the holiest of symbols. The font in which infants were consecrated to God, the sacramental vessels whence piety received the hallowed draught, were given to the same destruction. Perhaps it most nearly touched my heart to see among these devoted relics fragments of the humble communion tables and undecorated pulpits which I recognized as having been torn from the meeting-houses of New England. Those simple edifices might have been permitted to retain all of sacred embellishment that their Puritan founders had bestowed, even though the mighty structure of St. Peter's had sent its spoils to the fire of this terrible sacrifice. Yet I felt that these were but the externals of religion, and might most safely be relinquished by spirits that best knew their deep significance.

"All is well," said I, cheerfully. "The woodpaths shall be the aisles of our cathedral—the firmament itself shall be its ceiling. What needs an earthly roof between the Deity and his worshippers? Our faith can well afford to lose all the drapery that even the holiest men have thrown around it, and be only the more sublime in its simplicity."

"True," said my companion; "but will they pause here?"

The doubt implied in his question was well founded. In the general destruction of books already described, a holy volume, that stood apart from the catalogue of human literature, and yet, in one sense, was at its head, had been spared. But the Titan of innovation—angel or fiend, double in his nature, and capable of deeds befitting both characters—at first shaking down only the old and rotten shapes of things, had now, as it appeared, laid his terrible hand upon the main pillars which supported the whole edifice of our moral and spiritual state. The inhabitants of the earth had grown too enlightened to define their faith within a form of words, or to limit the spiritual by any analogy to our material existence. Truths which the heavens trembled at were now but a fable of the world's infancy. Therefore, as the final sacrifice of human error, what else remained to be thrown upon the embers of that awful pile except the book which, though a celestial revelation to past ages, was but a voice from a lower sphere as regarded the present race of man? It was done! Upon the blazing heap of falsehood and wornout truth—things that the earth had never needed, or had ceased to need, or had grown childishly weary of—fell the ponderous church Bible, the

great old volume that had lain so long on the cushion of the pulpit, and whence the pastor's solemn voice had given holy utterance on so many a Sabbath day. There, likewise, fell the family Bible, which the long-buried patriarch had read to his children—in prosperity or sorrow, by the fireside and in the summer shade of trees—and had bequeathed downward as the heirloom of generations. There fell the bosom Bible, the little volume that has been the soul's friend of some sorely tried child of dust, who thence took courage, whether his trial were for life or death, steadfastly confronting both in the strong assurance of immortality.

All these were flung into the fierce and riotous blaze; and then a mighty wind came roaring across the plain with a desolate howl, as if it were the angry lamentation of the earth for the loss of heaven's sunshine; and it shook the gigantic pyramid of flame and scattered the cinders of half-consumed abominations around upon the spectators.

"This is terrible!" said I, feeling that my cheek grew pale, and seeing a like change in the visages about me.

"Be of good courage yet," answered the man with whom I had so often spoken. He continued to gaze steadily at the spectacle with a singular calmness, as if it concerned him merely as an observer. "Be of good courage, nor yet exult too much; for there is far less both of good and evil in the effect of this bonfire than the world might be willing to believe."

"How can that be?" exclaimed I, impatiently. "Has it not consumed everything? Has it not swallowed up or melted down every human or divine appendage of our mortal state that had substance enough to be acted on by fire? Will there be anything left us tomorrow morning better or worse than a heap of embers and ashes?"

"Assuredly there will," said my grave friend. "Come hither tomorrow morning, or whenever the combustible portion of the pile shall be quite burned out, and you will find among the ashes everything really valuable that you have seen cast into the flames. Trust me, the world of tomorrow will again enrich itself with the gold and diamonds which have been cast off by the world of today. Not a truth is destroyed nor buried so deep among the ashes but it will be raked up at last."

This was a strange assurance. Yet I felt inclined to credit it, the more especially as I beheld among the wallowing flames a copy of the Holy Scriptures, the pages of which, instead of being blackened into tinder, only assumed a more dazzling whiteness as the finger marks of human imperfection were purified away. Certain marginal notes and commentaries, it is true, yielded to the intensity of the fiery test, but without

detriment to the smallest syllable that had flamed from the pen of inspiration.

"Yes; there is the proof of what you say," answered I, turning to the observer; "but if only what is evil can feel the action of the fire, then, surely, the conflagration has been of inestimable utility. Yet, if I understand aright, you intimate a doubt whether the world's expectation of benefit would be realized by it."

"Listen to the talk of these worthies," said he, pointing to a group in front of the blazing pile; "possibly they may teach you something useful without intending it."

The persons whom he indicated consisted of that brutal and most earthy figure who had stood forth so furiously in defence of the gallows—the hangman, in short—together with the last thief and the last murderer, all three of whom were clustered about the last toper. The latter was liberally passing the brandy bottle, which he had rescued from the general destruction of wines and spirits. This little convivial party seemed at the lowest pitch of despondency, as considering that the purified world must needs be utterly unlike the sphere that they had hitherto known, and therefore but a strange and desolate abode for gentlemen of their kidney.

"The best counsel for all of us is," remarked the hangman, "that, as soon as we have finished the last drop of liquor, I help you, my three friends, to a comfortable end upon the nearest tree, and then hang myself on the same bough. This is no world for us any longer."

"Poh, poh, my good fellows!" said a dark-complexioned personage, who now joined the group—his complexion was indeed fearfully dark, and his eyes glowed with a redder light than that of the bonfire; "be not so cast down, my dear friends; you shall see good days yet. There's one thing that these wiseacres have forgotten to throw into the fire, and without which all the rest of the conflagration is just nothing at all; yes, though they had burned the earth itself to a cinder."

"And what may that be?" eargerly demanded the last murderer.

"What but the human heart itself?" said the dark-visaged stranger, with a portentous grin. "And, unless they hit upon some method of purifying that foul cavern, forth from it will reissue all the shapes of wrong and misery—the same old shapes or worse ones—which they have taken such a vast deal of trouble to consume to ashes. I have stood by this live-long night and laughed in my sleeve at the whole business. Oh, take my word for it, it will be the old world yet!"

This brief conversation supplied me with a theme for lengthened thought. How sad a truth, if true it were, that

man's age-long endeavor for perfection had served only to render him the mockery of the evil principle, from the fatal circumstance of an error at the very root of the matter! The heart, the heart—there was the little yet boundless sphere wherein existed the original wrong of which the crime and misery of this outward world were merely types. Purify that inward sphere, and the many shapes of evil that haunt the outward, and which now seem almost our only realities, will turn to shadowy phantoms and vanish of their own accord; but if we go no deeper than the intellect, and strive, with merely that feeble instrument, to discern and rectify what is wrong, our whole accomplishment will be a dream, so unsubstantial that it matters little whether the bonfire, which I have so faithfully described, were what we choose to call a real event and a flame that would scorch the finger, or only a phosphoric radiance and a parable of my own brain.

1844 *Mosses from an Old Manse*

BUZBY'S PETRIFIED WOMAN

I think the sound of the wind in that country never stopped. I think everyone there was a little mad because of it. In the end I suppose I was like all the rest. It was a country of topsy-turvy, where great dunes of sand blew slowly over ranch houses and swallowed them, and where, after the sand had all blown away from under your feet, the beautiful arrowheads of ice-age hunters lay mingled with old whisky bottles that the sun had worked upon. I suppose, now that I stop to think about it, that if there is any place in the world where a man might fall in love with a petrified woman, that may be the place.

In the proper books, you understand, there is no such thing as a petrified woman, and I insist that when I first came to that place I would have said the same. It all happened because bone hunters are listeners. They have to be.

We had had terrible luck that season. We had made queries in a hundred towns, and tramped as many canyons. The institution for which we worked had received a total of one Oligocene turtle and a bag of rhinoceros bones. A rag picker could have done better. The luck had to change. Somewhere there had to be fossils.

I was cogitating on the problem under a coating of lather in a barbershop with an 1890 chair when I became aware of a voice. You can hear a lot of odd conversation in barbershops, particularly in the back country, and particularly if your trade makes you a listener, as mine does. But what caught my ear at first was something about stone. Stone and bone are pretty close in my language and I wasn't missing any bets. There was always a chance that there might be a bone in it somewhere for me.

The voice went off into a grumbling rural complaint in the back corner of the shop, and then it rose higher.

"It's petrified! It's petrified!" the voice contended excitedly.

I managed to push an ear up through the lather.

"I'm a-tellin' ya," the man boomed, "a petrified woman,

right out in that canyon. But he won't show it, not to nobody. 'Tain't fair, I tell ya."

"Mister," I said, speaking warily between the barber's razor and his thumb, "I'm reckoned a kind of specialist in these matters. Where is this woman, and how do you know she's petrified?"

I knew perfectly well she wasn't, of course. Flesh doesn't petrify like wood or bone, but there are plenty of people who think so. In the course of my life I've been offered objects purporting to be everything from petrified butterflies to a gentleman's top hat.

Just the same I was still interested in this woman. You can never tell what will turn up in the back country. Once, for example, I had a mammoth vertebra handed to me with the explanation that it was a petrified griddle cake. Mentally, now, I was trying to shape that woman's figure into the likeness of a mastodon's femur. This is a hard thing to do when you are young and far from the cities. Nevertheless, I managed it. I held that shining bony vision in my head and asked directions of my friend in the barbershop.

Yes, he told me, the woman was petrified all right. Old Man Buzby wasn't a feller to say it if it 'tweren't so. And it weren't no part of a woman. It was a *whole* woman. Buzby had said that, too. But Buzby was a queer one. An old bachelor, you know. And when the boys had wanted to see it, 'count of it bein' a sort of marvel around these parts, the old man had clammed up on where it was. A-keepin' it all to hisself, he was. But seein' as I was interested in these things and a stranger, he might talk to me and no harm done. It was the trail to the right and out and up to the overhang of the hills. A little tar-papered shack there.

I asked Mack to go up there with me. He was silent company but one of the best bone hunters we had. Whether it was a rodent the size of a bee or an elephant the size of a house, he'd find it and he'd get it out even if it meant carrying a five-hundred-pound plaster cast on foot over a mountain range.

In a day we reached it. When I got out of the car I knew the wind had been blowing there since time began. There was a rusty pump in the yard and rusty wire and rusty machines nestled in the lea of a wind-carved butte. Everything was leaching and blowing away by degrees—even the tar-paper on the roof.

Out of the door came Buzby. He was not blowing away, I thought at first. His farm might be, but he wasn't. There was an air of faded dignity about him.

Now in that country there is a sort of etiquette. You don't

drive out to a man's place, a bachelor's, and you a stranger, and come up to his door and say: "I heard in town you got a petrified woman here, and brother, I sure would like to see it." You've got to use tact, same as anywhere else.

You get out slowly while the starved hounds look you over and get their barking done. You fumble for your pipe and explain casually you're doin' a little lookin' around in the hills. About that time they get a glimpse of the equipment you're carrying and most of them jump to the conclusion that you're scouting for oil. You can see the hope flame up in their eyes and sink down again as you explain you're just hunting bones. Some of them don't believe you after that. It's a hard thing to murder a poor man's dream.

But Buzby wasn't the type. I don't think he even thought of the oil. He was small and neat and wore—I swear it—pince-nez glasses. I could see at a glance he was a city man dropped, like a seed, by the wind. He had been there a long time, certainly. He knew the corn talk and the heat talk, but he never would learn how to come forward in that secure, heavy-shouldered country way, to lean on a car door and talk to strangers while the horizon stayed in his eyes.

He invited us, instead, to see his collection of arrowheads. It looked like a good start. We dusted ourselves and followed him in. It was a two-room shack, and about as comfortable as a monk's cell. It was neat, though, so neat you knew the man lived, rather than slept there. It lacked the hound-asleep-in-the-bunk confusion of the usual back-country bachelor's quarters.

He was precise about his Indian relics as he was precise about everything, but I sensed after a while, a touch of pathos in it—the pathos of a man clinging to order in a world where the wind changed the landscape before morning, and not even a dog could help you contain the loneliness of your days.

"Someone told me in town you might have a wonderful fossil up here," I finally ventured, poking in his box of arrowheads, and watching the shy, tense face behind the glasses.

"That would be Ned Burner," he said. "He talks too much."

"I'd like to see it," I said, carefully avoiding the word *woman*. "It might be something of great value to science."

He flushed angrily. In the pause I could hear the wind beating at the tar-paper.

"I don't want any of 'em hereabouts to see it," he cried passionately. "They'll laugh and they'll break it and it'll be gone like—like everything." He stopped, uncertainly aware of his own violence, his dark eyes widening with pain. "We are scientists, Mr. Buzby," I urged gently. "We're not here to break anything. We don't have to tell Ned Burner what we see."

He seemed a little mollified at this, then a doubt struck him. "But you'd want to take her away, put her in a museum."

I noticed the pronoun, but ignored it. "Mr. Buzby," I said, "we would very much like to see your discovery. It may be we can tell you more about it that you'd like to know. It might be that a museum would help you save it from vandals. I'll leave it to you. If you say no, we won't touch it, and we won't talk about it in the town, either. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

I could see him hesitating. It was plain that he wanted to show us, but the prospect was half frightening. Oddly enough, I had the feeling his fright revolved around his discovery, more than fear of the townspeople. As he talked on, I began to see what he wanted. He intended to show it to us in the hope we would confirm his belief that it was a petrified woman. The whole thing seemed to have taken on a tremendous importance in his mind. At that point, I couldn't fathom his reasons.

Anyhow, he had something. At the back of the house we found the skull of a big, long-horned, extinct bison hung up under the eaves. It was a nice find, and we coveted it.

"It needs a dose of alvar for preservation," I said. "The Museum would be the place for a fine specimen like this. It will just go slowly to pieces here."

Buzby was not unattentive. "Maybe, Doctor, maybe. But I have to think. Why don't you camp here tonight? In the morning——"

"Yes?" I said, trying to keep the eagerness out of my voice. "You think we might——"

"No! Well, yes, all right. But the conditions? They're like you said?"

"Certainly," I answered. "It's very kind of you."

He hardly heard me. That glaze of pain passed over his face once more. He turned and went into the house without speaking. We did not see him again until morning.

The wind goes down into those canyons also. It starts on the flats and rises through them with weird noises, flaking and blasting at every loose stone or leaning pinnacle. It scrapes the sand away from pipy concretions till they stand out like strange distorted sculptures. It leaves great stones teetering on wine glass stems.

I began to suspect what we would find, the moment I came there. Buzby hurried on ahead now, eager and panting. Once he had given his consent and started, he seemed in almost a frenzy of haste.

Well, it was the usual thing. Up. Down. Up. Over boulders and splintered dead falls of timber. Higher and higher into the

back country. Toward the last he outran us, and I couldn't hear what he was saying. The wind whipped it away.

But there he stood, finally, at a niche under the canyon wall. He had his hat off and, for a moment was oblivious to us. He might almost have been praying. Anyhow I stood back and waited for Mack to catch up. "This must be it," I said to him. "Watch yourself." Then we stepped forward.

It was a concretion, of course, just as I had figured after seeing the wind at work in those miles of canyon. It wasn't a bad job, at that. There were some bumps in the right places, and a few marks that might be the face, if your imagniation was strong. Mine wasn't just then. I had spent a day building a petrified woman into a mastodon femur, and now that was no good either, so I just stood and looked.

But after the first glance it was Buzby I watched. The unskilled eye can build marvels of form where the educated see nothing. I thought of that bison skull under his eaves, and how badly we needed it.

He didn't wait for me to speak. He blurted with a terrible intensity that embarrassed me, "She—she's beautiful, isn't she?"

"It's remarkable," I said. "Quite remarkable." And then I just stood there not knowing what to do.

He seized on my words with such painful hope that Mack backed off and started looking for fossils in places where he knew perfectly well there weren't any.

I didn't catch it all; I couldn't possibly. The words came out in a long, aching torrent, the torrent dammed up for years in the heart of a man not meant for this place, nor for the wind at night by the windows, nor the empty bed, nor the neighbors twenty miles away. You're tough at first. He must have been to stick there. And then suddenly you're old. You're old and you're beaten, and there must be something to talk to and to love. And if you haven't got it you'll make it in your head, or out of a stone in a canyon wall.

He had found her, and he had a myth of how she came there, and now he came up and talked to her in the long afternoon heat while the dust devils danced in his failing corn. It was progressive. I saw the symptoms. In another year, she would be talking to him.

"It's true, isn't it, Doctor?" he asked me, looking up with that rapt face, after kneeling beside the niche. "You can see it's her. You can see it plain as day." For the life of me I couldn't see anything except a red scar writhing on the brain of a living man who must have loved somebody once, beyond words and reason.

"Now Mr. Buzby," I started to say then, and Mack came up and looked at me. This, in general, is when you launch into a careful explanation of how concretions are made so that the layman will not make the same mistake again. Mack just stood there looking at me in that stolid way of his. I couldn't go on with it. I couldn't even say it.

But I saw where this was going to end. I saw it suddenly and too late. I opened my mouth while little Mr. Buzby held his hands and tried to regain his composure. I opened my mouth and I lied in a way to damn me forever in the halls of science.

I lied, looking across at Mack, and I could feel myself getting redder every moment. It was a stupendous, a colossal lie. "Mr. Busby," I said, "that—um—er—figure is astonishing. It is a remarkable case of preservation. We must have it for the Museum."

The light in his face was beautiful. He believed me now. He believed himself. He came up to the niche again, and touched her lovingly.

"It's okay," I whispered to Mack. "We won't have to pack the thing out. He'll never give her up."

That's where I was a fool. He came up to me, his eyes troubled and unsure, but very patient.

"I think you're right, Doctor," he said. "It's selfish of me. She'll be safer with you. If she stays here somebody will smash her. I'm not well." He sat down on a rock and wiped his forehead. "I'm sure I'm not well. I'm sure she'll be safer with you. Only I don't want her in a glass case where people can stare at her. If you can promise that, I——"

"I can promise that," I said meeting Mack's eyes across Buzby's shoulder.

"And if I come there I can see her?"

I knew I would never meet him again in this life.

"Yes," I said, "you can see her there." I waited, and then I said, "We'll get the picks and plaster ready. Now that bison skull at your house . . ."

It was two days later, in the truck that Mack spoke to me. "Doc."

"Yeah."

"You know what the Old Man is going to say about shipping that concretion. It's heavy. Must be three hundred pounds with the plaster."

"Yes, I know."

Mack was pulling up slow along the abutment of a bridge. It was the canyon of the big Piney, a hundred miles away. He got out and went to the rear of the truck. I didn't say anything, but I followed him back.

"Doc, give me a hand with this, will you?"

I took one end, and we heaved together. It's a long drop in the big Piney. I didn't look, but I heard it break on the stones.

"I wish I hadn't done that," I said.

"It was only a concretion," Mack answered. "The old geezer won't know."

"I don't like it," I said. "Another week in that wind and I'd have believed in her myself. Get me the hell out of here—maybe I do, anyhow. I tell you I don't like it. I don't like it at all."

"It's a hundred more to Valentine," Mack said.

He put the map in the car pocket and slid over and gave me the wheel.

THE RESTING PLACE

The possibility that Dr. Hillebrand was developing kleptomania caused a good deal of pleasure among his younger colleagues—that is, the entire personnel of the Department of Anthropology, including its director, Walter Klibben. It was not that anybody really disliked the old boy. That would have been hard to do, for he was coöperative and gentle, and his humor was mild; he was perhaps the greatest living authority on Southwestern archeology, and broadly learned in the general science of anthropology; and he was a man who delighted in the success of others.

Dr. Hillebrand was the last surviving member of a group of men who had made the Department of Anthropology famous in the earlier part of the twentieth century. His ideas were old-fashioned; to Walter Klibben, who at forty was very much the young comer, and to the men he had gathered about him. Dr. Hillebrand's presence, clothed with authority, was as incongruous as that of a small, mild brontosaurus would be in a modern farmyard.

On the other hand, no one living had a finer archeological technique. Added to this was a curious intuition, which caused him to dig in unexpected places and come up with striking finds—the kind of thing that delights donors and trustees, such as the largest unbroken Mesa Verde black-on-white jar known up to that time, the famous Biltabito Cache of turquoise and shell objects, discovered two years before and not yet on exhibition, and, only the previous year, the mural decorations at Painted Mask Ruin. The mural, of which as yet only a small part had been uncovered, compared favorably with the murals found at Awatovi and Kawaika-a by the Peabody Museum, but was several centuries older. Moreover, in the part already exposed there was an identifiable katchina mask, unique and conclusive evidence that the katchina cult dated back to long before the white man came. This meant, Dr. Klibben foresaw gloomily, that

once again all available funds for publication would be tied up by the old coot's material.

The trustees loved him. Several years ago, he had reached the age of retirement and they had waived the usual limitation in his case. He was curator of the museum, a position only slightly less important than that of the director, and he occupied the Kleinman Chair in American Archeology. This was an endowed position paying several thousand a year more than Klibben's own professorship.

Dr. Hillebrand's occupancy of these positions, on top of his near monopoly of publication money, was the rub. He blocked everything. If only the old relic would become emeritus, the younger men could move up. Klibben had it all worked out. There would be the Kleinman Chair for himself, and McDonnell could accede to his professorship. He would leave Steinburg an associate, but make him curator. Thus, Steinberg and McDonnell would have it in mind that the curatorship always might be transferred to McDonnell as the man with senior status, which would keep them both on their toes. At least one assistant professor could, in due course, be made an associate, and young George Franklin, Klibben's own prized student, could be promoted from instructor to assistant. It all fitted together and reinforced his own position. Then, given free access to funds for monographs and papers . . .

But Dr. Hillebrand showed no signs of retiring. It was not that he needed the money from his two positions; he was a bachelor and something of an ascetic, and much of his salary he put into his own expeditions. He loved to teach, he said—and his students liked him. He loved his museum; in fact, he was daffy about it, pottering around in it until late at night. Well, let him retire, and he could still teach a course or two if he wanted; he could still potter, but Klibben could run his Department as he wished, as it ought to be run.

Since there seemed no hope that the old man would give out physically in the near future, Klibben had begun looking for symptoms of mental failure. There was, for instance, the illogical way in which Dr. Hillebrand often decided just where to run a trench or dig a posthole. As Steinburg once remarked, it was as if he were guided by a ouija board. Unfortunately, this eccentricity produced splendid results.

Then, sometimes Hillebrand would say to his students, "Now, let us imagine—" and proceed to indulge in surprising reconstructions of the daily life and religion of the ancient cliff dwellers, going far beyond the available evidence. The director had put Franklin onto that, because the young man had worked on Hopi and Zuñi ceremonial. Franklin reported that the old boy always made it clear that these reconstructions were not science, and, further, Franklin said that they were

remarkably shrewd and had given him some helpful new insights into aspects of modern Indians' religion.

The possibility of kleptomania was something else again. The evidence—insufficient so far—concerned the rich Biltabito Cache, which Dr. Hillebrand himself was enumerating, cataloguing, and describing, mostly evenings, when the museum was closed. He was the only one who knew exactly how many objects had been in the find, but it did look as if some of it might now be missing. There was also what the night watchman thought he had seen. And then there was that one turquoise bead—but no proof it had come from that source, of course—that McDonnell had found on the floor near the cast of the Quiriguá stela, just inside the entrance to the museum.

The thefts—if there had been any—had taken place in April and early May, when everyone was thinking of the end of the college year and the summer's field trips. A short time later, and quite by accident, Klibben learned from an associate professor of ornithology that old Hillebrand had obtained from him a number of feathers, which he said he wanted for repairing his collection of katchina dolls. Among them were parrot and macaw feathers, and the fluffy feathers from the breast of an eagle.

Klibben's field was not the American Southwest, but any American anthropologist would have been able to draw an obvious conclusion; turquoise, shell, and feathers of those sorts were components of ritual offerings among the modern Hopis and Zuñis, and possibly their ancestors, among whose remains Dr. Hillebrand had carried on his lifework. Dr. Klibben began to suspect—or hope—that the old man was succumbing to a mental weakness far more serious than would be evidenced by the mere stealing of a few bits of turquoise and shell.

The Director made tactful inquiries at the genetics field laboratory to see if the old man had been seeking corn pollen, another component of the ritual offerings, and found that there the question of the evolution of *Zea maiz* in the Southwest was related to the larger and much vexed question of the origin and domestication of that important New World plant, so interesting to archeologists, botanists, and geneticists. Dr. Hillebrand had been collecting specimens of ancient corn from archeological sites for a long time—ears, cobs, and grains extending over two millenniums or more, and other parts of the plant, including some fragments of tassels. It was, Klibben thought, the kind of niggling little detail you would expect to find Hillebrand spending good time on. Dr. Hillebrand had been turning his specimens over to the plant and heredity boys, who were delighted to have them. They, in turn, had fol-

lowed this up by obtaining—for comparison—seed of modern Pueblo Indian, Navajo, and Hopi corn, and planting it. It was natural enough, then, that from time to time Dr. Hillebrand should take specimens of seed and pollen home to study on his own. It might be clear as day to Klibben that the old boy had gone gaga to the point of making ritual offerings to the gods of the cliff dwellings; he still had nothing that would convince a strongly pro-Hillebrand board of trustees.

Even so, the situation was hopeful. Klibben suggested to the night watchman that, out of concern for Professor Hillebrand's health, he keep a special eye on the Professor's after-hours activities in the museum. Come June, he would arrange for Franklin—with his Southwestern interests, Franklin was the logical choice—to go along on Hillebrand's expedition and see what he could see.

Franklin took the assignment willingly, by no means unaware of the possible advantages to himself should the old man be retired. The archeologist accepted the addition of the young man to his staff with equanimity. He remarked that Franklin's knowledge of Pueblo daily life would be helpful in interpreting what might be uncovered, while a better grounding in Southwestern prehistory would add depth to the young man's ethnographic perceptions. Right after commencement, they set out for the Navajo country of Arizona, accompanied by two undergraduate and four graduate students.

At Farmington, in New Mexico, they picked up the university's truck and station wagon, and Hillebrand's own field car, a Model A Ford as archaic as its owner. In view of the man's income, Franklin thought, his hanging on to the thing was one more oddity, an item that could be added to many others to help prove Klibben's case. At Farmington, too, they took on a cook and general helper. Dr. Hillebrand's work was generously financed, quite apart from what went into it from his own earnings.

The party bounced over the horrifying road past the Four Corners and around the north end of Beautiful Mountain, into the Chinlee Valley, then southward and westward until, after having taken a day and a half to drive about two hundred miles, they reached the cliffs against which stood Painted Mask Ruin. The principal aim of the current summer's work was to excavate the decorated kiva in detail, test another kiva, and make further, standard excavations in the ruin as a whole.

By the end of a week, the work was going nicely. Dr. Hillebrand put Franklin, as the senior scientist under him, in charge of the work in the painted kiva. Franklin knew perfectly well that he was deficient in the required techniques; he would, in fact, be dependent upon his first assistant, Philip Fleming, who

was just short of his Ph.D. Fleming had worked in that kiva the previous season, had spent three earlier seasons with Dr. Hillebrand, and was regarded by him as the most promising of the many who had worked under him. There was real affection between the two men.

Two of the other graduate students were well qualified to run a simple dig for themselves. One was put in charge of the untouched second kiva, the other of a trench cutting into the general mass of the ruin from the north. Franklin felt uncomfortably supernumerary, but he recognized that that was an advantage in pursuing his main purpose of keeping a close watch on the expedition's director.

After supper on the evening of the eighth day, Dr. Hillebrand announced rather shyly that he would be gone for about four days, "to follow an old custom you all know about." The younger men smiled. Franklin kept a blank face to cover his quickened interest.

This was a famous, or notorious, eccentricity of the old man's, and one in which Drs. Klibben, McDonnell, and the rest put great hope. Every year, early in the season, Dr. Hillebrand went alone to a ruin he had excavated early in his career. There was some uncertainty as to just where the ruin was; it was believed to be one known to the Navajos as Tsekaiye Kin. No one knew what he did there. He said he found the surroundings and the solitude invaluable for thinking out the task in hand. It was usually not long after his return from it that he would announce his decision to dig in such-and-such a spot, and proceed to uncover the painted kiva, or the Kettle Cave fetishes, or the Kin Hatsosi blanket, or some other notable find.

If Franklin could slip away in the station wagon and follow the old man, he might get just the information he wanted. So far, Dr. Hillebrand's activities on the expedition had evidenced nothing but his great competence. If the old man ever performed mad antique rites with stolen specimens, it would be at his secret place of meditation. Perhaps he got up and danced to the ancient gods. One might be able to sneak a photo . . .

Dr. Hillebrand said, "I shan't be gone long. Meantime, of course, Dr. Franklin will be in charge." He turned directly to his junior. "George, there are several things on which you must keep a close watch. If you will look at these diagrams—and you, too, Phil . . ."

Franklin and Fleming sat down beside him. Dr. Hillebrand expounded. Whether the ancient devil had done it intentionally or not, Franklin saw that he was neatly hooked. In the face of the delicacy and the probable outcome of the next few days'

work, he could not possibly make an excuse for absenting himself when the head of the expedition was also absent.

Dr. Hillebrand took off early the next morning in his throbbing Model A. He carried with him a Spartan minimum of food and bedding. It was good to be alone once more in the long-loved reaches of the Navajo country. The car drove well. He still used it because, short of a jeep, nothing newer had the clearance to take him where he wanted to go.

He drove slowly, for he was at the age when knowledge and skill must replace strength, and getting stuck would be serious. When he was fifty, he reflected, he would have reached T'iiz Hatsosi Canyon from this year's camp in under four hours; when he was thirty, if it had been possible to travel this country in a car, he would have made even greater speed, and as like as not ended by getting lost. He reached the open farming area outside the place where T'iiz Hatsosi sliced into the great mesa to the south. There were nearly twice as many hogans to be seen as when he had first come here; several of them were square and equipped with windows, and by some of them cars were parked. Everything was changing, but these were good people still, although not as genial and hospitable as their grandparents had been when he first packed in.

He entered the narrow mouth of T'iiz Hatsosi Canyon in the late afternoon, and by the exercise of consummate skill drove some four miles up it. At that point, it was somewhat wider than elsewhere, slightly under two hundred feet across at the bottom. The heavy grazing that had so damaged all the Navajos' land had had some effect here. There was less grass than there used to be—but then, he reflected, he had no horses to graze—and the bed of the wash was more deeply eroded, and here and there sharp gullies led into it from the sides.

Still, the cottonwoods grew between the occasional stream and the high, warmly golden-buff cliffs. Execpt at noon, there was shade, and the quality of privacy, almost of secrecy, remained. In the west wall was the wide strip of white rocks from which the little ruin took its name, Tsekaiye Kin, leading the eye to the long ledge above which the cliff arched like a scallop shell, and upon which stood the ancient habitations. The lip of the ledge was about twenty feet above the level of the canyon, and approachable by a talus slope that was not too hard to negotiate. Some small evergreens grew at the corners of the ledge. From the ground, the settlement did not seem as if it had been empty for centuries, but rather as if its occupants at the moment happened not to be visible.

The small black rectangles of doorways and three tiny squares of windows made him feel, as they had done over forty years ago, as if the little settlement were watching him.

South of the far end of the ledge, and at the level of the canyon floor, was the spring. Water seeped richly through a crack in the rock a few feet above the ground and flowed down over rock to form a pool at the base. The wet golden-brown stone glistened; small water growths clung to crevices. In the pool itself, there was cress, and around it moss and grass rich enough to make a few feet of turf.

Here Dr. Hillebrand deposited his bedroll and his food. He estimated that he had better than two hours of daylight left. He cut himself a supply of firewood. Then he took a package out of his coffeepot. The package was wrapped in an old piece of buckskin. With this in hand, he climbed up the slope to the ruin.

The sense of peace had begun once he was out of sight of the camp at Painted Mask Ruin. It had grown when he entered T'iiz Hatsosi Canyon; it had become stronger when he stepped out of the car and glimpsed through the cottonwoods his little village, with its fourteen rooms. By the spring, it had become stronger yet, and mixed with a nostalgia of past times that was sweetly painful, like a memory of an old and good lost love. These feelings were set aside as he addressed himself to the task of climbing, which was not entirely simple; then they returned fourfold when he was in the ruin. Here he had worked alone, a green young man with a shiny new Doctor's degree, a boy-man not unlike young Fleming. Here he had discovered what it was like to step into a room that still had its roof intact, and see the marks of the smoke from the household fire, the loom ties still in place in the ceiling and floor, the broken cooking pot still in the corner.

He paid his respects to that chamber—Room 4-B; stood in the small, open, central area; then went to the roofless, irregular oval of the kiva. All by himself he had dug it out.

Could Dr. Franklin have been there then, spying unseen, he would have been most happy. From under a stone that appeared firmly embedded in the clay flooring Dr. Hillebrand took an ancient, crude stone pipe fitted with a recent willow stem. He filled it with tobacco, performed curious motions as he lit it, and puffed smoke in the six directions. Then he climbed out of the kiva on the inner side and went behind the double row of habitations, to the darker area under the convex curve of the wall at the back of the cave, the floor of which was a mixture of earth and rubbish. Two smallish, rounded stones about three feet apart inconspicuously marked a place. Sitting by it on a convenient ledge of rock, he puffed at the pipe again; then he opened the buckskin package and proceeded to make

an offering of ancient turquoise beads, white and red shell, black stone, feathers and down, and corn pollen.

Sitting back comfortably, he said, "Well, here I am again."

The answer did not come from the ground, in which the bones of the speaker reposed, but from a point in space, as if he were sitting opposite Dr. Hillebrand. "Welcome, old friend. Thank you for the gifts; their smell is pleasing to us all."

"I don't know whether I can bring you any more," the archeologist said. "I can buy new things, of course, but getting the old ones is becoming difficult. They are watching me."

"It is not necessary," the voice answered. "We are rich in the spirits of things such as these, and our grandchildren on earth still offer them to us. It has been rather for your benefit that I have had you bringing them, and I think that that training has served its purpose."

"You relieve me." Then, with a note of anxiety, "That doesn't mean that I have to stop visiting you?"

"Not at all. And, by the way, there is a very handsome jar with a quantity of beans of an early variety in it where you are digging now. It was left behind by accident when the people before the ones who built the painted kiva moved out. It belonged to a woman called Bluebird Tailfeather. Her small child ran off and was lost just as they were moving, and by the time she found him, the war chief was impatient. However, we can come back to that later. I can see that you have something on your mind."

"I'm lonely," Dr. Hillebrand said simply. "My real friends are all gone. There are a lot of people I get on nicely with, but no one left I love—that is, above the ground—and you are the only one below the ground I seem to be able to reach. I—I'd like to take your remains back with me, and then we could talk nights."

"I would not like that."

"Then of course I won't."

"I was sure of that. Your country is strange to me, and travelling back and forth would be a lot of effort. What I saw that time I visited you was alien to me; it would be to you, too, I think. It won't be long, I believe, before I am relieved of attachment to my bones entirely, but if you moved them now, it would be annoying. You take that burial you carried home ten years ago—old Rabbit Stick. He says you treat him well and have given him the smell of ceremonial jewels whenever you could, but sometimes he arrives quite worn out from his journey."

"Rabbit Stick," Dr. Hillebrand mused. "I wondered if there were not someone there. He has never spoken to me."

"He couldn't. He was just an ordinary Reed Clan man. But he is grateful to you for the offerings, because they have given

him the strength he needed. As you know, I can speak with you because I was the Sun's Forehead, and there was the good luck that you were thinking and feeling in the right way when you approached me. But tell me, don't the young men who learn from you keep you company?"

"Yes. There is one now who is like a son to me. But then they have learned, and they go away. The men in between, who have become chiefs, you might say, in my Department, have no use for me. They want to make me emeritus—that is, put me on a pension, take over my authority and my rewards, and set me where I could give advice and they could ignore it. They have new ways, and they despise mine. So now they are watching me. They have sent a young man out this time just to watch me. They call him a student of the ways of your grandchildren; he spent six weeks at Zuñi once, and when even he could see that the people didn't like him, he went and put in the rest of the summer at Oraibi."

"New Oraibi or Old Oraibi?" the Sun's Forehead asked.

"New Oraibi."

The chief snorted.

"So, having also read some books, he thinks he is an ethnographer, only he calls himself a cultural anthropologist. And he is out here to try to find proof that my mind is failing." He smiled. "They'd certainly think so if they saw me sitting here talking to empty air."

The Sun's Forehead chuckled.

"They certainly would. They wouldn't be able to hear me, you know." Then his voice became serious again. "That always happens, I think. It happened to me. They wanted to do things differently, when I had at last come to the point at which an Old Man talked to me. I reached it in old age—not young, as you did. They could not take my title, but they wanted to handle my duties for me, bring me enough food to live on, hear my advice and not listen to it. Struggling against them became wearying and distasteful, so finally I decided to go under. At the age I had reached—about your age—it is easy to do."

"And now you say that you are about to be detached from your bones entirely? You are reaching the next stage?"

"Let us say that I begin to hope. Our life is beautiful, but for a hundred years or so now I have been longing for the next, and I begin to hope."

"How does it happen? Or is it wrong for me to know?"

"You may know. You are good, and you keep your secrets, as our wise men always did. You will see a man who has become young, handsome, and full of light. When we dance, he dances with great beauty; his singing is beautiful, and you feel as if it were creating life. Then one time when the

katchinas themselves are dancing before us—not masks, you understand, the katchinas themselves—you can't find him among the watchers. Then you seem to recognize him, there among the sacred people, dancing like them. Then you think that the next time our grandchildren on the earth put on the masks and dance, that one, whom you knew as a spirit striving to purify himself, who used to tell you about his days on the earth, will be there. With his own eyes he will see our grandchildren and bless them." The chief's voice trailed off, as though the longing for what he was describing deprived him of words.

"To see the katchinas themselves dancing," Dr. Hillebrand mused. "Not the masks, but what the masks stand for . . . That would keep me happy for centuries. But then, I could not join your people. I was never initiated. I'd be plain silly trying to dance with them. It's not for me."

"For over forty years I have been initiating you," the Sun's Forehead said. "As for dancing—you will no longer be in that old body. You will not be dancing with those fragile, rheumatic bones. There is room for you in our country. Why don't you come over? Just lie down in that crevice back there and make up your mind."

"You know," Dr. Hillebrand said, "I think I will."

Both the Kleinman Professor of American Archeology and the spirit who once had been the Sun's Forehead for the settlements in the neighborhood of T'iiz Hatsosi were thoroughly unworldly. It had not occurred to either of them that within six days after Dr. Hillebrand had left camp Dr. George Franklin would organize a search for him, and that four days later his body would be found where he had died of, apparently, heart failure. Above all, it had not occurred to them that his body would be taken home and buried with proper pomp in the appropriate cemetery. (But Philip Fleming, close to tears, resolutely overlooked the scattering of turquoise and shell in the rubbish between the crevice and the kiva.)

Dr. Hillebrand found himself among people as alien to him as they had been to the Sun's Forehead. They seemed to be gaunt from the total lack of offerings, and the means by which they should purify and advance themselves to where they could leave this life for the next, which he believed to be the final one, were confused. He realized that his spirit was burdened with much dross, and that it would be a long time before he could gather the strength to attempt a journey to the country of his friend.

His portrait, in academic gown and hood, was painted posthumously and hung in the entrance of the museum, to one side of the stela from Quiriguá and facing the reproduction

of the famous Painted Kiva mural. Dr. Klibben adroitly handled the promotions and emoluments that fell under his control. Philip Fleming won his Ph.D. with honor, and was promptly offered a splendid position at Harvard. Moved by he knew not what drive, and following one or two other actions he had performed to his own surprise, Fleming went to Dr. Hillebrand's grave, for a gesture of respect and thanks.

It had seemed to him inappropriate to bring any flowers. Instead, as he sat by the grave, with small motions of his hands he sprinkled over it some bits of turquoise and shell he had held out from a nceklace he had unearthed, and followed them with a pinch of pollen given him by a Navajo. Suddenly his face registered utter astonishment; then careful listening.

The following season, Fleming returned to Painted Mask Ruin by agreement with Dr. Klibben, who was delighted to get his Department entirely out of Southwestern archeology. There he ran a trench that led right into a magnificent polychrome pot containing a store of beans of high botanical interest.

Within a few years, he stopped visiting the grave, but he was sentimentalist enough to make a pilgrimage all alone to Tsekaiye Kin at the beginning of each field season. It was jokingly said among his confreres that there he communed with the spirit of old Hillebrand. Certainly he seemed to have inherited that legendary figure's gift for making spectacular finds.

THRESHOLD

It was quiet in the comfortable little apartment, twelve stories above the traffic of Central Park West. Venetian blinds reflected soft lights. Conventional prints were on the walls, a neutral-colored rug on the floor, and a decanter of whiskey was amber and crystal in Haggard's hand as he reflected ironically on the setting. Distinctly out of place, he thought, for an experiment in black magic.

He poured liquor for Stone, who had just arrived, out of breath and puffing nervously on a cigarette. The young attorney leaned forward in his chair and accepted the glass.

"You're not drinking, Steve?"

"Not tonight," said Haggard, with a twisted little smile. "Drink up."

Stone obeyed. Then he set down the glass and opened a brief case he had been holding on his lap. From it he took a flat, oblong parcel.

"Here's the book you wanted." He tossed it across the room.

Haggard didn't open the parcel. He placed it carefully on an end table, next to a capped thermos bottle standing there. His gaze lingered on the latter.

There was something innately cold about Stephen Haggard. Owner of a struggling advertising agency, he seemed quite unmoved by the trials that beset others and were apparently unable to affect him. Handsome, thirty-four, with rather thin lips and very level black gaze, he moved imperturbably through life. The man seemed incased in a gelid sheathe of some frigid stuff. He was ice and iron.

And Stone was warmth and laughter, a husky, pleasant-faced fellow slightly younger than his host, with frankness not written but printed in block letters all over him. He said, "I had a hell of a time getting the book, even after I showed 'em the letter you gave me."

"That so?" Haggard asked. He was luxuriously inhaling a cigarette, lying back in his chair and seeming completely relaxed. "That book shop can get anything—but they kept me waiting for months on this item. Incidentally, thanks a million for picking it up for me."

"That's all right," Stone smiled, but his eyes were puzzled. "Rather a rush job, eh?"

"I've been waiting for the book a long time. And I had to get"—Haggard hesitated and turned his head very slightly in the direction of the thermos bottle—"something else." As though to forestall further questions, he rose. "I'll see if Jean's ready. She takes hours to put on her face."

"All women do," Stone grinned. "I ought to thank you for letting me take Jean out tonight."

"I'll be busy—" The rest of the sentence was lost as Haggard vanished through the door. When he came back Stone had unwrapped the oblong parcel and was examining a vellum-bound book.

"Curiosity killed the cat," Haggard remarked. "I'll fix you another drink while you're reading."

Looking slightly sheepish, Stone put down the book. "Sorry. My curiosity. You said it was an essay on magic—"

"It is, but you can't read Latin, Russ. Jean says she'll be ready soon, so there's time for a couple of highballs, anyway. There!" The glass foamed and subsided. Haggard took the volume and sat down opposite his guest, idly thumbing the pages. "I'll read you a bit, if you like. There's a warning on the flyleaf. 'Let none but the pure in heart and the . . . *fortis* —strong in will—read this book; and let no man dangerously attempt to—' Well, it goes on. If you perform black magic, you're in danger of being whisked off to hell by Baal and Beelzebub."

"Going to try the stuff?" Stone asked.

Haggard didn't answer. He held his hand out before him and regarded it intently. No tremor shook it.

"What's up? Been seeing little green men? That stuff about magic makes people potty sometimes—" Stone hesitated, flushing, and then grinned. "My usual tact."

The two men laughed together. Stone went on:

"I didn't mean you, of course. But I remember a fellow I was working with went nuts after shooting all his dough on fortunetellers and quacks. He kept screaming about the fires of hell and the devils that were coming for him."

Haggard was suddenly interested. "What sort of chap was he? I mean—intelligent?"

"Yeah, up to then. Nervous as a cat, though—"

"Nervous! Nerves lead to emotion, emotion to . . . to—"

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. Afraid of devils, was he?" Haggard's lips curled in a contemptuous smile.

Stone finished his drink. Liquor always made him argumentative. "Well, he was batty. But it wasn't very long ago that

we had witch trials not too far from New York. People have always been afraid of devils."

Haggard started to laugh. "Sure. The stupid and the neurotic."

Stone stood up, crossed the room, and took the book of magic. He thumped through it rapidly. "Here's a picture I noticed—that's enough to scare anybody who believed in it, even if it doesn't exist."

The sketch was that of a crowned, malefic head supported by ten multijointed and clawed legs. The title beneath it said "Asmodée."

Haggard was smiling again as he closed the book. "You're wrong, Russ. Even if Asmodeus existed, an intelligent man needn't be afraid of him—or it. Figure it out. What's a demon's resources?"

Stone poured a hasty shot. "Well—all sorts of magic. It could just wave a claw and you'd drop down to hell, eh?"

"Power," Haggard nodded. "If you stopped using your arm, what'd happen?"

"It would atrophy."

"Check. Devils had power—according to legend. But nobody ever admitted they were very smart. Why should they need to develop their brains? They could accomplish every desire by waving a claw, as you say. Wishing," said Haggard, grinning, "will make it so."

"A gorilla isn't very smart, but you wouldn't last long in a wrestling match with one."

"I'd use a gun." Haggard said logically. "Devils have only power. We've our brains. Science, psychology—hell, if Faust had gone to Harvard he could have tied Mephisto's tail into knots."

"I'm a Yale man myself," Stone murmured and got up as Jean Haggard floated into the room.

She was slim and cool and lovely, in a fragile, blond manner. In her evening gown and wrap she looked devastating.

Oddly enough, for a brief, unguarded second, a deadly viciousness showed in Haggard's eyes as he glanced at his wife. Instantly it was gone.

Jean's smile flashed. "Sorry to keep you waiting, Russ. And I'm sorry to inflict myself on you tonight at this short notice."

"My fault," Haggard grunted. "Got to work. No use Jean sticking around to listen to my moans. Enjoy yourselves, comrades."

They said they would and departed. Haggard put the safety lock on the door. Then he came back, stared at the book, opened it, and hurriedly found a page. He read it with a tight smile.

The formula was there.

He went to the phone and dialed a number.

"Phyllis? This is Steve. . . . I know; I couldn't phone before. Sorry. . . . Tonight? I'm tied up. . . . I told you—"

There was clicking silence.

"I'm sorry, darling. I can't. Jean will be back any minute. Tomorrow night, eh? I . . . I may have a surprise for you."

Evidently the answer was satisfactory, for Haggard whistled as he hung up and went into the kitchen. He returned with a good-sized mixing bowl.

This he placed in the center of the carpet. Then he uncapped the thermos and carefully poured its sluggish contents into the bowl. A thin steam arose. The blood had maintained its heat. Fresh blood, of course, was necessary, though the Jersey farmer had asked annoying questions when Haggard paid him. "But don't you want the pig, mister? Jest the blood? What—"

Why did freshly spilled blood play such an important part in these ceremonies, since mythology's beginning, Haggard wondered. He turned to the book and began reading. Latin phrases rattled crisply from his lips. He was conscious of a slight nervous tension, and purposefully made himself relax. No emotions. No neuroses. No hysteria. Just—logic.

Logic against demons.

The level of the blood was being lowered. A rim of it showed now around the inside of the basin. Where was it going? Oddly enough, Haggard wasn't surprised, though all along he had felt himself to be skeptical of this fantastic business.

The bowl was empty of blood. And the incantation was finished.

Haggard blinked. The lights—had they flickered? It wasn't imagination. They were dimming—

"Rot," he said very softly. "Imagination, glamour, autosuggestion. Electricity depends on current; ghosts can't affect a dynamo."

The lights were bright again. But again they faded. Haggard stood in a pallid darkness, looking down at the vague shadow of the bowl at his feet. It seemed to move—

It pulsed and did not hold its shape. It grew larger. It was a blot of black shadow, a sloping funnel at the bottom of which Haggard saw somethting green. It was like looking into the wrong end of a telescope. Quite tiny and far away, yet vividly distinct, a room with green walls and floor became visible below. It was empty.

The funnel grew larger. Haggard felt the floor unsteady beneath the soles of his shoes. Vertigo gripped him as he swayed.

If he fell—

"I am," he said quietly, "looking down into a green room. There may be a hole in the carpet and in the floor. Mr.

Touhey downstairs may have redecorated. All this is scarcely probable. Therefore what I see isn't real. It's an illusion."

But it was shockingly real. Haggard had difficulty in maintaining his balance. He didn't close his eyes to shut out the sight, though. Instead, he went on: "In this floor is wood and steel, perhaps concrete. They are solids. They cannot be made to vanish except by physical means. Therefore what I see is an illusion."

The vertigo was gone now. Haggard looked down without alarm. He looked suddenly into a face that was all teeth and bristling hair. Clawed talons reached up at him. Saliva slavered from the gaping mouth.

Haggard didn't move. The talons hesitated an inch from his face. They twitched menacingly.

"You see," said the man, "I'm not at all frightened. Come —" He stopped short. He had almost said, "Come up," and that would mean the oral admission of the illusion.

"Come where we can talk comfortably."

The gaping hollow in the floor and the green room at its bottom were gone. The apartment was quite normal again. The bowl stood empty on the carpet. A short, squat man stood before Haggard, shifting uneasily from one foot to the other.

His naked body was hairy and muscular, and his brutal face seemed normal enough, save for a curiously lateral compression of the skull. Forehead and chin slanted back. The lips were compressed tightly over buck teeth.

"Well, sit down," Haggard said, and set the example.

Sullenly the other obeyed, glowering under black brows. There was a silence.

"Are you dumb?" Haggard asked finally, with blatant disrespect. Almost he regretted the question, for when the demon spoke, his teeth were visible. They were the sharp, terrible fangs of a carnivore.

"Are you not afraid of me?" The voice was deep and resonant, and Haggard thought that in the past many men had trembled before it. He chuckled.

"No use to waste time. I'm not afraid, no. What's your name, first of all?"

The demon didn't quite know how to take this. He started to get mad, but thought it over instead. At last he grunted, "You couldn't pronounce it. Call me 'Baal.' Among the Assyrians that meant 'Lord.' "

"Good as any. All right. Have you ever met a man before who wasn't afraid of you?"

Baal's eyes were veiled, and they were amber cat's-eyes. "Why should I answer that?"

Haggard realized that he was getting tense again, and

relaxed. "You needn't, then. First I want you to realize that you're not dealing with a stupid lout you can frighten with a roar. I want something from you. I'm willing to pay for it." Haggard waited for the demon's reaction.

He almost grinned at sight of the triumph on Baal's brutal face. "A bargain—a pact! Well, I have done that before, mortal. I have powers; they can serve you, at a price."

"What price? My . . . my soul?" Haggard knew himself to be ridiculous as he asked.

"Your what?" Baal inquired. "Oh, I remember. Mortals always wanted to buy my gifts with what they called 'souls.' I remember what I told the Prophet Alikaam: 'Gift horses may not be sound in gait and limb. Show me this valuable soul of yours and we'll bargain.' Naturally he couldn't show it to me, though he said it was inside his body." The demon laughed hoarsely. "You can't catch me with an old trick like that. I don't want this precious soul of yours. I want you!"

"Why?"

"To eat," Baal explained. "Human flesh is . . . well, it has an indescribable taste. To a being like me, your meat would provide hours of ecstasy."

Haggard nodded. "Very material—but I get the point. If I agree, what powers have you to give?"

The demon's eyes evaded the man's. "Oh—money. Enough for you to live on in comfort, perhaps. Don't overestimate me—"

"And don't underestimate me. Evolution gave you the specialization of power. I want money, yes, but a great deal of it."

Baal frowned. "Well—I can arrange that. But you must understand that while I have power, it's limited. I can bestow on you only two gifts. The law of compensation makes more impossible. I don't know why, but that's the way it works."

Haggard scrutinized his guest. The statement was apparently true, he decided.

"If I receive a gift from you, how do I know something unpleasant won't come of it? If I ask for a pudding, I don't want it on the end of my nose."

The demon shifted uncomfortably in the chair. "It doesn't work that way. I don't understand it, but you won't have any trouble. The gifts will come naturally. My intervention won't be suspected."

Haggard glanced at his wrist watch and took a deep breath. "All right. I want one million dollars."

"Done."

"Second, I want my wife eliminated without scandal to myself—but I want her to suffer."

"Done."

"Then what?"

"Then I eat you."

Haggard stood up. "Sorry. It doesn't appeal to me. The deal's off."

Baal's jaw dropped. He put out a long-nail hand.

"Now wait. I didn't mean I'd eat you immediately. Some little time, of course, for you to enjoy yourself—"

Inwardly Haggard exulted. But he did not show it. Psychology was working. "The question arises," he said gently, "why you didn't eat me when you first appeared. For some reason this was impossible. Don't interrupt me! I'm trying to remember—"

"We'll come to some arrangement," Baal said hastily.

"—just what happened. You wanted to eat me. You wanted to get me into a position where that would be possible to you. You . . . of course! You tried to get me to fall into that imaginary pit. That green room. Sure!" Haggard went on, hurriedly making up a convincing lie. "That's just what de Galois wrote—that you couldn't eat a human unless he first entered your green room."

"He wrote that about me?"

"Yes."

"How did you you know he referred to me?" the demon asked, with unexpected shrewdness. "Baal isn't my real name."

"He described you," Haggard said blandly. "So I'm not in any danger unless I enter your green room."

"If you make a pact, you must keep it," Baal rapped out. "Besides, you couldn't hope to escape the might of my powers."

But Haggard knew how to press a bargain. "I want more concessions. I weigh over two hundred pounds on the hoof, so I should be a tasty morsel."

"What do you want?"

"Well—a fair chance."

"Doors," said Baal, after a pause. "A jinni I knew once . . . well, how do you like this? I'll put three doors in your path. Doors each of a different color. The first one will be in blue, and beyond it is one wish. When you pass the second door, which will be yellow, your second wish will be yellow, your second wish will come true. And beyond the third door—"

"Yes?"

"I shall be waiting to eat you."

"What color—"

But Baal grinned. "I am not stupid. If you knew that, you'd never go through a door of that color. It's neither blue nor yellow."

Haggard said suddenly, "It's a deal."

"Not quite," the demon disagreed. "After you have passed the first two doors, I shall put my seal on you." He smiled. "Don't touch your head; I don't mean horns. It's like a witch mark. That's one of the rules, too, though I don't know why."

"What sort of seal?"

"I'll take some power away from you—some minor physical power, perhaps—but it won't cause you trouble or pain or even embarrassment. Maybe I'll give you a wart on your back. Or put a gray streak in your hair. I just can't help it," he shrugged as Haggard started to protest. "That's one thing I can't alter. My powers won't work unless I meet certain requirements."

Haggard pulled at his lower lip. "I suppose it's no use asking who issues those requirements?"

"How should I know? Is it a deal?"

"It's a deal."

The two shook hands. Baal looked around thoughtfully. "Well, I'll be leaving." His gaze lingered on the Venetian blinds.

Haggard said, "Can you visit me again? You can? Then why not do so? I'd like to talk to you—after all, I don't see a demon every day."

Baal said doubtfully, "I don't—"

"You don't drink whiskey, I'm sure, but I'll have fresh blood for you every time."

"Fine," the demon agreed, baring his fangs—and vanished.

Haggard stood perfectly motionless for three minutes. Then he held out his hand and looked at it. Quite steady.

He took the bowl to the kitchen and carefully cleansed it of blood. He locked the book of magic in his desk. Finally, he poured a drink.

No need to be on guard just now. Psychology had triumphed over mere demoniac power. Two doors to triumph.

Three doors to doom.

The first door—blue. The second—yellow. Beyond them, Haggard's wishes. But the color of the third door?

The third primary color, red? Scarcely. That would be too obvious, even to a person of Baal's apparent mentality. Haggard did not make the mistake of underrating the demon. Baal was cunning. Green, then—the color of the creature's lair? That, too, was undesirably obvious.

Perhaps the color might be duplicated. The third door might be also blue or yellow. Well, there was time enough to think of that, and already Haggard's brain had worked out a soundly logical method of discovering the truth. First, though, he'd have to make friends with Baal. Provide him with blood and interest him in modern life. Disarm him—

The room was stuffy. Haggard threw open the windows, but the air itself was sultry with early summer. Below, the park was a blotch of shadow beyond the bright ribbon of the street. Jean and Russ Stone would not be in till late. There was time for a walk.

He took the elevator down, nodding to the sleepy Negro who operated the car, and stepped out into the night. At the Seventy-second Street entrance he turned into Central Park, grateful for the relief of a cool breeze. Idly he wandered, his thoughts busy with plans. Thus Haggard did not notice the shadowy figure beside him till a low voice commanded, "Put up your hands, bud. Quick!"

Instinct rather than logic made Haggard act. He whirled toward the shadow, lifting his hands in a gesture that was never finished. Something crashed against his skull, and the lights went out.

He woke up in a hospital bed. He said, "What's happened?" and the nurse fled to return with a doctor. The latter tested pulse and temperature, and, after a while, talked to Haggard, explaining much.

"Amnesia?" the patient asked. "How long have I been here?"

"About a month. It wasn't amnesia. Concussion. Your wife's here."

When Jean came in, Haggard caught the tail end of a whispered command from the doctor. He peered intently at his wife as she sat down composedly by the bedside.

"Yes. I'm fine—came out of it as suddenly as I went into it. Jean, the doctor ordered you not to tell me something. What?"

"N-nothing."

"I'll only worry until I know." Haggard, through years of living with a woman he detested, had become familiar with her temperament. He used psychology on her now, and at last Jean capitulated.

"The firm—your advertising agency. It burned down the day after you were hurt."

"It's insured." Only after thinking of that did Haggard ask, "Was anyone hurt?"

"No. But—" She hesitated.

"Well?"

"The insurance—lapsed. I don't know anything about it.

Russ Stone investigated; he did everything he could. You're bankrupt."

Haggard's smile was like ice. "I'm bankrupt. Not the plural. Love, honor and cherish. For better or worse. Well, I'm glad you told me, Jean. You'd better go now."

When the doctor appeared, there was an argument. Haggard at last had his way. Physically he had been well for a long time, and he was completely cured. He was released from the hospital, with injunctions to be careful.

Careful? What had gone wrong? Baal's powers were untrustworthy. Or—or had the whole thing been due to imagination? No; Haggard knew he was not the type to experience hallucinations. Well—he was bankrupt.

He taxied to look at the razed place where his advertising firm had once stood. Struck by a thought, he entered a drugstore and telephoned his brokers.

"Mr. Strang, please. . . . This is Mr. Gardner. . . . Yes." Haggard had used a false name from the beginning of his dabblings in the stock market. Jean had a way of finding out too much—and Phyllis needed a good deal of money. Briefly, Haggard wondered about Phyllis, what she had thought when he failed to appear on the night following the accident. He'd phone her next. Strang was speaking.

"Gardner! For God's sake! Where've you been? I've tried every way I knew to get in touch with you—"

"What's wrong?"

"Can you come up here immediately?"

Haggard frowned. The brokers had never seen his face; he'd always used the mails. But this— "All right," he agreed. "I'll be right up."

He found the building, entered an elevator, got off at the twenty-second floor, and walked along a marble corridor. He opened a door and walked into a reception room. The office clerk said, "Can I help you, sir?"

Haggard didn't answer. He was staring at something behind the clerk.

It was a blue door.

The office was furnished in blue-and-tan leather. It was perfectly logical for the door to be of that hue. *Beyond it—*

Beyond it, Haggard sat down facing a gray-haired, plump man—Strang.

"What have you to tell me?" Strangely, he was all ice now.

"Do you remember that consolidated stock—the oil field—you bought a month ago?"

"Yes."

"The bottom dropped out of it the day after, and I tried

to phone you. I was told the building had burned down. No one knew of a man named Gardner who had been there."

"The bottom dropped out?"

"For a week. Then the drillers struck a lake of oil. In your absence I acted for you, Mr. Gardner. I had advance information. The stock you now hold is worth, roughly, one million dollars."

There was more talk, but it meant little to Haggard. He was thinking of the blue door through which he had passed to attain his first desire.

Two doors were left—

For the time, Haggard kept his good fortune secret. He lived quietly on in the apartment with Jean, waiting for further developments. Occasionally he saw Phyllis, though now he detected flaws in the girl that had not been apparent before. His passion for her was dying. But his hatred for Jean flamed afresh. He was too much like his wife, and egotists cannot live together.

But Haggard rented another apartment surreptitiously, with a definite purpose in mind. He furnished it carefully and one night poured blood into a bowl that stood on the carpet. Baal came.

Somehow, conversing with the demon was not unpleasant. It made Haggard realize the superiority of his own brain. Baal was like a child—no, a savage, interested in everything. He tried smoking, and tasted liquor, but liked neither. Games delighted him, though. Yet there are few games limited to two persons. It was some time before Haggard could plausibly propose the scheme he had in mind.

This was a word-association test. Baal liked it at first, but soon grew bored before Haggard had had time to lull the demon's possible suspicions. He vanished sleepily, and Haggard cursed. He had to learn the color of the third door.

Well—it was late, yet he wasn't sleepy. During the past few weeks he had spent less and less time at the original apartment, usually staying at his new place overnight. But somehow the place did not attract him now. A walk—

Carefully he avoided the park. He turned into a bar for a drink, and there met several friends. Influential men, who might have avoided a bankrupt had they been sober. They lived out of town and, when the bar closed at two A.M., cursed in bitter chorus.

"Hell of a time—we're just starting—"

Haggard remembered that his own apartment was but a few blocks away. He suggested it to the others. "I've got plenty of Scotch there."

So they all went to the apartment overlooking Central Park.

A strong smell of paint greeted them. The elevator boy said sleepily, "They're redecorating, Mistah Haggard. Ain't seen you for a while, suh?"

Haggard didn't answer. A queer, inexplicable, tight feeling was in his stomach as the elevator shot up. He glanced at his three companions. They seemed to notice nothing amiss.

They got out in the hall. Odor of turpentine and paint was strong. The color scheme, Haggard decided, was atrocious. He paused before his door. It had been repainted.

It had been repainted yellow.

Very quietly Haggard took out his key, unlocked the door, and pushed it open. He walked into the room, his companions behind him. He switched on the light.

Russ Stone stood blinking confusedly. Jean, in a blue negligee, cried out and made a futile gesture.

"Gentlemen," Haggard said quietly. "You're witnesses to this. Adultery is legal cause for divorce. I'll need your evidence later—"

It was as simple as that. Haggard had wanted his wife eliminated without scandal to himself, but he had wanted her to suffer. And certainly Jean's ego would suffer horribly under the publicity that would ensue. Finally, Haggard would be free, in possession of a million dollars. He could have Phyllis without complications, if he still wanted her—a point on which he was doubtful. He faced only the future, in which the third door lay.

Phyllis was pleased when he told her. "Come over tomorrom night and we'll have a party," she smiled. "I'm moving—getting a better place. Here's the address. And thanks for that last check, Stevie."

"It's a date. Tomorrow night."

Yet Haggard knew he had no time to lose. He had an appointment to keep, and kept it, the next night, in the apartment he had rented surreptitiously. Baal came in response to the blood sacrifice. He was in good humor.

"I never discuss business," he grinned, baring the menacing fangs. "Play that record I like—the 'Bolero.' "

Haggard found the black disk. "You said after I passed the first two doors you'd put your seal on me. What—"

Baal wouldn't answer; he was experimenting with a magnetic toy that had always fascinated him. Haggard's eyes narrowed. He'd have to wait.

Two hours later he proposed the word-association test and Baal agreed, not realizing its significance. Haggard had prepared a convincing set of pseudorules for the "game." He sat with a watch in his hand, eying it intently.

"Music."

" 'Bolero.' "

Two seconds elapsed between key word and response.

"Smoke."

"Fire."

Two and a half seconds.

"Cigarette."

"Water."

Baal, Haggard remembered, had yelled for a glass of water after trying a cigarette. The time was two seconds on this.

"Toy."

"Fast."

Logical response, Haggard thought, after a glance at the magnetic gadget. It worked that way. He went on carefully with a string of meaningless words, lulling Baal's suspicions and establishing the normal time of response. Only twice did the demon hesitate for any noticeable period.

"Food."

A very long pause—ten seconds. Then: "Eat." Baal had discarded the natural association word and substituted a harmless one—one that would reveal nothing. Had he first thought of Haggard or—the color of the third door?

"Open."

"Book." But five seconds had elapsed. Not quite long enough for Baal to think of a completely harmless word, but long enough to substitute a second for the first. Haggard remembered that, and presently said:

"Book."

The seconds ticked past. Baal was silent. At last he said, "Dead."

Haggard continued, but his mind was working furiously. The logical response to "book" would be, probably "read." Yet Baal's subconscious had warned him against that word. Why?

There were, of course, two ways of pronouncing it—in the present and in the past tense.

"Necktie," Haggard threw in suddenly. He caught Baal's startled glance at his own throat, and the demon's pause.

"Choke."

Haggard was wearing a red necktie.

Inwardly exulting, he threw in a few more key words to clinch the question, and finally stopped, realizing that now he knew the color of the third door. It was red. Beyond it lay doom—but Haggard would never open a red door, or go near one. Baal had lost, though the demon did not even realize it. Demoniac power was no match for applied psychology!

Haggard lost interest in the proceedings, though he disguised his feelings well. But it seemed hours before Baal yawned and vanished, with a casual nod.

The room was empty. And that was unendurable. With relief, Haggard remembered his appointment with Phyllis. He'd take her out—no, he'd bring her champagne, and they'd celebrate. Phyllis wouldn't know the real reason, of course, but—that didn't matter.

With two bottles of champagne under his arm, Haggard dismounted from a taxi half an hour later. He tipped the cabman lavishly and stood for a second looking up at the purple, star-sprinkled sky. A warm wind blew on his face. A million dollars—and freedom, not to mention revenge on Jean. Haggard touched his forehead with an odd gesture. Beyond that frontal bone lay his brain, stronger than demons or their power.

"Cogito, ergo vici," he paraphrased silently. And turned to the steps of the apartment house.

The elevator boy let him off at the third floor and gestured down the corridor. "She just moved in today, sir. Right there."

Haggard walked along the passage, hearing the low whine of the descending elevator. 3-C. This was it. A door, he noticed, painted a soft gray. He'd be noticing such things from now on. Watching for a red one that he must never pass.

He took out the key Phyllis had given him and inserted it in the lock. Then he turned the knob and opened the door.

He looked into a bare room whose walls and ceiling and floor were green. Baal, naked and hairy, stood quietly waiting. Haggard didn't move, yet an invisible wind bore him forward. Behind him the door crashed shut.

Baal smiled, showing his teeth. "Our bargain," he said. "Now I shall exact the fee."

Haggard had turned into ice. He heard himself whisper, "You didn't keep the bargain. It was a red door—"

Baal said, "How did you learn that? I didn't tell you. Yes, it was a red door, the third one."

Haggard turned around and walked a few steps. He put his finger on the gray, smooth surface of the door, incongruous in contrast with the green walls about it. "It's not red."

Baal was walking forward, too. "Have you forgotten the witch mark? After you passed the second door, I took a minor physical power away from you—"

He drew the back of his hairy hand across his mouth. Haggard heard the faint click of teeth and whispered, "Applied psychology—"

"I know nothing of that," said Baal. "I have only my powers. It was part of our bargain that I deprive you of a minor physical power. The door is not gray. It is red. You are color-blind—"

GREENFACE

"What I don't like," the fat sport said firmly—his name was Freddie Something—"is snakes! That was a whopping, mean-looking snake that went across the path there, and I ain't going another step nearer the icehouse!"

Hogan Masters, boss and owner of Masters Fishing Camp on Thursday Lake, made no effort to conceal his indignation.

"What you don't like," he said, his voice a trifle thick, "is work! That li'le garter snake wasn't more than six inches long. What you want is for me to carry all the fish up there alone while you go off to the cabin and take it easy—"

Freddie was already on his way to the cabin. "I'm on vacation!" he bellowed back happily. "Gotta save my strength! Gotta 'cuperate!"

Hogan glared after him, opened his mouth and shut it again. Then he picked up the day's catch of bass and walleyes and swayed on toward the icehouse. Usually a sober young man, he'd been guiding a party of fishermen from one of his light-housekeeping cabins over the lake's trolling grounds since early morning. It was hot work in June weather and now, at three in the afternoon, Hogan was tanked to the gills with iced beer.

He dropped the fish between chunks of ice under the sawdust, covered them up and started back to what he called the lodge—an old, two-story log structure taken over from the previous owners and at present reserved for himself and a few campers too lazy even to do their own cooking.

When he came to the spot where the garter snake had given Freddie his excuse to quit, he saw it wriggling about spasmodically at the edge of a clump of weeds, as if something hidden in there had caught hold of it.

Hogan watched the tiny reptile's struggles for a moment, then squatted down carefully and spread the weeds apart. There was a sharp buzzing like the ghost of a rattler's challenge, and something slapped moistly across the back of his hand, leaving a stinging sensation as if he had reached into a cluster of nettles. At the same moment, the snake disappeared with a jerk under the plants.

The buzzing continued. It was hardly a real sound at all—more like a thin, quivering vibration inside his head and decidedly unpleasant! Hogan shut his eyes tight and shook his head to drive it away. He opened his eyes again, and found himself looking at Greenface.

Nothing even faintly resembling Greenface had ever appeared before in any of Hogan's weed patches, but at the moment he wasn't greatly surprised. It hadn't, he decided at once, any real face. It was a shiny, dark-green lump, the size and shape of a goose egg, standing on end among the weeds; it was pulsing regularly like a human heart; and across it ran a network of thin, dark lines that seemed to form two tightly shut eyes and a closed, faintly smiling mouth.

Like a fat little smiling idol in green jade—Greenface it became for Hogan then and there! With alcoholic detachment, he made a mental note of the cluster of fuzzy strands like hair roots about and below the thing. Then—somewhere underneath and blurred as though seen through milky glass—he discovered the snake, coiled up in a spiral and still turning with labored, writhing motions as if trying to swim in a mass of gelatin.

Hogan put his hand out to investigate this phenomenon, and one of the rootlets lifted as if to ward off his touch. He hesitated, and it flicked down, withdrawing immediately and leaving another red line of nettle-burn across the back of his hand.

In a moment Hogan was on his feet, several yards away. A belated sense of horrified outrage overcame him—he scooped up a handful of stones and hurled them wildly at the impossible little monstrosity. One thumped down near it; and with that, the buzzing sensation in his brain stopped.

Greenface began to slide slowly away through the weeds, all its rootlets wriggling about it, with an air of moving sideways and watching Hogan over a nonexistent shoulder. He found a chunk of wood in his hand and leaped in pursuit—and it promptly vanished.

Hogan spent another minute or two poking around in the vegetation with his club raised, ready to finish it off wherever he found it lurking. Instead, he discovered the snake among the weeds and picked it up.

It was still moving, though quite dead; the scales peeling away from the wrinkled flabby body. Hogan stared at it, wondering. He held it by the head, and the pressure of his finger and thumb, the skull within gave softly, like leather. It became suddenly horrible to feel—and then the complete inexplicability of the grotesque affair broke in on him.

Hogan flung the dead snake away with a wide sweep of his arm. He went back to the icehouse and was briefly, but thoroughly, sick.

Julia Allison leaned on her elbows over the kitchen table, studying a mail-order catalogue, when Hogan walked unsteadily into the lodge. Julia had dark-brown hair, calm gray eyes, and a wicked figure. She and Hogan had been engaged for half a year; Hogan didn't want to get married until he was sure he could make a success out of Masters Fishing Camp, which was still in its first season.

Julia glanced up smiling. The smile became a stare. She closed the catalogue.

"Hogan!" she stated, in the exact tone of her pa, Whitey Allison, refusing a last one to a customer in Whitey's liquor store in town, "you're plain drunk! Don't shake your head—it'll slop out your ears!"

"Julia—" Hogan began excitedly.

She stepped up to him and sniffed, wrinkling her nose. "*Pfaah!* Beer! Yes, darling?"

"Julia, I just saw something—a sort of crazy little green spook—"

Julia blinked twice.

"Look, infant," she said soothingly, "that's how people get talked about! Sit down and relax while I make up coffee, black. There's a couple came in this morning, and I stuck them in the end cabin. They want the stove tanked with kerosene, ice in the icebox, and wood for a barbecue—I fixed them up with linen."

"Julia," Hogan inquired hoarsely, "are you going to listen to me or not?"

Her smile vanished. "Now you're yelling!"

"I'm *not* yelling. And I don't need coffee. I'm trying to tell you—"

"Then do it without shouting!" Julia replaced the cover on the coffee can with a whack that showed her true state of mind, and gave Hogan an abused look which left him speechless.

"If you want to stand there and sulk," she continued immediately, "I might as well run along—I got to help pa in the store tonight." That meant he wasn't to call her up.

She was gone before Hogan, struggling with a sudden desire to shake his Julia up and down for some time, like a cocktail, could come to a decision. So he went instead to see to the couple in the end cabin. Afterward he lay down bitterly and slept it off.

When he woke up, Greenface seemed no more than a vague and very uncertain memory, an unaccountable scrap of afternoon nightmare—due to the heat, no doubt! *Not* to the beer: on that point Hogan and Julia remained in disagreement, however completely they became reconciled otherwise. Since neither was willing to bring the subject up again, it didn't really matter.

The next time Greenface was seen, it wasn't Hogan who saw it.

In mid-season, on the twenty-fifth of June, the success of Master Fishing Camp looked pretty well assured. Whitey Allison was hinting he'd be willing to advance money to have the old lodge rebuilt, as a wedding present. When Hogan came into camp for lunch everything was nice and peaceful, but before he got to the lodge steps, a series of piercing feminine shrieks from the direction of the north end cabin swung him around, running.

Charging up to the cabin with a number of startled camp guests strung out behind him, Hogan heard a babble of excited talk shushed suddenly and emphatically within. The man who was vacationing there with his wife appeared at the door.

"Old lady thinks she's seen a ghost, or something!" he apologized with an embarrassed laugh. "Nothing you can do. I . . . I'll quiet her down, I guess—"

Waving the others away, Hogan ducked around behind the cabin and listened shamelessly. Suddenly the babbling began again. He could hear every word of it.

"I did so see it! It was sort of blue and green and wet—and it had a green face and it s-s-smiled at me! It fl-floated up a tree and disappeared! Oh—G-G-Georgie!"

Georgie continued to make soothing sounds. But before nightfall, he came into the lodge to pay his bill.

"Sorry, old man," he said—he still seemed more embarrassed than upset—"I can't imagine what the little woman saw but she's got her mind made up, and we gotta go home. You know how it is. I sure hate to leave, myself!"

Hogan saw them off with a sickly smile. Uppermost among his own feelings was a sort of numbed, horrified vindication. A ghost that was blue and green and wet and floated up trees and disappeared, was a far from exact description of the little monstrosity he'd persuaded himself he *hadn't* seen—but still too near it to be a coincidence. Julia, driving out from town to see him next day, didn't think it was a coincidence, either.

"You couldn't possibly have told that hysterical old goose about the funny little green thing you thought you saw? She got confidential in the liquor store last night, and her hubby couldn't hush her. Everybody was listening. That sort of stuff won't do the camp any good, Hogan!"

Hogan looked helpless. If he told her about the camp haunt, she wouldn't believe him anyhow. And if she did, it would scare her silly.

"Well?" she urged suspiciously.

Hogan sighed. "Never spoke more than a dozen words with the woman—"

Julia seemed miffed but puzzled. There was a peculiar oily hothouse smell in the air when Hogan walked up to the road with her and watched her start back to town in her ancient car, but with a nearly sleepless night behind him, he wasn't as alert as he might have been. He was recrossing the long, narrow meadow between the road and the camp before the extraordinary quality of that odor struck him. And then, for the second time, he found himself looking at Greenface—at a bigger Greenface and not a better one.

About sixty feet away, up in the birches on the other side of the meadow, it was almost completely concealed: an indefinable oval of darker vegetable green in the thick foliage. Its markings were obscured by the leaf shadows among which it lay motionless except for that sluggish pulsing.

Hogan stared at it for long seconds while his scalp crawled and his heart hammered a thudding alarm into every fiber of his body. What scared him was its size—that oval was as big as a football; it had been growing at a crazy rate since he saw it last!

Swallowing hard, he mopped off the sweat that was starting out on his forehead while he walked on stiffly toward the lodge. Whatever it was, he didn't want to scare it off! He had an automatic shotgun slung above the kitchen door, for emergencies; and a dose of No. 2 shot would turn this particular emergency into a museum specimen—

Around the corner of the lodge, he went up the entrance steps four at a time. A few seconds later, with the gun in his hands and reaching for a handful of shells, he shook his head to drive a queer soundless buzzing out of his ears. Instantly, he remembered when he'd experienced that sensation before and wheeled toward the screened kitchen window.

The big birch trembled slightly as if horrified to see a huge spider with jade-green body and blurred cluster of threadlike legs flow down along its trunk. Twelve feet from the ground, it let go of the tree and dropped with the long bunched threads stretched straight down before it. Hogan grunted and blinked.

It happened before his eyes: at the instant the bunched tips hit the ground, Greenface was jarred into what could only be called a higher stage of visibility. There was no change in the head, but the legs abruptly became flat, faintly greenish ribbons, flexible and semitransparent. Each about six inches wide and perhaps six feet long, they seemed attached in a thick fringe all around the lower part of the head, like a Hawaiian

dancer's grass skirt. They showed a bluish gloss wherever the sun struck them, but Greenface didn't wait for a closer inspection.

Off it went, swaying and gliding swiftly on the ends of these foot ribbons into the woods beyond the meadow. For all the world, it *did* look like a conventional ghost, the ribbons glistening in a luxurious winding sheet around the area where a body should have been, but wasn't! No wonder that poor woman—

He found himself giggling helplessly. Forcing himself to stop, he laid the gun upon the kitchen table. Then he tried to control the shaking of his hands long enough to get a cigarette going.

Long before the middle of July, every last tourist had left Masters Fishing Camp in a more or less perturbed condition. Vaguely, Hogan sensed it was unfortunate that two of his attempts to dispose of Greenface had been observed while his quarry remained unseen. It wasn't, of course, his fault if the creature chose to exercise an uncanny ability to become almost completely invisible at will—nothing more than a tall, glassy blur which flickered off through the woods and was gone. And it wasn't until he drove into town one evening that he realized how unfortunate that little trick was, nevertheless, for him.

Whitey Allison's greeting seemed brief and chilly, while Julia delayed putting in an appearance for almost half an hour. Hogan waited patiently enough.

"You might pour me a Scotch," he suggested at last.

Whitey passed him a significant look.

"Better lay off the stuff," he advised heavily. Hogan flushed red.

"What you mean by that?"

"There's plenty of funny stories going around about you right now!" Whitey told him, blinking belligerently. Then he looked past Hogan, and Hogan knew Julia had come into the store behind him; but he was too angry to drop the matter there.

"What do you expect me to do about them?" he demanded.

"That's no way to talk to pa!"

Julia's voice was sharper than Hogan had ever heard it—he swallowed hard and tramped out of the liquor store without looking at her. Down the street he had a couple of drinks; and coming past the store again on the way to his car, he saw Julia behind the counter laughing and chatting with a group of summer residents. She seemed to be having a grand time; her gray eyes sparkled and there was a fine high color in her cheeks.

Hogan snarled out the worst word he knew and went on home. It was true he'd grown accustomed to an impressive dose of whiskey at night, to put him to sleep. At night, Greenface wasn't abroad and there was no sense in lying awake to wonder and worry about it. On warm, clear days around noon was the time to be on the alert; twice Hogan caught it basking in the treetops in full sunlight and each time took a long shot at it, which had no effect beyond scaring it into complete visibility. It dropped out of the tree like a rotten fruit and scudded off into the bushes, its foot ribbons weaving and flapping all about it.

Well, it all added up. Was it surprising if he seemed constantly on the watch for something nobody else could see? When the camp cabins grew empty one by one and stayed empty, Hogan told himself that he preferred it that way. Now he could devote all his time to tracking down that smiling haunt and finishing it off! Afterward would have to be early enough to repair the damage it had done his good name and bank balance.

He tried to keep Julia out of these calculations. Julia hadn't been out to the camp for weeks; and under the circumstances he didn't see how he could do anything now to patch up their misunderstanding.

After being shot at the second time, Greenface remained out of sight for so many days that Hogan almost gave up hunting for it. He tramped morosely down into the lodge cellar one afternoon and pulled a banana from a cluster he'd got from the wholesale grocer in town. Wedged in under the fruit he found the tiny mummified body of a hummingbird, some tropical species with a long curved beak and long ornamental tail feathers.

Except for beak and feathers, it would have been unrecognizable: bones, flesh and skin were shriveled together into a small lump of doubtful consistency, like dried gum. Hogan, reminded of the dead snake from which he had driven Greenface near the icehouse, handled it with fingers that shook a little. In part, at least, the hummingbird seemed to explain the origin of the camp spook.

Greenface was, of course, carnivorous, in some weird, out-of-the-ordinary fashion. The snake had been an indication, and since then birds of every type were growing shy around the camp, while red squirrels and chipmunks disappeared without trace. When that banana cluster was shipped from Brazil or some island in the Caribbean, Greenface—a seedling Greenface, very much smaller even than when Hogan first saw it—had come along with it, clinging to its hummingbird prey!

But during the transition, something—perhaps merely the touch of the colder North—must have removed some internal check on its growth which still seemed to be progressing in a jerky and unpredictable fashion. For though it appeared to lack any solid parts that might resist decomposition after death, creatures of such size and conforming to no recognizable pattern of either the vegetable or the animal kingdoms, couldn't very well be in existence anywhere without finally attracting human attention. Whereas, if they grew normally to be only a foot or two high in those luxuriant tropical places, they seemed intelligent and alert enough to escape observation —even discounting that inexplicable knack of turning transparent from one second to the next!

His problem, meanwhile, was a purely practical one; and the next time he grew aware of the elusive hothouse smell near the lodge, he had a plan ready laid. His nearest neighbor, Pete Jeffries, who provided Hogan with most of his provisions from a farm two miles down the road to town, owned a hound by the name of Old Battler—a large, surly brute with a strain of Airedale in its make-up and reputedly the best trailing nose in the county.

Hogan's excuse for borrowing Old Battler was a fat buck who'd made his headquarters in the marshy ground across the bay. Pete had no objection to that sort of business. He whistled the hound in and handed him over to Hogan with a parting admonition to "keep an eye peeled for them damn game wardens!" Pete and Old Battler were the slickest pair of poachers for a hundred miles around.

The oily fragrance under the birches was so distinct that Hogan could almost have followed it himself. Unfortunately, it didn't mean a thing to the dog. Panting and growling as Hogan, cradling the shotgun, brought him up on a leash, Old Battler was ready for any type of quarry from rabbits to a pig-stealing bear; but he simply wouldn't or couldn't understand that he was to track down that bloodless vegetable odor to its source!

He walked off a few yards in the direction the thing had gone, nosing the grass; then, ignoring Hogan's commands, he returned to the birch, smelled carefully around its base and paused to demonstrate in unmistakable fashion what he thought of the scent. Finally he sat on his haunches and regarded Hogan with a baleful, puzzled eye.

There was nothing to do but take him back and tell Pete Jeffries the poaching excursion was off because the warden had put in an appearance. When Hogan got back to the lodge, he heard the telephone jingling above the cellar stairs and started for it with an eagerness that surprised himself.

"Hello!" he shouted into the mouthpiece. "Hello? Julia? That you?"

There was no answer from the other end. Hogan, listening, heard voices, several of them: people were laughing and talking. Then a door slammed faintly and someone called out: "Hi, Whitey! How's the old man?" She had called up from the liquor store all right, perhaps just to see what he was doing. He thought he could even hear the faint flutter of her breath.

"Julia," Hogan said softly, scared by the silence. "What's the matter, darling? Why don't you say something?"

Now he did hear her take a quick, deep breath. Then the receiver clicked down, and the line went dead.

The rest of the afternoon, he managed to keep busy cleaning out the cabins that had been occupied. Counting back to the day the last of them was vacated, he decided the reason nobody had arrived since was that a hostile Whitey Allison, in his strategic position at the town bus stop, was directing all tourist traffic to other camps. Not—Hogan assured himself again—that he wanted anyone around until he had solved his problem; it would only make matters worse.

But why had Julia called up? What did it mean?

That night the moon was full. Near ten o'clock, with no more work to do, Hogan settled down wearily on the lodge steps. Presently he lit a cigarette. His intention was to think matters out to some conclusion in the quiet night air, but all he seemed able to do was to tell himself uselessly, over and over again, that there *must* be some way of trapping that elusive green horror!

He pulled the sides of his face down slowly with his fingertips. "I gotta *do* something!"—the futile whisper seemed to have been running through his head all day: "Gotta *do* something! Gotta—" He'd be having a nervous collapse if he didn't watch out!

The rumbling barks of Jeffries' Old Battler began to churn up the night to the eastward—and suddenly Hogan caught the characteristic tinny stutter of Julia's little car as it turned down the road beyond the Jeffries farm and came rattling on in the direction of the camp.

The thrill that swung him to his feet was quenched at once by fresh doubts. Even if Julia was coming to tell him she'd forgiven him, he'd be expected to explain what was making him act like this. And he couldn't explain it! If she actually believed him, it might affect her mind. If she didn't she'd think he was crazy or lying—he couldn't do it, Hogan decided despairingly. He'd have to send her away again!

He took the big flashlight down from its hook beside the

door and started off forlornly to meet her when she would bring the car bumping along the path from the road. Then he realized that the car, past Jeffries' place but still a half mile or so away, had stopped.

He waited, puzzled. From a distance he heard the creaky shift of gears, a brief puttering of the motor—another shift and putter. Then silence. Old Battler was also quiet, probably listening suspiciously; though he, too, knew the sound of Julia's car. There was no one else to hear it; Jeffries had gone to the city with his wife that afternoon, and they wouldn't be back till late next morning.

Hogan frowned, flashing the light off and on against the moonlit side of the lodge. In the quiet, three or four whippoorwills were crying to each other with insane rapidity up and down the lake front. There was a subdued shrilling of crickets everywhere, and occasionally the threefold soft call of an owl dropped across the bay. He started reluctantly up the path toward the road.

The headlights were out, or he would have been able to see them from here. But the full moon sailed high, and the road was a narrow silver ribbon running straight down through the pines toward Jeffries' farmhouse.

Quite suddenly he discovered the car, drawn up beside the road and turned back toward town. It was Julia's car all right; and it was empty. Hogan walked slowly toward it, peering right and left, then jerked around with a start to a sudden crashing noise among the pines a hundred yards or so down off the road—a scrambling animal rush that seemed to be moving toward the lake. An instant later, Old Battler's angry roar told him the hound was running loose and had prowled into something it disapproved of down there.

He was still listening, trying to analyze the commotion, when a girl in a dark sweater and skirt stepped out quietly from the shadow of the roadside pines beyond him. Hogan didn't see her; he heard her cross the ditch to the road in a beautiful reaching leap. When he looked around, she was running like a rabbit for the car.

He yelped breathlessly: "Julia!"

For just an instant, Julia looked back at him, her face a pale, scared blur in the moonlight. Then the car door slammed shut behind her, and with a shiver and groan the old machine lurched into action. Hogan made no further attempt to stop her. Confused and unhappy, he watched the headlights sweep down the road until they swung out of sight around the corner behind Jefferies' farm.

"Now what the devil was *she* poking around here for?"

He sighed, shook his head and started back to the camp.

There was a cool draft of air flowing up from the lake across the road, but Old Battler's vicious snarls were no longer audible on it. Hogan sniffed idly at the breeze, wondered at a faint, peculiar odor that tainted it, and sniffed again. Then, in a flash of apprehensive rage, he realized what had happened. Greenface was down in the pines somewhere—the hound had stirred it up, discovered it was alive and worth worrying, but lost it again and was now casting about silently to find its hiding place!

Hogan crossed the ditch in a jump that bettered Julia's, blundered into the wood and ducked just in time to avoid being speared in the eye by a jagged branch of asp. More cautiously he worked his way in among the trees, went sliding down a moldy incline, swore in exasperation as he tripped over a rotten trunk and was reminded thereby of the flashlight in his hand. He walked slowly across a moonlit clearing, listening, then found himself confronted by a dense cluster of evergreens and switched on the light.

It stabbed into a dark-green oval, bigger than a man's head, eight feet away.

He stared fascinated at the thing, expecting it to vanish. But Greenface made no move beyond a slow writhing among the velvety foot ribbons that supported it. It seemed to have grown again in its jack-in-the-box fashion; it was taller than Hogan and stooping slightly toward him. The lines on its pulsing head formed two tightly shut eyes and a wide, thin-lipped, insanely smiling mouth.

Gradually it was borne in upon Hogan that the thing was asleep! Or had been asleep—for in that moment, he became aware of a change in the situation through something like the buzzing escape of steam, a sound just too high to be audible, that throbbed through his head. Then he noticed that Greenface, swaying slowly, quietly, had come a foot or two closer, and he saw the tips of the foot ribbons grow dim and transparent as they slid over the moss toward him. A sudden horror of this stealthy approach seized him, draining the strength out of his body. Without thinking of what he did he switched off the light.

Almost instantly the buzzing sensation died away, and before Hogan had backed off to the edge of the moonlit clearing, he realized that Greenface had stopped its advance. Suddenly he understood.

Unsteadily he threw the beam on again and directed it full on the smiling face. For a moment there was no result; then the faint buzzing began once more in his brain, and the foot ribbons writhed and dimmed as Greenface came sliding forward. He snapped it off, and the thing grew still, solidifying.

Hogan began to laugh in silent hysteria. He had caught it now! Light brought Greenface alive, let it act, move—enabled it to pull its unearthly vanishing stunt. At high noon it was as vital as a cat or hawk. Lack of light made it still, pulled, though perhaps able to react automatically.

Greenface was trapped!

He began to play with it, savagely enjoying his power over the horror, switching the light off and on. Presently, Greenface would die; but first—he seemed to sense a growing dim anger in that soundless buzzing—and suddenly the thing did not stop!

In a flash, Hogan realized he had permitted it to reach the edge of the little moonlit clearing, and under the full glare of the moon, Greenface was still advancing upon him, though slowly. Its outlines grew altogether blurred—even the head started to fade.

Hogan leaped back, with a new rush of the helpless horror with which he had first sensed it coming toward him. But he retreated only into the shadows on the other side of the clearing.

The ghostly outline of Greenface came rolling on, its nebulous leering head swaying slowly from side to side like the head of a hanged and half-rotted thing. It reached the fringe of shadows and stopped, while the foot ribbons darkened as they touched the darkness and writhed back. Dimly it seemed to be debating this new situation.

Hogan swallowed hard. He had noticed a blurred, shapeless something which churned about slowly within the jellylike shroud beneath the head; and he had a sudden conviction that he knew the reason for Old Battler's silence. Greenface had become as dangerous as a tiger!

Meanwhile, he had no intention of leaving it in the moonlight's liberty. He threw the beam on the dim oval mask again, and slowly, stupidly, moving along that rope of light, Greenface entered the darkness; and the light flicked out, and it was trapped once more.

Trembling and breathless after his half-mile run, Hogan reached the lodge and began stuffing his pockets with as many shells as they would take. Then he picked up the shotgun and started back toward the spot where he had left the thing, forcing himself not to hurry. If he didn't blunder now, his troubles would be over. But if he did—Hogan shivered. He hadn't quite realized before that a time was bound to come when Greenface would be big enough to lose its fear of him.

Pushing down through the ditch and into the woods, he flashed the light ahead of him. In a few more minutes he

reached the place where he had left Greenface. And it was not there!

Hogan glared about, wondering wildly whether he had missed the right spot and knowing he hadn't. He looked up and saw the tops of the jack pines swaying against the pale blur of the sky; and as he stared at them, a ray of moonlight flickered through that broken canopy and touched him and was gone again, and then he understood. Greenface had crept up along such intermittent threads of light into the trees.

One of the pine tops appeared blurred and top-heavy. Hogan watched it a few minutes; then he depressed the safety button on the automatic, cradled the gun, and put the flashlight beam dead-center on that blur. In a moment he felt the fine mental irritation as the blur began to flow downward through the tree toward him. Remembering that Greenface did not mind a long drop to the ground, he switched off the light and watched it take shape among the shadows, and then begin a slow retreat toward the treetops and the moon.

Hogan took a deep breath and raised the gun.

The five reports came one on top of the other in a rolling roar, while the pine top jerked and splintered and flew. Greenface was plainly visible now, still clinging, twisting and lashing in spasms like a broken snake. Big branches, torn loose in those furious convulsions, crashed ponderously down toward Hogan. He backed off hurriedly, flicked in five new shells and raised the gun again.

And again!

And again!

The whole top of the tree seemed to be coming down with it! Droping the gun, Hogan covered his head with his arms and shut his eyes. He heard the sodden, splashy thump with which it landed on the forest mold a half dozen yards away. Then something hard and solid slammed down across his shoulders and the back of his skull.

There was a brief sensation of plunging headlong through a fire-streaked darkness. For many hours thereafter, no sort of sensation reached Hogan's mind at all.

"Haven't seen you around in a long time," bellowed Pete Jeffries across the fifty feet of water between his boat and Hogan's. The farmer pulled a fat flapping whitefish out of the illegal gill net he was emptying and plunked it down on the pile before him. "What you do with yourself—sleep up in the woods?"

"Times I do," Hogan admitted.

"Used to myself when I was your age. Out with a gun alla time," Pete said mournfully. "It ain't no real fun any

more—'specially since them game wardens got Old Battler."

Hogan shivered imperceptibly, remembering the ghastly thing he'd buried that July morning, six weeks back, when he awoke, thinking his skull was caved in and found Greenface somehow had dragged itself away, with enough shot in it to lay out a township. At least it felt sick enough to disgorge what was left of Old Battler, and to refrain from harming Hogan. Maybe he'd killed it, at that—though he couldn't quite believe it.

"Think the storm will hit before evening?" he asked out of his thoughts, not caring much either way. Pete glanced at the sky.

"Yes!" he agreed matter-of-factly. "Hit the lake in half an hour maybe. I know two guys," he added, "who are going to get awful wet. Not meaning us—"

"That so?"

'Yeah. Know that little bay back where the Indian outfit used to live? There's two of the drunkest buggers I seen on Thursday Lake this summer—fishing there from a little duck boat! They come across the lake somewheres."

"Think we ought to warn 'em?"

"Not me!" said Jeffries. "They made some kinda crack when I passed there. I like to have rammed 'em." He looked at Hogan with puzzled benevolence. "Seems there was something I was gonna tell you . . . well, guess it was a lie!" He sighed. "How's the walleyes hitting?"

"Pretty good." Hogan had picked up a stringful trolling along the lake bars.

"I got it now!" Pete spluttered excitedly. "Whitey told me last night: Julia's got herself engaged up with a guy in the city—place she's working at! They're going to get married real quick."

Hogan bent over the side of his boat and began to unknot the fish-stringer. He hadn't seen Julia since the night he last met Greenface. A week or so later he heard she'd left town and taken a job in the city.

"Seemed to me I oughta tell you," Pete continued with remorseless neighborliness. "Didn't you and she used to to go around some?"

"Yeah, some," Hogan agreed desperately. He held up the walleyes. "Want to take these home for the missis, Pete? I was just fishing for the fun of it."

"Sure will!" Pete was delighted. "If you don't want 'em. Nothing beats walleyes for eatin', 'less it's whitefish. But I'm going to smoke these. Say, how about me bringing you a ham of buck, smoked, for the walleyes?"

"O. K.," Hogan smiled.

"Have to be next week," Pete admitted regretfully. "I went shooting the north side of the lake three nights back, and there wasn't a deer around. Something's scared 'em all out over there."

"O. K.," Hogan said again, not listening at all. He got the motor going and cut away from Pete with a wave of his hand. "Be seeing you, Pete!"

Two miles down the lake he got his mind off Julia long enough to find a possible unpleasant significance in Pete's last words.

He cut the motor to idling speed and then shut it off entirely, trying to get his thoughts into some kind of order. Since that chunk of pine rapped him over the head and robbed him of his chance of finishing off Greenface, he'd seen no more of the thing and heard nothing to justify his suspicion that it was still alive somewhere, maybe still growing. But from Thursday Lake northward to the border of Canada stretched two hundred miles of bush, tree and water, with only the barest scattering of towns and tiny farms. Hogan often pictured Greenface prowling about back there, safe from human detection and a ghastly new enemy for the harried small life of the bush, while it nourished its hatred for the man who had so nearly killed it.

It wasn't a pretty picture. It made him take the signs indicating MASTERS FISHING CAMP from the roads, and made him turn away the occasional would-be guest who still found his way to the camp in spite of Whitey Allison's unrelenting vigilance in town. It also made it impossible for him even to try to get in touch with Julia and explain what couldn't have been explained anyhow.

A rumble of thunder broke through Hogan's thoughts. The sky in the east hung black with clouds; and the boat was beating in steadily toward shore with the wind and waves behind it. Hogan started the motor and came around in a curve to take a direct line toward camp. As he did so, a white object rose sluggishly on the waves not a hundred yards ahead of him and sank again. With a start of dismay he realized it was the upturned bottom of a small flat boat, and remembered the two fishermen he'd intended warning against the approach of the storm.

The little bay Jeffries had mentioned, lay a half-mile in back of him; he'd come past it without being aware of the fact. There was no immediate reason to think the drunks had met with an accident; more likely they'd simply landed and neglected to draw the boat high enough out of the water, so that it drifted off into the lake on the first puff of wind.

Circling the derelict to make sure it was really empty, Hogan turned back to pick up the two sportsmen and take them to his camp until the storm was over.

On reaching the comparatively smooth water of the tree-ringed bay, Hogan throttled the motor and came in slowly because the bay was shallow and choked with pickerel grass and reeds. There was little breeze here; the air seemed even oppressively hot and still after the free race of wind on the outer lake. It was also darkening rapidly.

He stood up in the boat and stared along the shoreline over the tops of the reeds, wondering where the two had gone—and whether they mightn't have been in the boat anyway when it overturned.

"Hey, there!" he yelled uncertainly.

His voice echoed back out of the creaking shore pines. From somewhere near the end of the bay sounded a series of loud splashes—probably a big fish flopping about in the reeds. When that stopped, the stillness became almost tangible; and Hogan drew a quick, deep breath as if he found breathing difficult.

Again the splashing in the shallows, much closer now. Hogan faced the sound frowning; his frown became a puzzled stare. That was certainly no fish but some big animal, a deer, a bear, possibly a moose—the odd thing was that it should be coming toward him. Craning his neck, he saw the reed tops bend and shake about a hundred yards away, as if a slow, heavy wave of air were passing through them in his direction. There was nothing else to be seen.

Then the truth flashed on him—a rush of horrified comprehension.

Hogan tumbled back into the stern and threw the motor on full power. As the boat drove forward, he swung it around to avoid an impenetrable wall of reeds ahead, and straightened out toward the mouth of the bay. Over the roar of the motor and the splash and hissing of water, he was aware of one other sensation: that shrilling vibration of the nerves, too high to be a sound, that had haunted his dreams all summer! How near the thing came to catching him as he raced the boat throught the weedy traps of the bay, he never knew; but once past the first broad patch of open water he risked darting a glance back over his shoulder—

And then, through a daze of incredulous shock, Hogan heard himself scream—raw, hoarse yells of sheer animal terror.

He wasn't in any immediate danger for Greenface had given up the pursuit. It stood, fully visible among the reeds, a hundred yards or so back. The smiling, jade-green face was

turned toward Hogan, lit up by strange reflections from the stormy sky and mottled with red streaks and patches he didn't remember having seen there before. The glistening, flowing mass beneath it writhed like a cloak of translucent pythons. It towered in the bay, dwarfing even the trees behind it in its unearthly menace. It *had* grown again! It was all of thirty feet high.

The storm, breaking before Hogan reached camp, raged on through the night and throughout the next day. Since he would never be able to find the thing in that torrential downpour, he didn't have to decide whether he must try to hunt Greenface down or not. In any case, he wouldn't have to go looking for it, Hogan told himself, staring out of the lodge windows at the tormented chaos of water and wind without —it had come back for him, and presently it would find its way to the familiar neighborhood of the camp!

There was a certain justice in that. He'd been the nemesis of the monster as much as it had been his. It was simply time to bring the matter to an end before anyone else got killed.

Someone had told him—now he thought of it, it must have been Pete Jeffries, plodding up faithfully through the endless storm one morning with supplies for Hogan—that the two lost sportsmen were considered drowned; their boat had been discovered, and as soon as the weather made it possible, the lake would be searched for their bodies. Hogan nodded, saying nothing and keeping his face expressionless. Pete was looking at him in a worried way.

"You shouldn't drink so much, Hogan!" Pete blurted out suddenly. "It ain't doing you no good. The missis was telling me you was really keen on that Julia—maybe I shoulda kept my trap shut. But you'd have found out anyhow."

"Sure I would," Hogan said quickly. It hadn't dawned on him before that Pete believed he'd shut himself up here to mourn for Julia.

"Me," Pete told him confidentially, "I didn't marry the girl I was after, neither. But don't you never tell that to the missis, Hogan! Well, anyhow, it got me just like it got you . . . you gotta snap outta it, see?"

Something was moving, off in the grass back of the machine shed. Hogan watched it from the corner of his eye till he made sure it was only a bush shaking itself in the sleety wind.

"Eh?" he said. "Oh, sure. I'll snap out of it, Pete. Don't you worry."

"That's right." Pete sounded hearty but not quite convinced. "Come around see us some evening, Hogan. It don't do a guy no good to be sittin' off here by himself alla time."

Hogan gave his promise. Maybe he was thinking of Julia

a good deal; but mostly, it seemed to him, he was thinking of Greenface. As for drinking too much, he was certainly far too smart even to look at the whiskey. There was no telling when the crisis would come, and he intended to be ready for it. At night he slept well enough.

Meanwhile, the storm continued, day and night. Hogan couldn't quite remember finally how long it had been going on, but it was as bad a wet blow as he'd ever got stuck in. The lake water rolled over the dock with every wave, and the little dock down near the end cabins had been taken clean away. At least three trees were down within the confines of the camp, the ground littered with branches. There were times when Hogan got to wondering why Greenface didn't come—and whether he hadn't possibly made the whole thing up.

But then he would always remember that on cold wet days it didn't like to move about. It was hiding up, waiting for the storm to subside. It would be hard for so huge a thing to find shelter anywhere, of course; but after a little thinking, he knew exactly where it must be—at the cut-off above the lake, about three miles west of the camp and a mile or so from the bay where he had seen it last.

On the eighth morning the storm ebbed out. In mid-afternoon the wind veered around to the south; shortly before sunset the cloud banks began to dissolve while mists steamed from the lake surface. Hogan went out with a hand ax and brought in a few dead birches from a windfall over the hill to the south of the lodge. His firewood was running low; he felt chilled and heavy all through, unwilling to exert himself. He had left the gun in the lodge, and as he came downhill dragging the last of the birches, he was frightened into a sweat by a pale, featureless face that stared at him out of the evening sky between the trees. The moon had grown nearly full in the week it was hidden from sight; and Hogan remembered that Greenface was able to walk in the light of the full moon.

He cast an anxious look overhead. The clouds were melting toward the horizon in every direction; it threatened to be an exceptionally clear night. He stacked the birch logs beside the fireplace in the lodge's main room. Then he brewed up the last of his coffee and drank it black. A degree of alertness returned to him.

Afterward he went about, closing the shutters over every window except those facing the south meadow. The tall cottonwoods on the other three sides of the house should afford a protective screen, but the meadow would be flooded with moonlight. He tried to remember at what time the moonset

came—no matter, he'd watch till then and afterward sleep! The effect of the coffee was wearing off, and he had no more.

He pulled an armchair up to an open window from where, across the still, he controlled the whole expanse of open ground over which Greenface could approach. Since a rifle couldn't have much effect on a creature that lacked both vital parts and sufficient solidity to stop a bullet, he had the loaded shotgun across his knees. The flashlight and the contents of five more shell boxes lay on the small table beside him.

With the coming of night, all but the brightest of stars were dimmed in the gray gleaming sky. The moon itself stood out of Hogan's sight above the lodge roof, but he could look across the meadows as far as the machine shed and the ice-house.

He got up twice to replenish the fire which made a warm, heartening glow on his life side; and the second time he considered replacing the armchair with something less comfortable. He was becoming thoroughly drowsy. Occasionally a ripple of apprehension brought him bolt upright, pulse hammering; but the meadow always appeared quiet and unchanged, and the night alive only with familiar, heartening sounds: the crickets, a single whippoorwill, and the occasional dark wail of a loon from the outer lake.

Each time fear wore itself out again, and then, even thinking of Julia, it was hard to keep awake. But she remained in his mind tonight with almost physical clearness—sitting opposite him at the kitchen table, raking back her unruly hair while she leafed slowly through the mail-order catalogues; or diving off the float he'd anchored beyond the dock, a bathing cap tight around her head and the chin strap framing her beautiful, stubborn little face like a picture.

Beautiful but terribly stubborn, Hogan thought, frowning drowsily. Like one evening, when they'd quarreled again and she hid among the empty cabins at the north end of the camp. She wouldn't answer when Hogan began looking for her, and by the time he discovered her, he was worried and angry. So he came walking slowly toward her through the half-dark, without a word—and that was one time Julia did get a little scared of him. "Hogan!" she cried breathlessly. "Now wait! Listen, Hogan—"

He sat up with a jerky start, her voice still ringing in his mind.

The empty moonlit meadow lay like a vast silver carpet below him, infinitely peaceful; even the shrilling of the tireless crickets was withdrawn in the distance. He must have slept

for some while, for the shadow of the house formed an inky black square on the ground immediately below the window. The moon was sinking.

Hogan sighed, shifted the gun on his knees, and immediately grew still again. There'd been something—and then he heard it clearly: a faint scratching on the outside of the bolted door behind him, and afterward a long breathless whimper like the gasp of a creature that has no strength to cry out.

Hogan moistened his lips and sat very quiet. In the next instant, the hair at the back of his neck rose hideously of its own accord.

"Hogan . . . Hogan . . . oh, please! . . . Hogan!"

The toneless cry might have come out of the shadowy room behind him, or over miles of space, but there was no mistaking that voice. Hogan tried to say something, and his lips wouldn't move. His hands lay cold and paralyzed on the shotgun.

"Hogan . . . please! Listen . . . Hogan—"

He heard the chair go over with a dim crash behind him. He was moving toward the door in a blundering, dreamlike rush, and then struggling with numb fingers against the stubborn resistance of the bolt.

"That awful thing! That awful thing! Standing there in the meadow! I thought it was a . . . a TREE! I . . . I'm not CRAZY, am I Hogan?"

The jerky, panicky whispering went on and on, until he stopped it with his mouth on hers and felt her relax in his arms. He'd bolted the door behind them before carrying her to the fireplace couch—Greenface must be standing somewhere around the edge of the cottonwood patch if she'd seen it coming across the meadow from the road. Her hand tightened on his shoulder, and he looked down. Julia's eyes were wide and dark, but incredibly she was smiling—well, he'd always known Julia was wonderful!

"I came back, Hogan. I had to find out—was that it, Hogan? Was that what—"

He nodded hastily; there was no time to wonder, hardly any time left to explain. Now she was here, he realized he'd never have stopped Greenface with any amount of buckshot —but they could get away if only they kept to the shadows.

The look of nightmare came back into Julia's eyes as she listened; her fingers dug painfully into his shoulder. "But, Hogan," she whispered, "it's so big . . . big as the tree, a lot of them!"

Hogan frowned at her uncomprehendingly until, watching him, Julia's expression began to change. He knew it mirrored

the change in his own face, but he couldn't do anything about that.

"It could come right through them—" she whispered.

Hogan still wasn't able to talk.

"It could be right outside the house!" Julia's voice wasn't a whisper any more, and he put his hand over her mouth, gently enough, until her breathing steadied.

"Don't you *smell* it?" he murmured, close to her ear.

It was Greenface all right; the familiar oily odor was seeping into the air they breathed, growing stronger moment by moment until it became the smell of some foul tropical swamp, a wet, rank rottenness. Hogan was amazed to find he'd stopped shaking. He felt quick and strong and reckless—he knew he couldn't afford to be reckless. He thought frantically.

"Look, Julia," he whispered, "it's dark in the cellar. No moonlight; nothing. Make it there alone?"

She nodded doubtfully.

"I'll put the fire out first," he explained in hasty answer to her look. "Be down right after you!"

"I'll help you," she gasped. All Julia's stubbornness was concentrated in the three words.

Hogan fought down an urgent impulse to slap her face hard, right and left. Like a magnified echo of that impulse was the vast soggy blow that smashed immediately against the outer lodge wall, above the door.

They stared stupidly. The whole house was shaking. The wall logs were strong, but a prolonged tinkling of broken glass announced that each of the shuttered windows on that side had been broken simultaneously. "The damn thing!" Hogan thought. "The damn thing! It's really come for me! If it hits the door—"

The ability to move returned to them together. They left the couch in a clumsy, frenzied scramble and reached the head of the cellar stairs not a step apart. With the second shattering crash, the telephone leaped from the wall beside Hogan. His hand on the stair railing, he stared back.

He couldn't see the door from there. The fire roared and dancer in the hearth, as if it enjoyed being shaken up so roughly. The head of the eight-point buck had dropped off the cabinet and lay on the floor beside the fire, its glass eyes fixed in a red baleful glare on Hogan. Nothing else seemed changed.

"HOGAN!" Julia wailed aloud from the shadows at the foot of the stairs. He heard her start up again and turned to tell her to wait there.

Then Greenface hit the door.

Glass, wood and metal flew inward together with an in-

describable explosive sound. Hogan slid down four steps and stopped again, his head on a level with the top of the stairs. Below him he heard Julia's choked breathing. Nothing else stirred.

A cool draft of air began to flow past his face. Then came a heavy scraping noise and the renewed clatter of glass.

"Hogan!" Julia sobbed recklessly. "Come down! IT'LL GET IN!"

"It can't read!" Hogan breathed.

As if in answer, the stairs began to tremble under his feet. Wood splintered ponderously; the shaking continued and seemed to spread through the house. Then something smacked against the wall, just around the corner of the room that shut off Hogan's view of the door. Laboriously, like a floundering whale, Greenface was coming into the lodge.

At the foot of the stairs, Hogan caught his foot in a mess of telephone wires and nearly went headlong over Julia. She clung to him, trembling.

"Did you see it?"

"Just its head!" Hogan gasped. He was steering her by the arm through the dark cellar. "We gotta keep away from the stairs, out of the light. Stay there, will you? And, Julia, kid" —he was fumbling with the lock of the side entrance door— "keep awful quiet, please!"

"I will," she whispered scornfully. The timbers groaned overhead, and for a moment they stared up in tranced expectation, each sensing the other's thought. Julia gave a low, nervous giggle.

"Good thing that floor's double strength!"

"That's the fireplace, right over us," he said frowning. He opened the door an inch or so and peered out. "Look here, Julia!"

The shifting light of the fire streamed through the shattered frame of the main lodge door. The steps leading up to it had been crushed to kindling wood. As they stared, a shadow, huge and formless, dropped soundlessly across the lighted area. They shrank back.

"Oh, Hogan!" Julia whimpered. "It's horrible!"

"All of that," he said, with dry lips. "Do you feel anything—funny?"

She peered at him through the gloom. "Feel anything, Hogan?"

"Up here!" He put his fingertips to her temples. "Sort of buzzing?"

"Oh," she said; "yes, I do!" She was getting panicky again, and he squeezed her arm reassuringly. "What is it, Hogan?"

"A sort of sound our friend makes," he explained, "when

he's feeling good. But it should be much louder. Julia, that thing's been out in the cold and rain all week. No sun at all. I should have remembered! I bet it *likes* that fire up there. It's getting friskier now, and that's why we hear it."

There was a moment's silence.

"Let's run for it, Hogan! The car's right up on the road."

"Uh-uh!" He shook his head. "We might make it all right, but Greenface can come along like a horse when it wants to . . . and the fire's pepping it up—it *might* know perfectly well that we're ducking around down here!"

"Oh, no!" she said, shocked.

"Anyway, it wouldn't settle anything. I got an idea—Julia, honey, promise just once you'll stay right here and not yell after me, or anything? I'll be right back."

"What you going to do?"

"I won't go out of the cellar," Hogan said soothingly. "Look, darling, there's no time to argue—do you promise, or do I lay you out cold?"

"I promise," she said after a sort of frosty gasp.

"What were you doing?"

"Letting out the kerosene tank." He was breathing hard. "Is *it* still there?"

"HOGAN!"

"All right!" he whispered excitedly. "I'm going to fix that devil's whistling. Now then, I'll put a match to it. But we won't leave just yet. Wait here as long as we can—and then slip over into the nearest cabin. No running around in the moonlight!"

He ducked off again. After a minute, she saw a pale flare light up the chalked brick wall at the end of the cellar, and realized he was holding the match to a wad of paper. The kerosene fumes went off suddenly with a faint *BOOM!* and the glare of yellow light drove the shadows back with a rush toward Julia.

She heard Hogan move around in the passageway behind a door to her left. There were two more muffled explosions; then he came out and closed the door softly behind him.

"Going up like pine shavings!" he muttered gleefully. "Well, we wanted a new lodge anyhow. Now, Julia—"

"It looks almost like a man, doesn't it, Hogan? Like a sick old man!"

Hogan hushed her nervously. The buzzing in his brain was louder now, rising and falling as if the strength of the thing were gathering and ebbing in waves. And Julia unconsciously had spoken too loud.

"Keep under the ledge of the window," he told her. "It

hasn't any real eyes, but it sees things somehow just as well as you and I."

Julia subsided reproachfully, and he gave her arm a quick squeeze. "If it'll just stay put for another two minutes, the fire ought to catch it—"

From the corner of the cabin window he could see half of the main room of the lodge through the door Greenface had shattered. Greenface itself filled most of that space. It was hunched up before the fireplace, its great, red-splotched head bending and nodding toward the flames; in that attitude there was something vaguely human about it. But its foot ribbons sprawled over all the rest of the floor space like the tentacles of an octopus, and Hogan noticed they, too, were now splotched with red.

Most of his attention was directed toward the cellar windows of the lodge. Every one of them was alight with the flickering glare of the fires he had spread, and that glare was deepening while smoke poured out through the open door. The gathering roar of the fire mingled in his mind with the soundless, nervous rasp that meant Greenface's strength was returning.

It was like a race between the two: whether the fire would trap the thing before the heat which the fire kindled made it alert enough to perceive its danger and escape. It wasn't just a question of its escaping, either! Hogan hadn't told Julia how convinced he was that Greenface knew the two of them were there, to be caught at leisure as soon as it recovered enough to want to make the exertion. But it would make the exertion anyhow the instant it sensed they were trying to get away.

WOULDN'T THAT FIRE EVER BREAK THROUGH?

Then it happened—with blinding suddenness.

The thing swung its head around from the fireplace and lunged hugely backward. In a flash it turned nearly transparent, and Hogan heard Julia cry out beside him—he hadn't told her about that particularly ghastly little trick. In the same moment, the vibration in his mind became like a ragged, piercing shriek, like pain, brief and intolerable.

Hogan reeled away from the window, dragging Julia with him. There was a sudden series of muffled explosions—it wasn't till afterward he remembered the shells left lying on the table—then the lodge floor broke through into a cellar with a thundering crash, and the released flames leaped bellowing upward.

They were out of the cabin by then, running down toward the lake.

"Your Pa isn't going to like the idea," Hogan pointed out thoughtfully.

"He better like it!" Julia sounded a trifle grim. "But God bless the forest rangers—though they *were* kind of nasty!"

"They put the fire out anyhow," he said. "How would you care to mop up after a half-wit who lights a match to see how much kerosene he'd spilled in the dark?"

"Poor Hogan. . . . I got to tell you, too: I did get myself engaged in the city! I just couldn't go through with it without coming back first—"

"To find out if I really was batty? Can't blame you, honey! Well, it's all over with, anyhow," he said cheerily and put his arm around her.

"Hogan," Julia murmured after a suitably lengthy interval, "you think there might be anything left of it?"

He shook his head decisively. "Not after that bonfire. We can go have a look."

They walked up from the dock together toward the blackened, water-soaked mess that had been the lodge building. It was still an hour before dawn. They stood staring at it in silence. Greenface's funeral pyre had been worthy of a titan.

"We won't build here again till spring," Hogan told her at last. "We can winter in town, if you like. There won't be anything left of it then, for sure. There was nothing very solid about it, you know—just a big poisonous mass of jelly from the tropics. Winter would have killed it, anyhow.

"Those red spots; it was rotting last week—it never really had a chance."

"You aren't feeling sorry for it, are you?"

"Well, in a way," Hogan admitted. He kicked a cindered two-by-four apart with his foot and stood there frowning. "It was just a big crazy freak shooting up all alone in a world where it didn't fit in, and where it could only blunder around and do a lot of damage and die. I wonder how smart it really was and whether it ever understood the fix it was in."

"Quit worrying about it!" Julia commanded.

Hogan grinned down at her. "O. K.," he said.

"And kiss me," said Julia.

THE LIMITS OF WALTER HORTON

One Sunday morning, led to the piano by an unexplainable impulse, Walter Horton sat down and played the whole of the Chopin B minor sonata. The performance was quite flawless from the standpoint of both technique and interpretation. It was otherwise remarkable in that Horton had never played the piano before in his life.

Until that moment, as a matter of fact, he wasn't aware that he was capable of playing *any* sort of musical instrument. Nor had he ever felt the slightest desire to do so. He listened to music only when waiting for the hourly news summary on the radio, and then with no more effect than if the program had been, say, a speech to some Indonesian patriotic group in their native tongue.

The presence of the piano in the Horton household was his wife's responsibility: ever since their marriage, nine years before, she had talked about resuming the music lessons she had discontinued when she was sixteen. Walter himself was indifferent to his wife's unfulfilled intentions and to the instrument itself. He considered it more or less in the category of furniture, an article that filled a certain space in the living room of their apartment—about as adequately and not much more expensively than a cabinet and a couple of occasional chairs might have done.

When Mrs. Horton discovered that the music was not, as she had assumed, coming from the radio, she was dumfounded. Her husband's explanation of the performance was hardly plausible—if it was an explanation at all.

"I don't know, dear," he said. "I just woke up this morning with a kind of hankering to play the thing. I came in and started to run my hands over the whatchamacallit—"

"The keyboard," she supplied, patiently.

He nodded. "The keyboard. And . . . well. . . ." He shrugged.

Mrs. Horton turned and went back to fixing breakfast. If her husband had known how to play the piano all these years, or if he had learned quite recently, why had he made such a point of secrecy? It occurred to her that he might have been nurturing, through the years of their marriage, some inarticulate and peculiarly male resentment of her own musical interests, modest as they were. Now, perhaps, she was being made the victim of a grim attrition, such as quiet and self-contained men are sometimes given to. She felt a twinge of guilt through the quavers of uncertainty.

Craftily, yet sympathetically, she asked, as she set down her husband's orange juice, "What else can you play, dear?"

Horton looked up at her with an expression of surprise. Still absorbed as he was in the phenomenon that had just taken place, the question hadn't even occurred to him. The truth was that he didn't even know what he had played—neither that the music was Chopin's nor, much less, that it was a particular sonata keyed in B minor.

When he tried to explain this, his wife turned, tight-lipped with bafflement, and left the room. Horton lazily left the table, returned to the piano, and amused himself the rest of the morning with the Mozart *Sonata in C,* the *Fireworks* prelude of Debussy and some Liszt waltzes.

Although the music itself meant little to him, he was quite charmed with his suddenly acquired talent, and the next day he postponed going to his office until he had run through two or three Chopin études and a Brahms capriccio. The day after that he stayed home from the office altogether and spent the entire morning and much of the afternoon at the piano. He was almost reluctant to leave it at all, for fear that by the time he returned, his strangely bestowed gift would have been lost.

But there was no apparent diminution of his powers. If anything, he seemed to play more and more prolifically. Each phrase was perfectly formed at his touch. He never repeated himself; in fact, he seemed to be quite incapable of doing so. The music passed through him as if on some endless recording tape. Once he had played any composition, it was lost to time, his part in it having been achieved.

One day, after a few weeks, Mrs. Horton came home in midafternoon from a shopping trip to find him at the piano. It had become almost the only place she ever saw him. Leaving her packages on the bench in the foyer, she went over and gave him a wifely kiss on the forehead, suppressing her

anxiety at finding him home so early. He glanced up at her with an abstracted smile.

Hanging up her coat, her eyes lingering sadly on her husband's spare, square-shouldered form, she noticed how much of a studious, preoccupied cast had overtaken his features. She could almost have believed that she had been living with a stranger—a man bearing an amazing superficial resemblance to her husband but another person beneath the sharply drawn lines of his face and behind the familiar gray eyes.

She straightened herself and said in a tone as briskly matter-of-fact as she could summon, "It's nice to see you home so early, dear."

"Hm?" Horton's voice drifted dreamily through the measured tones of a Bach sonata.

"I said you're home early." She couldn't seem to control the waver in her throat. "An easy day at the office?"

"Oh. Yes." His fingers rested quietly on the last chord. He straightened up, then leaned back on the piano bench. "I'm through with it. I'm selling out."

Mrs. Horton felt the ground shift dangerously beneath her feet. His business had come to represent what little was left of normality, of contact with the past, in their life, and she felt desperately that it must be defended. She began gently, then more and more excitedly, to try to dissuade him.

"But," he answered blandly, "it isn't as if I were giving us up to poverty. We have no debts, we've got a bit in the bank, and. . . . Anyway, you always used to say you hoped some day I'd be able to shake free of the office and retire—"

"Retire, yes," she interrupted bitterly. "But at your age it's . . . why, it's almost indecent. And to give yourself up to such —such whimsical nonsense as this!"

"I really don't see what difference it makes," said Horton. "After all, most men find some other interest when they leave their business. Fishing, or stamp collecting—something of the sort."

Mrs. Horton realized helplessly that her argument was futile. The sounds of the piano, echoing magnificently through the house—now in the rich, dramatic periods of Beethoven, now in the delicate traceries of Couperin or Lully—became more and more infuriating, seemed to fill an ever-widening distance between her and her husband.

Since Horton had been one of the most promient young members of the town's business community, his retirement evoked more than a little interest. It was understood that he had decided to devote himself to music. This came to the attention of the music critic of the local paper—a man named Farley Gresham.

Gresham was a grave, solitary man who lived restlessly

with the knowledge of his own failure. As a would-be composer, he had never succeeded in persuading any musician or conductor that his work was worth a public hearing. The job he'd settled for as a music critic neither satisfied his ambitions nor impressed his neighbors. Consequently, he was always somewhat on the defensive in the community and always on the watch for a possible ally.

Gresham paid a call on Horton one evening, heard what he later referred to as "an absolutely unsurpassed rendering of the *Appassionata,*" and was struck with the inescapable fact that he had discovered a prodigy—one of rather advanced age, as the species goes, but unmistakably a prodigy.

"My dear man," Gresham said, almost tearful with gratitude for the opportunity to patronize, "my dear man, such a talent mustn't be kept concealed. You've got to give a recital."

Horton was startled. He began to protest. "Really, I'm not interested—"

"You owe it to the audience," Gresham insisted. "You owe it to music." He made a gesture of finality. "I'll make the arrangements."

Although he was genuinely taken aback and even a little awe-struck at first by the idea of performing in public, Horton could see no reason, after all, for opposing the project. Then he began to think of the audience—his neighbors, the friends for whom he was able to spare less and less attention. The idea of appearing among them in a new and special guise began to amuse him and finally it excited him. He asked his wife what she thought of the idea, but didn't even hear her weak objections. He stood looking across the music rack, over the top of the piano, into the mirror, picturing himself in white tie and stiff shirt on the auditorium stage, and didn't even notice the trail of muffled tears that his wife left on her way to the bedroom.

The selection of a program, of course, presented something of a difficulty, since Horton didn't know the names of compositions or their composers, nor was he able to predict beforehand what he might play at any given time. He didn't want to try to explain this to Gresham because he knew it would seem ridiculous, if not utterly insane, so he was merely evasive. Gresham shrugged off Horton's reluctance to commit himself as evidence of temperament that merely proved the presence of the artist in Horton. At any rate, he didn't want to press his protégé for fear of losing him, so he arranged the recital without any announcement of the program.

The performance attracted a sizable crowd, most of whom came out of neighborly pride, interest, and curiosity. But

among them also were a few well placed city critics and reputable musicians whom Gresham, through his connections in the field, had persuaded to attend. They were, of course, overwhelmed by the quality of Horton's performance and the taste with which his program of Clementi, Chopin, Bartók, and Szymanowski had been "selected." "A discreet combination of scholarship and catholicity," one of the critics remarked in his column the next morning, "performed with faultless judgment and incredible technique."

With this encouragement, Gresham arranged a recital in New York. It proved equally successful. The reviews made considerable point of Horton's unique unprofessional background, and this, along with the unanimously laudatory tone of the reviews, earned him a good deal of publicity. The result was a flood of offers for further engagements.

Within a few months, it became obvious that the only way to satisfy the demands of Horton's public was to send him on a nationwide tour. Gresham took care of the arrangements, and the day the last of the signed contracts arrived in the mail, he walked into the office of his managing editor and, with an air of exhilaration slightly fortified by a self-congratulatory drink, quit his job on the paper. His association with Horton had brought him closer to musical glory than his reviews of orchestra road concerts and performances by the students of the local music school ever had. It also promised to bring him more money than he'd made out of his newspaper job and—who could tell?—perhaps the inspiration, and later the leisure, for another, mature attempt to establish a place for himself in the world of music as a composer.

So, with Gresham as his manager and with Mrs. Horton trailing helplessly but devotedly in his wake, Horton undertook a series of recitals whose uniform brilliance reduced Rubinstein, Horowitz, Arrau, and Gieseking to second rank among modern keyboard musicians. Horton's continued reluctance to announce his programs beforehand aroused some comment at first but, as with Gresham, it was dismissed —if not respected—as an artistic whim.

Attempts were made by the New York Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony to engage Horton as a guest soloist, but of course he was obliged to reject them in view of the fact that he couldn't commit himself to any particular piece of music and it was unlikely that what he played would coincide with what the orchestra was playing. This elusiveness made Horton's services even more attractive. His insistence on playing only works written for the solo instrument even added to his prestige as an artist of intense conviction and integrity.

Mrs. Horton, by now feeling hopelessly out of contact with

her husband, had long since given up her struggle to restore him—and their marriage—to the normality of his premusical life. But once, quite by accident, she was given a chance to attack this monstrous change with a new weapon. She was being interviewed, between concert tours, by a woman reporter on her role as the wife of an internationally famous artist.

"I suppose," said the reporter sympathetically, "you feel rewarded for the years of struggle and pain you and your husband must have suffered while he was preparing for his career?"

"Struggle?" Mrs. Horton began to laugh hollowly, then broke off with a gasp. In a moment, she found herself telling for the first time Horton's version of how he had learned to play the piano.

The reporter, assuming that Mrs. Horton was either a wanderer in some mental fourth dimension or was elaborately trying to ridicule her, naturally checked the story with Gresham before doing anything so foolish as putting it on paper.

Gresham, when she broke in on him with her question, was in the midst of a kind of transformation of his own. He had had a month of freedom since Horton's last tour, and in this time he had begun—tentatively, doubtfully—to resume the work he had promised himself he would one day return to. He had spent the whole month at a composition of his own—a sonata based on a simple but strangely magnetic theme that had attached itself to his mind years before but that he had been fearful of trying to capture and reconstruct on paper. But now it flowed from his pen exactly as he had imagined it all those years.

Gresham tossed aside the sheaf of staff paper he was writing on and gave the reporter a generous smile. He listened to her story and, naturally, laughed it off extravagantly. "I've heard Mrs. Horton tell that gag in the company of some of the country's greatest artists," he said, "and you know, my dear, she almost had them believing it. Why, Graustein himself—the magnificent Graustein—sat down on the floor and wept because he'd been practicing nine hours a day since he was knee-high to a cello and hadn't acquired half the technique that—to hear Mrs. Horton tell it—Horton had acquired overnight. Of course, Mrs. Horton was horrified to think Graustein believed her—nearly died of shame." He shook his head admiringly. "Incredible sense of humor that woman has."

The story, of course, never appeared in the papers. It did not fail to impress Gresham, however. For some time, he'd been taking notice of the amazing variety of Horton's programs. He'd noticed also that Horton's refusal to repeat a

composition applied not only to his public performances but even to the most casual frittering away of time at the piano in his own living room.

Thinking back over the period of their association, Gresham could not recall having heard Horton play any single composition, nor even so much as a single passage, more than once. Furthermore, he had been struck by a rather odd development in the character of Horton's recent programs. More and more they tended toward the obscure and pedantic —the lesser known compositions of the masters and the works of half-forgotten composers. Just recently, Horton had performed a suite that was unfamiliar even to the *avant-garde* among the reviewers, and a number of them had assumed that it was an original work. Horton, characteristically, had refused either to confirm or deny that he had written the suite—it was widely known and accepted that Horton never deigned to discuss what he had played any more than he'd announce what he was going to play—so the assumption had gone unchallenged. To Gresham the thing had sounded like something by Scriabin. That is, he would have said Scriabin, except that to his knowledge Scriabin had never written any such work. Gresham decided to do a little research.

It took him almost a month to establish that the suite was indeed a work of Scriabin. He traced it to a manuscript in a university music-library collection, but he was puzzled by the curator's insistence that the composition had never been published, nor even previously performed.

Gresham began to wonder seriously about Mrs. Horton's story. Not that the events she'd described to the reporter were the important thing. Even if one accepted Horton's rare talent as the purest sort of inspiration, that didn't explain what was happening. It occurred to Gresham that perhaps he'd been witnessing some phenomenon even more fantastic—a phenomenon that even Horton himself wasn't fully aware of.

Was it possible, Gresham asked himself, that all of the best of music—the greatest works of the whole historical field of musical creation—was being transmitted through Horton, each single work achieving through him its perfect, its ultimate, form? If that were true, then through what accident or what cruel irony had he been selected as its pure instrument? And what were the limits of this process? Time? History itself? Indeed, were there limits at all? Gresham found himself jealous, appalled, shaken with awe and apprehension.

One evening, several months after these questions had first occurred to him, Gresham was seated at the small piano in the study of Horton's New York apartment, snatching a few moment's work at his own manuscript while waiting to see

Horton about some details of his next performance. He felt a sense of exhilaration, for he was nearing the end of the sonata now and he had as yet found no reason to give it up. He almost dared to hope it might be worth trying to persuade some young pianist to perform it at one of those small downtown recitals sponsored by groups of experimental-minded amateurs of the arts.

At the large piano in the living room, while Mrs. Horton sat trying to absorb herself in a detective novel, Horton was playing the final movement of one of Prokofiev's recent works. There was a pause as the final, perfectly struck chords of the allegretto died away, and then Horton began to play something else. As the music drifted in through the door of the study, Gresham became aware that the composition was one which he himself had listened to on a television concert only the night before. It was a fantasia by a young California composer named Shorrer. The puzzling thing about it was that it had been introduced on the television show as the first performance of a new work.

It was possible, of course, that Horton himself had heard it and that his ability to repeat it now—note for note, Gresham would have sworn—could be attributed to a hypersensitive musical memory.

But no. Gresham brought himself erect with a start. Horton had been on the stage at Carnegie Hall at the very time Shorrer's work was being performed on television. He couldn't possibly have heard the composition before. Gresham's pencil dropped from his quivering fingers. He arose from his piano, his mind paralyzed by the enormity of what had happened and by the apprehension of what might happen next. He paced the floor of the study, unable to transmit to paper the concluding phrases of his own work which lay, totally formed, in the recesses of his brain. Horton, he knew, had exhausted the past; he had caught up with his own time.

The next evening Gresham stood in the wings of the concert hall as Horton strode across the stage, acknowledged his applause with a nod, and seated himself briskly at the piano. As his fingers poised over the keyboard, a gasp of expectation escaped Gresham's tightened lips.

Horton struck a series of brilliant chords, which dissolved into a delicate and poignant melody. Gradually, it subsided into a throbbing echo, low and ominous, as a new theme developed against it. The counterpoint became more and more intense, mounted to a delirious climax, then fell to a whisper from which issued the slow and ghostly theme of a new movement.

The beauty of his own sonata was almost painful to Gresham

and he was so transported by it that it was minutes before he realized that he was witnessing Horton's transition from the past into the immediate present.

As he listened almost hypnotically to the mathematical symbols that he had so painfully written materializing into exquisite sound at Horton's touch, Gresham felt a surge of triumph. For to have been transmitted through Horton—didn't this mean that the sonata had been given a place, alongside all the other works which the pianist had unwittingly performed, in the history of great music? Tears of fulfillment and gratitude began to dim Gresham's eyes.

Then, almost as quickly as it had risen in him, triumph began to ebb. For the whispers among the few other onlookers in the wings and the excited glances in the front rows of the audience told him something that he hardly dared to believe but knew he must face: The sonata would be credited to Horton! And Horton, he knew, would never disown it! Nor could anyone deprive him of it—except by explaining the truth that was too fantastic, too obviously an insane figment of jealousy, to be believed.

Gresham started away in disappointment, but one thought consoled him and drew him back. For he had not given the whole of his work to Horton after all. The sonata was unfinished—its concluding passages had not yet been committed to form but existed only as ideas which lay unwritten in Gresham's mind. And when Horton, having exhausted both past and present, reached the boundaries of the future—what could he do? Gresham stood waiting, a bitter smile on his lips.

He listened as the music rolled to a thunderous climax. Horton's hands hung over the keyboard, gestured uncertainly and fell. The echo of a chord faded into the excruciating silence of the hall.

Gresham felt a quick lift of hope, which turned in the same instant to horror, as Horton's hands fluttered, then inexorably returned to the keyboard. The knowledge struck Gresham sickeningly that he would no more be able to stop himself from creating such music than he could stop Horton from playing it as his own, and he thought of all the years of music that would pour, as quickly as he conceived it, from his own mind into Horton's waiting fingers.

Transfixed and helpless, he stood listening as the music resumed and Horton played the concluding bars of the sonata.

THE MAN WHO VANISHED

Charlie Ballantine had little warning at first of the way things were going with him, and no one ever did find out what caused it, though the best opinion seemed to be that it sprang from some form of self-hypnosis. Such early inklings as Charlie himself had were more understandable in the light of hindsight than they were at the moment of happening. He saw nothing untoward, for instance, in an odd little incident that occurred one Sunday afternoon that spring, at his own apartment. He was at the telephone then, talking to Mary Mattson, who was trying to arrange a date for a dinner party, and as the phone was in the foyer he was relaying pertinent parts of the conversation to his wife, who was sitting in the living room, reading the Sunday paper.

"Speak *up,* Charles," she kept calling to him. "I can hardly hear a word you're saying." And when he had hung up and come back into the room she looked at him a moment curiously.

"What's the matter?" he asked a little petulantly, for at the end he had been almost shouting at her.

"I don't know. You looked sort of, well, dim, for a second, standing there," she replied. "Your voice was dim, too. Are you all right, Charles?"

"Mary heard me all right," he told her. Oddly, both then and later his voice always carried perfectly over the telephone.

"I bet she didn't," his wife replied. Charlie, an importer of porcelains by profession and then in his middle forties, was a thin, shy man, dark-haired, studious, and self-effacing. At the moment, he would have been quite content to let the matter drop, but his wife, whose name was Marcia, persisted. A large, handsome woman with what is often called a "striking" figure, she had ordinarily far too practical an outlook on life to be easily disturbed by anything—except, possibly, Charlie's shortcomings. Yet she looked at him now a little puzzledly.

"Anyway, you did look dim," she repeated. "It was almost—" and here, in spite of herself, she laughed. "It was almost as if you were fading away. Are you sure you're all right?"

But it was getting toward dusk at the time, the hour when one ought to put on the lights and still doesn't. And Charlie had a slight cold, which might have accounted for her failure to hear him. For the time, at least, they thought nothing of it.

In the days that followed, a few friends of his also remarked on his appearance. He looked "a little frail" was the way they usually put it, and once old Mrs. Morris, the bookkeeper at Charlie's office, after almost walking right into him in the corridor, stopped, stared, and then snatched off her glasses and stared at *them*. "Can't think what's come over me, Mr. B.," she remarked with her dry little air. "For a moment, I just didn't see you there at all."

And a few days later, Charlie's secretary, glancing up from her pad—he was dictating some letters at the time—gasped suddenly and then openly gaped at him.

"What's the matter, Miss Frazier?" he asked uneasily, for he could see that whatever was troubling her had something to do with him. The next instant she was covered with confusion.

"I don't know what got *into* me, Mr. Ballantine," she protested. "I must be seeing things, I guess, or something. But gollies, it was the strangest *thing!* For a second, back there, I thought I could see right *through* you."

To the various individuals concerned, the episodes so far had been separate, and isolated. But to Charlie himself they were already vaguely forming a pattern, and though all this suggested so far was that something out of the ordinary was happening to him, it was beginning to disturb him. He sat for a moment, staring at the girl steadily.

"See right through me?" he asked quietly.

But that, of course, threw the girl into greater confusion than ever, and it was probably only the fact that she was an old hand with the firm that made her willing to continue. "Well, not *really,* of course!" she protested, giggling nervously. And then, gaining courage, "Or, well, darn it, yes," she went on. "Anyway, part of you. It was the darnedest thing!" It turned out, under questioning—and even that was difficult; "You don't really believe it, do you, Mr. B?" she asked at one point—that it had seemed as if his whole upper body had just "faded away," as she put it. "It sounds crazy, I guess, but it all got smoky and hazy, sort of. I could see that Cunard lines poster right *through* you, for instance. Or I thought I could." She paused a moment and looked at him doubtfully. "I guess now it was some trick of the light, or something. It must have

been, mustn't it? But honestly, it was the darnedest *thing*. Your voice seemed to fade, too."

In the end, of course, they let it go at that; what else could they do? But in the days that followed Charlie noticed the girl glancing curiously at him occasionally; and—whether it was because she had told them or for other reasons—he caught others of the staff around the office staring at him, too. Indeed, the worst thing about the situation, as it developed, was his constant uncertainty about whether people were looking at him because he was going through one of his "fading" phases (as he was even then beginning to call them) or not—unless, possibly, the times when there was no doubt whatever about the matter were worse.

There was the time, for instance, when the man bumped into him on Forty-eighth Street. He was a big, husky, red-faced fellow, and although the mishap was entirely his fault —he'd come barging out of a cigar store, quite regardless of who might be in his way—he took the offensive instantly. "Whyn't you look where you're going?" he demanded—or, rather, he started to, for in the midst of the sentence, as he really faced Charlie, he stopped, and his voice trailed off. His face paled and—big, husky as he was—he raised one hand in an odd little pushing gesture of one who is feeling his way in the dark and can't be sure just what confronts him. An instant later, he was off down the street, almost running, and it wasn't till he'd reached the corner—it was Lexington Avenue —that he even looked back.

Charlie walked on after him, somewhat shaken himself, and when he came to a store with a mirror in the window, a little way farther on, he stopped and looked into it. It was an antiques store, and the mirror itself was one of those Early American affairs, with a wide, gold-leafed frame, full of carved curlicues, and a spread-winged eagle, also golden, at its top. The glass was slightly convex, which made it difficult to focus on it clearly, and a bit dim with dust and with age as well; at first, as Charlie looked, he could make out nothing in it, except a bulbously distorted reflection of the buildings across the way. Then, a moment later—and it is impossible to describe the shock it caused him—he heard a truck rumbling down the street behind him and saw its image, ballooning a little but still unmistakable, pass swiftly across the glass he was staring at. And the truck, he reminded himself instantly, had been behind him. Charlie, if he was there, should have been visible on that mirror, too!

And he *was* there; there could be no doubt of that. For no reason that he could have defined, Charlie stepped back a pace and glanced up and down the sidewalk. There was no one in

sight, on the quiet street, and after standing a second in what can hardly be called thought—it was more a mixture of dull panic and incredulity—he brought his gaze back and, stepping forward till his body almost touched the glass of the window, peered intently at the mirror. In a sense, he was *willing* himself to be there, and this time, wonderfully, rewardingly, he was there—hazily, at first, to be sure, but then, even as he stared, more clearly. Yet even as the image cleared there was still something odd about it; it was almost as if it had *grown* on the glass, forming there as he watched, and he found himself wondering later: Was it possible that he himself, so to speak, had superimposed himself there, by some effort of the will or the imagination—as one can, say, call up the image of another, clearly, in a sense visibly, before the mind? And if so, had it been the same forces, oppositely and of course unconsciously operating, that had caused the disappearance in the first place? He still didn't dare ask himself why.

There was, he decided later, a good deal more than a little truth in these surmises. He was disappearing, though at first only partially and intermittently, and, as he had suspected, his mind was directly involved. That time with Miss Frazier, for instance, his thoughts had definitely been wandering. He had been dictating a letter to a ceramist whose factory he had once visited, in the south of France, and his mind had drifted momentarily until he'd almost felt—and with such a sense of peace, of contentment—that he was back there again, sitting in the little vine-shaded arbor at the back of the plant, where the proprietor often took his ease while a batch was baking in the kilns inside. At the time of the encounter with the man on the street, he'd been thinking of a girl he had known years before in Buffalo, and when he had first looked in the mirror afterward his mind, of course, had been still on the man and his curious behavior. And that first time of all, on the telephone, he had been thinking, even as he talked, of how dull the Mattsons were—great friends of his wife though they might be—and from that to the days of his youth, when his whole life had seemed gayer and more promising.

Incredible as it seemed, then, it appeared that if he wanted to stay visible he had to keep his mind on it, and it may be added that as time went on this need for constant concentration on himself—"of all people," as Charlie put it, wryly, to himself—became one of the most annoying aspects of the phenomenon. Let his mind wander even for a moment, and—particularly on the street—he was likely to find himself in trouble immediately; for that reason the trips to and from his office became, eventually, a kind of dash along the tightrope

of his own frail ego, with an abyss of what practically amounted to oblivion on either side.

All this, however, did not emerge with precision for some time. One difficulty encountered by a man in the process of vanishing is that it's next to impossible to talk to others about it, and Charlie, perforce, had to do most of his analyzing of the problem himself. His wife, almost in spite of herself, was a help, though. From the start, Marcia regarded the whole thing as a subterfuge of some sort, cowardly on the face of it and undoubtedly aimed at her. But perhaps because of this she was the first to perceive the mind-image connection, as it might be called, and it was she, too, who finally got him to go see a doctor.

Charlie himself had been doubtful about that, at first. He didn't know what branch of specialized medicine he should turn to, and he feared—and in that he was right, for the most part—that a general practitioner would hardly be able to cope with a man whose sole problem was incipient invisibility. The man he went to, at last, was the New York substitute for a family doctor—which meant that Marcia had been to him twice in the past three years, once for a sort of bursitis in her left elbow and once for a pain in her side that she suspected had something to do with her kidneys (it turned out to be only a pain in her side), and he'd been called in once when Charlie was in bed with what threatened to be bronchial pneumonia. The men met, then, more or less as strangers in the consulting room; and the doctor, one of those brisk, youthful, efficient types, glanced at Charlie coldly at first and then warily as, rather diffidently, he essayed to describe his predicament.

"Disappearing?" the doctor repeated. He had been jotting down notes on a pad on the desk before him, but now he raised his pen from the paper. "You mean you have a sort of feeling, or something?"

"No, no. I don't have it," said Charlie. "It's the others. And it's only partly. I mean—as far as I can tell, that is—I only partly disappear, and just sometimes. So far, anyway. But I'm worried."

"You said 'others,' " the doctor said, and Charlie saw his hand slide out quietly to the push button on his desk. "What others? And how does it work?"

And of course, as usual (doesn't the car's engine always run perfectly for the garageman, the tooth stop aching when one goes to the dentist's?), Charlie had the darnedest time demonstrating his symptoms to the doctor. At the start, that is; for in the end, in desperation, with the doctor and his nurse staring steadily at him—she had come in early in the conversation

and stood near the door; the doctor sat, his chair pushed back a little, at his desk—Charlie wrenched his mind away from the present and focussed it deliberately on the girl in Buffalo.

He had been thinking of her more and more, somehow, lately. Her first name was Lois, he had remembered, and where she was now after all these years was problematical—married, maybe, or anyhow he imagined so, and if so, he hoped truly that she was happy; getting plump around the waist, perhaps, and also plumper in the cheeks and chin; but still, well, maybe as full as ever of that strange, charming mixture of knowingness, innocence, and gaiety that she had had when he had known her.

He had met her one summer when, still in college, he had driven West with Ned Fellows in Ned's jalopy, in search of jobs and maybe adventure, and the two of them had wound up in Buffalo, working in the Erie freight yards down along the lake front, and rooming together in an ancient rooming house near the railroad station. And she—Palancheck, her name was, Lois Palancheck—had been a filing clerk in the office of the express company in the yards. Lois Palancheck, blond, high-cheekboned; Polish, undeniably ("You know I'm Polish, so you think I'm easy," she'd say), and, equally undeniably, beautiful: he had spent most of that summer trying to tame her, strangely wild and wise as she was—as a wild bird, from its very wildness, is more wary, less trusting than a tame one.

Lois, yes, Lois Palancheck; he had even told Marcia about her once, in the early years of their marriage, though that had been a mistake. Now he wondered what had become of her. Meantime, sitting there in the doctor's office, he remembered how, one day toward the end of summer, they had borrowed Ned's car and driven out along the lake front to a resort called Erie Beach—only they hadn't paid much attention to the roller coasters and the other amusements that were out there. They had sat on the beach, making promises, both still knowing it was really goodbye—making promises to wait, to write to each other, to remember. And they had written, too, and hers had been nice letters, for Lois was a high-school graduate and was taking bookkeeping, nights. "I'm not going to be just another dumb Polack. You wait and see," she had told him. But it had been goodbye. . . .

Lois, Lois Palancheck—where was Lois now? Charlie had closed his eyes; he was walking back along the beach in the twilight, hand in hand with Lois, when he heard a loud "My God!" from the doctor and a scream from the nurse, followed by the sound of a door slamming. When he opened his eyes—and for a moment, this time, he had a little difficulty doing so—he was alone in the room with the doctor, and the doctor

was white with astonishment. "It's true, damn it, it's true!" the doctor was saying.

"They want me to go to the Cooley Clinic in Baltimore," Charlie said to his wife when he got home that evening, not without a slight tinge of pride. "You know, the place where all those big shots go for their checkups. They want me to have a checkup, too."

"Baltimore?" Marcia commented. She was reading a detective story at the time. "Isn't that where you knew that girl you told me about once?"

"Oh, no. That was Buffalo," said Charlie, and then he glanced at his wife apprehensively. Had he spoken too quickly? But she, apparently, had not noticed.

"Well, wherever she was, don't go thinking of her too much" was all she said. "Think of yourself more. Think of me." And she added, a trifle maliciously, "If you don't, you may vanish entirely."

And yet, he wondered later, was that malice, really, or a touch of that prescience that women, traditionally, were supposed to have? For the truth was, there was a problem about Lois. Unconsidered before, now memories of her were growing in his mind constantly, and the fact seemed to be both a presage and an involvement. Meantime, for the most part, his stay at the Clinic turned out to be a disappointment.

He got the full treatment there, to be sure—seven days at the hospital, during which he underwent just about all the tests, samplings, and explorations that modern medical research is capable of, from X-rays and ionoscopy to basal metabolism and the Keynes reaction. These disclosed a number of things that were "wrong" with him, in the sense that they differed from the ideal—low blood pressure and a fairly low blood count, a certain "waxiness" of the skin, due to a deficiency in pigmentation, a slight nitrogen imbalance, and so on—not to mention an odd correlation between his neuro- and vascular responses (Charlie's nervous reactions seemed to vary as he breathed, and vice versa), which was the one really unusual thing about him.

But all these, on the whole, were hardly more than might be discovered in the average, ordinary person, and though some of them, particularly the last, offered vague "leads" to the doctors (they pondered long over his nerve charts, for instance, in conjunction with the lack of pigmentation), there was none that offered any real clue to his condition, let alone suggesting a cure. Charlie left, in the end, with the doctors as bewildered about him as he was himself.

It has been truly said, though, that a man can learn to live

with any affliction, from the loss of a leg to total blindness, and Charlie had already developed a number of devices for getting along with his. On the ground that he was thereby saved from needless interruption, he had a spring catch installed on the door of his office; controlled by a button release on his desk, it gave him a moment or two to "collect himself," as he put it, before any intrusion. In restaurants, he always sought out a table at the rear, and if possible in a corner, and kept his mind firmly on himself, and the food before him, while eating; on the street, after some buffeting, he had learned to keep a similarly rigorous single-mindedness—or, conversely, if he did let his mind wander, to make sure no one was coming his way.

The trouble was, however, that as time went on, he came less and less to regard it as an affliction—or, rather it seemed to him that the affliction was not the tendency to vanish, itself, but the sternness of concentration that was constantly necessary to avoid it. This, of course, might have been ascribed to the "learning to live with it" process already mentioned, but it really went far beyond that; the fact was that the act of vanishing was becoming increasingly attractive. He had learned by now to recognize certain symptoms that characterized its onset, so that he was no longer taken unawares, so to speak, by the condition. There was a sort of "tingling," as he had described it to the researchers at the Clinic, followed by a feeling of "falling, only through time instead of space"—while the disappearance itself, when he could accomplish it without embarrassment, was at once a refuge and an adventure.

He could walk side by side with another person, unseen and of course unsuspected, and it seemed to him that at such times he penetrated far more deeply than he would otherwise have been capable of into the other's thoughts or emotions, not hearing or feeling them, exactly, but simply absorbing them, with interest and understanding. He could sit or stand unregarded, watching the flow of life around him with a mixture of sympathy and detachment that had formerly been impossible. What it meant, in the common phrase, was that it permitted him "to get outside himself"—and this, for a man at his stage and condition of life, was a feat that had its definite, though possibly dangerous, attractions.

"You live too much in the past," one of the psychiatrists at the Clinic had remarked to him (it was he who first offered the self-hypnosis theory), and though Charlie, at forty-seven, had just about concluded that the past was the best place *to* live in, he had to confess there was a certain shrewdness in the man's diagnosis. He would have been less ready to admit —openly, at least, for Charlie had his loyalties—the truth of

another of the same man's observations. This was a statement, which Charlie, of course, did not see, that the doctor made on his clinical report. "The whole case," he wrote, enlarging on his idea of autohypnosis, "is obviously a manifestation of a severe defense psychosis. Though the subject will not admit it, he wants to escape from everything—his wife, his job, his life, everything. He is an escapist, almost per se." He added, dryly, "I must admit, though, I have never seen this or any similar psychosis manifest itself with such thoroughgoing efficiency."

All this, however, was the scientific side. All that Charlie knew was that when he "let go" now, he could relive times and places—that one wonderful month abroad, among the gray hills and olive groves of Provence; the long summer with Lois (and why was that now, to him, so memorable?); walks and outings in his college days; and so on—with a vividness that was as remarkable as it was delightful.

Charlie had his own mild sense of humor, and, as he put it to his wife one day—and regretted it: "Maybe you can joke about this. I can't," she told him acidly—it was the strain of "keeping up appearances" that was getting him down; and though he knew instinctively that there was a certain vague peril connected with the practice, he was tempted more and more to experiment with his strange capacity. Even in his moments of "falling," he had a sense, an intuition, almost, that there was a point beyond which he must not go, or he'd risk falling into regions that were truly unpredictable, and for a long time he restrained himself. It was not until one day in May—a bright, sunny day, too, clear and golden—that he yielded finally to the impulse and truly let himself go.

He was walking down his own street at the time, heading for his office, and except for a couple of men just turning in to it at the next corner the block was deserted. And there had been a particularly bitter outburst from Marcia the evening before. They had been sitting at dinner then, face to face and, as usual, rather silent, and somehow or other his mind had wandered. . . . He had awakened, if that was the word for it, to find her staring at him, glaring at him. "Stop dimming, Charles! Damn it! Stop *dimming!*" she was shouting at him.

And yet it wasn't that, either, exactly. Charlie had his loyalties, and as he often told himself, he had married Marcia with his eyes open. Even now, throughout all his other difficulties, he retained a keen understanding of the problems she must face, being married to a man who was always on the verge of disappearing. More than that, it was the sense of being in the midst of a tangle: Marcia and her complaints behind him, and ahead of him the tediousness of his work at the office, and not only at the office, either, but everywhere. Life was dull,

dull, dull; that was the truth of it, and before he knew what he was doing, really, he turned his thoughts strongly away—toward Lois, though it seemed that was only at random—and, truly, let himself go.

There was the tingling at first, then the fall, and the fall got faster; and then, suddenly, he plunged into oblivion, but an oblivion so dark it was almost blinding. But before fear could take hold of him (through it all, oddly, he never felt fear), he was through the black darkness and on the other side; and the other side, not too surprisingly, was the same street he had been walking on—only now, somehow, everything had a thinner look, as if it had been painted on glass, and the two men he had noticed before were closer to him, much closer, and coming directly toward him. Again, intuitively, Charlie knew what to do.

He walked steadily on, and this time, as he'd somehow known, there was no feeling of contact, no disturbance. The men simply walked through him and past him, never stopping their conversation, and Charlie, too—this time, really, he thought, on "the other side"—went on down the street in his own direction. He had gone only a pace or two, though, before he felt a body bump against his and then heard a slight scurrying; and while this did not really startle him—it seemed to him, again intuitively, that there would surely be others who were invisible—it still made him, in a vague sort of way, apprehensive. He might learn to "see" better later, he thought, in this new world that he was in, or at least he hoped so, and meantime he slowed his pace, even on the familiar street, to a cautious shuffle, sliding one foot before him and then advancing, more or less as a blind man might, or a man in darkness. Progressing that way, he had almost come to the corner before he felt someone reach out (and it seemed the touch was familiar; was it from that day on the beach, long ago?) and take his hand.

A Sensible Plan for Busy Men and Women who "can't find time to read books"

BOOKS ABRIDGED

Four-books-in-one-volume . . . shortened, never rewritten, exactly like the full-length books offered in magazines . . . each one readable at a sitting . . . published in a fine hard-bound library edition at a very low price

BOOKS ABRIDGED is a new and sensible service for busy men and women directed straight at the cause of a common problem—*lack of time for reading.*

A GREAT SAVING ALSO—The price is only $2.19 per volume, plus a small charge for postage and handling. The combined price of the original publishers' editions of the four books in each volume of *Books Abridged* will run from $14 to $16.

YOU MAY REJECT ANY BOOK AND CANCEL WHEN YOU PLEASE—An advance description of each monthly volume is sent to you with a return form to send in if it doesn't interest you. You may reject any volume *before* receiving it. You do not have to take a specified number of volumes, and you may withdraw from membership at any time.

NO OBLIGATION—May we send you the current volume—at no expense to you—so that you may *demonstrate to yourself* how much good reading you can absorb in just one month—and also how satisfying these shortened versions can be. You may keep this volume without obligation, but please fill in and mail the coupon promptly as our supply of this particular volume is limited.

THE FIRST VOLUME

FREE

TO DEMONSTRATE

. . . how much good reading you can enjoy in a single month, and how thorough and satisfying these shortened versions are . . .

BOOKS ABRIDGED, INC. 25
76 Ninth Avenue, New York 11, N. Y.

Please send me at once, *without charge*, my first volume of BOOKS ABRIDGED, containing four books (including *"Grandfather Stories"*). I will receive an advance description of each monthly volume and may reject it before receiving the volume. For each volume I accept you will bill me $2.19 (plus a small charge for postage and handling). I may cancel the subscription any time I please, but the first introductory volume is free in any case.

Name { *Mr.* / *Mrs.* / *Miss* } .....
(Please Print)

Address.....

City.....*Zone*.....*State*.....BA 24

Only the most outstanding books from the hundreds published every month in hard-cover editions are chosen for the Bantam trademark.

That's why the book which carries the Bantam rooster is often one that has been a book club selection, a nationally listed bestseller, the basis for a great motion picture, and the choice of leading literary critics.

That's why Bantam's list of authors includes so many of the foremost writers of our time—novelists like Hemingway, Steinbeck, A. J. Cronin, Maugham, Costain, McCullers; mystery writers like Rex Stout, John Dickson Carr; Western writers like Luke Short, Peter Dawson; writers of science-fiction like Ray Bradbury, Fredric Brown.

Whether your choice is a mystery, a novel, a Western, or a work of non-fiction—if it carries the symbol of the Bantam rooster, you can be sure it is a book of exceptional merit, attractively printed, economically priced.

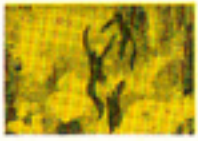
charles finney's

the circus of dr. lao

has been hailed by critics as a masterpiece of fantasy. The SATURDAY REVIEW called it "a remarkable excursion into the fantastic" and warns that it may "occasionally horrify or disgust you . . . It isn't a book for babes."

"A licentious, irreverent, insolent, amusing book . . . a satirical comment on our so-called civilization."
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

With this famous novelette setting the mood, the celebrated science-fiction author Ray Bradbury has selected eleven other imaginative stories by first-rate writers such as E. B. White, Roald Dahl and Shirley Jackson to make a rich, exciting collection. Here the reader will get a taste of the off-beat, the unusual—the flavor of unknown worlds, and the excitement of our own world seen in new dimensions.



charles finney's

the circus of dr. lao

has been hailed by critics as a masterpiece of fantasy. The SATURDAY REVIEW called it "a remarkable excursion into the fantastic" and warns that it may "occasionally horrify or disgust you . . . It isn't a book for babes."

"A licentious, irreverent, insolent, amusing book . . . a satirical comment on our so-called civilization."
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE

With this famous novelette setting the mood, the celebrated science-fiction author Ray Bradbury has selected eleven other imaginative stories by first-rate writers such as E. B. White, Roald Dahl and Shirley Jackson to make a rich, exciting collection. Here the reader will get a taste of the off-beat, the unusual—the flavor of unknown worlds, and the excitement of our own world seen in new dimensions.