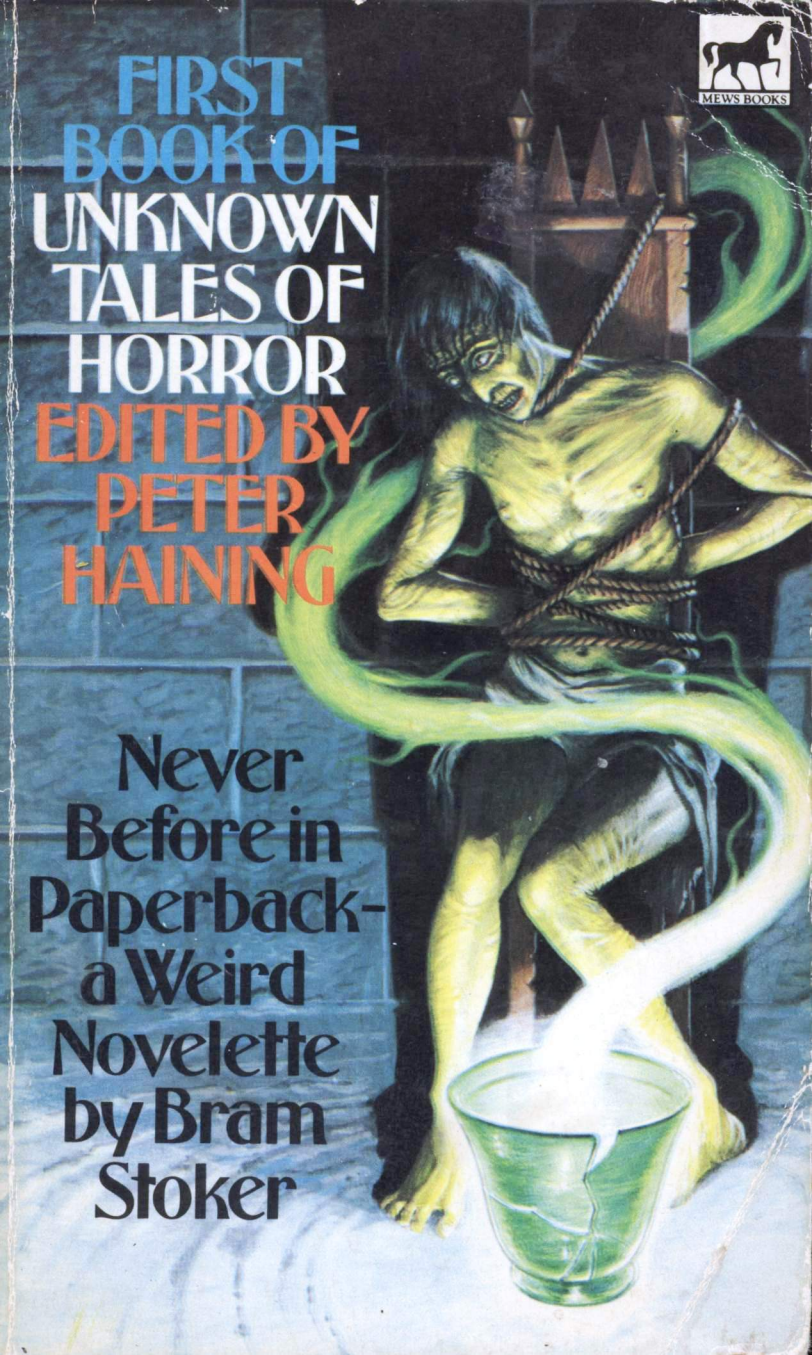
MEWS BOOKS

FIRST BOOK OF UNKNOWN TALES OF HORROR

EDITED BY PETER HAINING



Never Before in Paperback- a Weird Novelette by Bram Stoker

The First Book of
UNKNOWN TALES OF HORROR

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Edited by
Peter Haining

MEWS BOOKS
LONDON AND CONNECTICUT

For
ROBERT, RACHEL & CELIA
– welcome to the family

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INTRODUCTION

There is probably no vein of literature that has been so well mined by anthologists in recent years as that of the macabre or horror story. A veritable flood of collections of these tales, some the resurrected works of great writers now long since dead, others by leading modern exponents, have been produced for readers of all ages and most nationalities. There can be no denying that there is something universal about the appeal of the horror story – the simple enjoyment of being not too frightened by the almost-real and the not-quite-likely.

It is perhaps understandable, human nature being what it is, that such tales should be in demand as a source of literary escapism, especially when one considers all the very real horror that now fills our daily lives: revolutions and civil wars, urban guerilla warfare and bomb outrages, not to mention the mounting death toll on our roads, the frightening abuse of drugs and stimulants, and the unbearable pressures of society which too often culminate in suicide.

Not that one is suggesting that the macabre or horror story is really a way of escaping all this. But it is an easily accessible passport to meeting strange people with whom we can relate yet would never emulate, and in experiencing abnormal situations we can understand but would always determinedly avoid – with both the human and circumstantial elements eventually being satisfactorily resolved. In a nutshell, they are a kind of emotional safety valve as, in a similar way, are horror films in the cinema and on television. The horror story offers us an excursion into the darkest recesses of the human soul – but provides the all-essential guarantee of a safe return.

Whether these factors are the major reason for the great popularity of such tales or not – and one must never forget that they do also have to fulfill the essential criteria of all short stories of being *entertaining* – the demand has led to the great over-use of virtually all the most outstanding stories. Of late, anthology after anthology has been no more than a rehash of those that have gone before, and the endlessly patient readership has accepted this in the hope, too often vain, that

amongst the familiar there might occasionally appear the unfamiliar.

Of course, it would be useless for any editor to pretend that it is not easy to fall into this trap. Collections of horror stories are a staple part of numerous publishers' lists, and each new generation of readers is as anxious to discover the works of the established masters as his predecessors. Perhaps if more of the really representative collections were kept in print over the years, the situation would be to a degree ameliorated. It has not been helped, either, by the very real dearth of good modern horror story writers. Too many enthusiasts of the genre have taken up their pens believing that they can contribute new short stories, only to disappoint by producing what are too clearly pastiches of the writers they admire. Others have merely set out to write horror stories in the literal sense of the word – tales of unrelenting butchery, sadism and general unpleasantness without a grain of entertainment to be found in them. These tales, certainly popular among a section of the paperback market, have been appositely defined as 'Butcher Shop Horror'. I, personally, have no liking for such material and have never used any in my several dozen collections. I have been gratified in return, to find that it has not stopped my books being sold and accepted throughout the world, both in the English language and in translations.

But in this context there is a ray of hope I can offer the enthusiast of long-standing, and probably the new reader too. Despite this extensive exploitation of horror fiction, the vein, like that of any really good mine, is never completely worked out, and gems remain for the determined seeker. In this book, and in subsequent collections in the series. I hope to prove this with stories of quality, by writers of distinction, *which have never previously appeared in volume form.* In making my selections, I have taken the utmost care, and referred to the most reliable authorities so that I can make this claim with the strongest conviction. But it is a foolhardy editor in this particular field (beset as it is by amateur and obscure publications) who does not accept the possibility of a story having appeared elsewhere since its original magazine publication. So, with this proviso alone, I offer my first collection of 'Unkown Tales of Horror'.

Before you begin, however, I should just like to make a few comments on the stories, for I have chosen these with the particular idea in mind of trying to demonstrate the wide variety of categories which can be found under the general heading of horror. Horror is, of course, different things to different people, and what may unnerve one reader may barely

stir another. This, to my way of thinking, is the major reason why so many of the collections of 'Butcher Shop Horror' fail to satisfy – unless you like your chills bloody and unpleasant there is nothing for you. In this book I trust there is something to please everyone, from the tale of real fright to that of black humour: I have even, as you will see, given each story a sub-heading to indicate the category within which it falls, and included the original editor's comments.

I am delighted to say that this first collection contains two notable scoops – very early stories from the pens of two of the Twentieth Century's most famous writers of weird tales, *Bram Stoker* and *Ray Bradbury*. Stoker, whose stature and that of his creation, Dracula, grows with each passing year (they both now have fan clubs in several countries) was a fairly prolific, though little known writer, before the success of his great vampire novel. He contributed to a number of Victorian publications including 'The Contemporary Review' and 'London Society' to supplement his salary as manager to the famous actor, Sir Henry Irving. It was to the second of these that he submitted the fantasy story, 'The Crystal Cup, which I have reprinted here. The story appeared in the September 1872 issue of 'London Society' and is almost certainly the first literary excursion Stoker had made into the genre he was later to dominate. I believe the reader will find 'The Crystal Cup' a remarkable piece of work – particularly when he appreciates that Stoker wrote it when he was only twenty-five years old.

Ray Bradbury was younger even than Stoker when his first published effort, 'The Candle' appeared in the pages of the now legendary American pulp magazine, 'Weird Tales' in November 1942. Bradbury, today undisputed as the greatest writer of 'fantastic' fiction, had grown up during the golden era of the pulp magazines, and by his own admission had turned out millions of words in an effort to be published in them. His sights were particularly set on 'Weird Tales' which offered the kind of stories he most enjoyed, and he was to suffer dozens of rejections before he finally clicked with the bizarre story of Jules Marcott and the candle he stole to inflict revenge of his unfaithful wife. Bradbury was in fact helped in the polishing of this story by the then established 'Weird Tales' contributor Henry Kuttner, but following its publication he was never to look back, producing a string of still more successful tales before finally moving on into the sphere of glossy magazines, books and films.

The collection actually begins with a story by one of my favourite British writers, *H. Russell Wakefield*, a man who I believe has never quite been accorded the position of honour

he deserves. His contribution, 'The Sepulchre of Jasper Sarsen' makes an appropriate opener because it is really a modern Gothic story: and no true fan of the supernatural needs reminding that the Gothic centre was the birthplace of the horror story as we know it today. I think you will find Mr Wakefield's story a splendid combination of the old and new elements of fear making.

Arthur Machen, a British contemporary of Wakefield, who is represented here by a rare and sinister little story of murder, 'The Cosy Room', has already earned widespread appreciation, particularly for his stories propounding the theory that the fairies and goblins of tradition were not imaginary beings, but the remnants of an early race of European peoples who were driven into hiding by the larger people – us, that is. It is a fascinating piece of speculation, and Machen has not been short of disciples among other writers. *Robert E. Howard,* the creator of the super-barbarian, Conan, and favourite writer of 'Weird Tales' readers, could be numbered among these, and indeed his story in this collection,'The Little People' makes use of the idea. (The Howard story is also something of a coup for the book, as it was only found among Howard's papers in 1970 – nearly forty years after his death – does not appear in his collected works, and has only previously appeared in a very short-lived American magazine.)

Henry S. Whitehead always seemed to his fans a most unlikely man to have written horror fiction for he was the minister of the American Episcopalian Church. He had, however, spent quite a period of his life as an archdeacon in the West Indies and there had personal experience of voodoo and the supernatural which he embodied into some of his finest stories. Indeed Whitehead appears himself in the guise of the character Gerald Canevin in many of these. Unfortunately after his death in 1932, quite a number of Henry Whitehead's unpublished stories and even an incomplete novel were destroyed. Of the few that survived, 'Scar Tissue' had to wait for over a decade before it was published in 'Amazing Stories' in 1946.

Recently, that distinguished American discoverer of forgotten fantasy and Science Fiction works, Sam Moskowitz, has been sponsoring the talent of a virtually unknown American author, *W. C. Morrow.* His enthusiasm is one that I myself share, and I heartily concur with his statement that Morrow had 'a feel for the macabre which was one of the most infallible ever developed in America'. Little is now known about Morrow, a Californian who lived around the turn of the century, and his work is preserved in just one collection of short stories, long out of print. During his lifetime, though, he contributed to

several of the top American magazines, including 'Harpers', and in the pages of an issue dated April 1898 I found 'The Hero of the Plague', which is a really unique story of its kind and fully deserving of a new audience today.

After a hero it is surely only appropriate to have a story about a villain – a man of real evil. And this is certainly the correct designation for Sergeant Stanlas, the subject of Manly Wade Wellman's gruesome tale 'The Horror Undying'. Wellman, an outstanding contributor to the pulp magazines of the thirties and forties, and subsequently to SF and fantasy magazine, with some justification compares his real-life character to that other villain Sweeny Todd, the Demon Barber. And when I mention that just one of Stanlas's propensities is for cannibalism, you will appreciate what a grim tale lies in store for you!

The bizarre is not a classification that crops up very often in the horror genre, but I think it is just right for Robert Bloch's story of another evil man, Hitler, and his mad lust for power, 'The Machine that Changed History'. The tale was actually written and published in 1943 when the Fuerher was very much in everyone's mind. It came at the time, too, when Robert Bloch was at least finding widespread acclaim for his work after years of toil in the pulp magazines. This had come about mainly through his use of real characters in semi-fictional situations, and it was his stories of Jack the Ripper and The Man in the Iron Mask, to name but two, which brought him to the notice of Alfred Hitchcock who then turned Bloch's novel 'Psycho' into a classic movie. Hitler makes ideal material for a horror story not only because of his actions, but also because of his well-known interest in the occult: he believed, for instance, that astrology controlled his destiny, that black magic worked, and a 'second race' of super-humans lived inside the earth. In 'The Machine that Changed History' Robert Bloch has drawn on the man and his character to create a notable story – with an ending that will sit you up in your chair. And if only it could have been true!

The most genuinely shocking story in the collection, in my opinion, is William Bankier's 'Unholy Hybrid'. Bankier has not been a prolific writer of horror, but his tales have all been chilling little gems that remain in the memory after you have read them. His contribution here about the very strange plant that grew on Sutter Clay's land is no exception.

Enthusiastic readers of macabre fiction will find one writer in this collection whose name they do not normally associate with horror, Francis Clifford. It is, in fact, my intention in this series to have at least one unknown tale of terror by such an

'outsider' in each volume. For during my years of reading and collecting horror stories I have regularly come across excursions into the genre by writers from other fields, men and women quite clearly attracted to, and challenged by, its demands. It will be my pleasure to give their contributions – all having appeared in magazines – some permanence in these books.

Francis Clifford, my first such contributor, was a highly successful suspense and high-adventure writer, who sadly died just as I was nearing completion of this anthology in August 1975. Clifford had had the ideal background for a supreme writer, having been a British secret agent in Burma during the war, winning the D.S.O. for his work. He earned worldwide acclaim with his novel 'The Naked Runner' which was later filmed with Frank Sinatra. His story which appears here, 'Ten Minutes on a June Morning' is an exercise in psychological terror with a curious history. It deals with an assassin sent to kill an important public figure, and was actually written by Clifford in 1963, just before President Kennedy was shot in Dallas. Because of this strange quirk of fate which made his fiction almost fact, Clifford withheld magazine publication until 1970. It now finds book permanence and, I think, with the passing of the years, has a still more chilling impact.

Finally, as a kind of light relief, I have included a tale of black humour by that master of the ghoulish, Harry Harrison. His story 'They're Playing Our Song' deals with our obsession with the idols of popular music. It is short, evocative and closes the book on a memorable high note, if you will excuse the pun.

So here, then, is the first helping of 'Unknown Tales of Horror'. I hope by unearthing some forgotten but engrossing stories, the long term enthusiast and the new reader will find plenty to enjoy. I would certainly welcome suggestions for future collections and do thank most sincerely those authors, agents and readers who have assisted me in putting together this book. I do wish you all the thrills you would wish for yourself.

PETER HAINING
November, 1975.

GOTHIC

'The Gothic story will survive as long as darkness falls – and here is a tale that, for complete terror, should scare anybody's pants right off.'

Fantastic Universe, August 1953.

The Sepulchre of Jasper Sarasen

by H. RUSSELL WAKEFIELD

Sir Reginald Ramley was by temperament and inclination no frequenter of cemeteries. Such dormitories depressed him mildly, not so much because they reminded him of Man's mortality, against which he cherished no grudge, as because they provided even further proof, if such were needed, of Man's inanity, vulgarity and sentimentality.

Why, for example, spend good and often ill-spared money on headstones and plinths, or even artistically execrable emblematic figures and designs when a few quick years would weather their inscriptions into illegibility and – a little later – level the pious metal with the ground?

And the asininity of those optimistic mottoes which usually figured thereon! *Till we meet again . . . Till a brighter dawn . . .* and so on. Never satisfied! How much better the incomparable reality, a dreamless sleep!

It was, therefore, by mere chance that he entered the vast Death Field near his new West London home. He was strolling past it one Sunday morning in May when he heard coming from one of its trees, now proudly preening themselves in their new livery, the liquid tinkle of a willow warbler. To so keen, if intermittent, an ornithologist this was a matter of import, a willow warbler within four and a half miles of Hyde Park Corner!

He hurried through the gates between the wardens' lodges toward the clump of hawthorns in which, he judged, the singer was hidden, but when he reached it the little tune was already coming from a lime forty yards away, and soon it was a case of *Adieu, Adieu, the plaintive anthem fades.* The intrepid little visitor to town was returning aquiver to his proper habitat.

However, it had served the purpose of introducing Sir Reginald to that many-acred morgue. Having given up the hunt he found himself in a secluded corner of the place, hemmed in by a dense ring of distasteful yews and, somewhat to his astonishment, glancing into a small stone hut where some coffins could be dimly discerned through a gap at the top of a much rusted iron door.

He approached nearer and found there were six of these boxes resting on two tiers of shelves. Two were full-sized, the other four smaller. This seemed odd. He glanced up and there over the door were engraved the words *The Sepulchre of Jasper Sarasen.*

Quite – but why was it so indecorously open to the eye? He looked around him and there were headstones chipped and broken, some lying on their backs, and a half-dozen other small sheds in varying degrees unclosed to the view. So then he realised what had happened in this place. A bomb had dropped there, probably early in the war just ended, and its effects, though muted by time, were still plain to see. Jasper Sarasen's abode had suffered severely.

It was constructed of limestone with speckled granite panel insets in one side wall. It was about fifteen feet long by nine broad and twelve high. It could never have been a thing of any beauty or distinction. Now the triangular ornament over the door was down in the grass beside it, one of the rather risible angel pinnacles was missing, and bomb splinters had gouged out lumps of stone here and there.

Originally, he noticed, the gap over the door had been filled by a rectangle of dark purple glass, 'teeth' of which were still lodged in the stone. Some of the other mausoleums were in even worse shape, and on investigation he found their contents had been removed.

He strolled back to the sepulchre of Jasper Sarasen. For some utterly inexplicable reason he was experiencing a sharp sense of tension and a tiny shiver ran down his flanks. Not only tension but a very odd feeling of curiosity about and interest in this battered little deathshed.

He went right up to it this time and peered in through the gap. Just before he had been contrasting in his mind the wild jocund winging and songs of the birds with the motionless resi-

dents in grass and tomb and now, as he looked into the sepulchre, a bird flashed out of it and past him and was gone.

What sort of bird? The ornithologist was baffled. It was raven-black and about the size of a starling but its extreme speed of flight was what had startled him. Luckily it had not hit him in the face! It could not have missed him by more than an inch. Yet he had felt no airstir from its wings.

Could it be nesting in this foetid little cabin? For foetid it certainly was – quite a potent reek, its base just mustiness but mingling with that and dominating it was a kind of *sour spiciness*. One noseful was enough and Sir Reginald withdrew his head a bit.

It was fairly dark inside, even on this flaming spring morning, but he could pick out details. Perhaps that *was* the beginning of a nest, that untidy leafy mess on the far crossbeam. Otherwise there were just the six coffins, all of light yellow oak with discolored brass handles. One of them on the top shelf was skewed aside and looked none too secure on its ledge.

Certainly the bomb had done some macabre work and maybe stirred some sleepers in their eternal drowse. There on the floor, which somewhat to his surprise was soaking wet, was a small toy rowing-boat. No doubt some child had pushed it through the aperture. He then turned his attention to the gold-inscribed granite panels on one of the side walls.

They commemorated the following persons – Paula Mary Sarasen, who died on November 19th, 1892, aged thirty-eight, Lucy Elizabeth Sarasen who died on November 19th, 1892, aged sixteen, John Jasper Sarasen who died on November 19th, 1892, aged fourteen. Sir Reginald glanced quickly at the other two panels.

'Great Scott!' he exclaimed, 'they all died together on the same day!'

And it was so, for that date had also seen the passing of Sarah Margaret, aged ten, and Robert William, aged eight. Railway accident, perhaps, or acute food poisoning – more common in those days – or something.

There was one other puzzle – this was Jasper's sepulchre, but there was no mention of him. The sixth panel was uninscribed. Yet there were six coffins inside – so, presumably, one was his. Of course there might be a hundred explanations of that immeasurably unimportant matter. What affair was it of his!

'And I don't suppose you worry, Jasper,' he said in a jocular sotto voce manner. 'You're sleeping soundly enough!'

He thought he heard a slight sound coming from inside the hut. Perhaps that odd bird had slipped back. He glanced

through the gap once more. No sign of the bird, but he spotted something he had not noticed before – the lid of the askewed coffin was very slightly raised from its box.

He started to saunter back down the path to the entrance. He glanced over his shoulder for a moment and realised what a very isolated enclave was occupied by those shattered and neglected little chalets, remote and dispiriting within its barrier of joyless yews even on a morning like this.

What would it be like on a foul November night with an evil gusty wind whining through those melancholy trees and whimpering past those oaken shells? Perhaps, he thought, paradoxically, somehow *less* sinister. The contrast intensified the impression. How that spicy reek stuck in one's gullet!

He spat vigorously several times, something he had not done in a public place since he was an ill-mannered urchin. An elderly female of forbidding aspect passing by gave him a look of extreme revulsion and contempt. He hurried home to his lunch.

Sir Reginald was within two months of his fiftieth birthday and came from a middle-class family with a reputation for intellectualism. He had been true to his line, having taken one of the most unarguable Double-Firsts at Oxford and becoming a distinguished mathematician into the scholastic bargain. He had then spread-eagled all comers in the Civil Service exam and chosen the Treasury.

During the war he had been abroad on various important missions and collected to his reluctant shame a Knighthood of the Order of the British Empire, a Companionship of the Order of the Bath, and a rainbow of foreign orders. He had now returned to his department and taken a service flat in Kensington. He was a bachelor, presumably confirmed, a near-recluse by temperament. For exercise he fenced with the foil, for amusement went alone to concerts of music. He was tall, slim, perfectly 'preserved', and the habitual expression on his face was one of good-natured tolerance and scepticism.

As he walked home, his mind playfully considered the exercise of composing a Greek epitaph in the Elegiac Mode on the family of Sarasen and those others whose rest had been so violently and vulgarly interrupted by a low grade high explosive. By the time he reached Redcliffe Court the task was done. Very roughly translated the somewhat flippant couplet went as follows –

'He who so rudely disturbed your repose
Oh strollers in Hades,

Recently joined your brigade,
See that he knows he's in Hell!'

Over lunch he found his mind reverting to the Sarasen menage and what had caused that simultaneous taking off, except for Jasper himself. What had happened to him? Really, he complained to himself irritably, why *am* I worrying about those long-dead worthies, this petty and ancient history? What a waste of time and energy!

Curious how the mind selected, as it were, what one should think about irrespective of what one would choose and prefer. And who was one? What a charming piece of metaphysical nonsense! History, Man's composite mind, did the same thing, selecting capriciously what should be recorded on its tablets.

Guy Fawkes, for instance. Sir Reginald's mind went on a meandering stroll through several topics and then returned to the Sarasens. One cause of this was doubtless the very displeasing taste in his mouth. After lunch he gargled zealously without much result.

Indeed the next morning he found himself with a sore throat and a slight feeling of malaise but he did a hard day's work as usual. In the evening after dinner he suddenly felt a strong uncontrollable impulse to go out. As he went through the front door his brain was apparently busy with an office problem, a question of high-level policy. Apparently, because this topic had a competitor.

Sir Reginald was a mighty concentrator and this sensation of, as it were, dual occupation of his mind was quite maddening. In fact he realised that certain kinds of insanity must consist of just such a dual sway of the mind, such uncontrollable simultaneous tenure.

His fretful reverie was abruptly interrupted by a bass baritone voice exclaiming, 'Sorry, sir, the cemetery's shut. Shuts at eight,' and he found himself opposite the entrance gates, which faced him and barred his way. Also facing him and barring his way was a large person in a blue uniform, a cemetery warden.

Sir Reginald smiled. 'I just came out for a stroll,' said he, 'and let my mind take charge. I've no wish to go in there, I assure you. Must be getting old and vague and absent-minded, I suppose.'

The man smiled amiably back, 'Same with me at times, sir.'

'You live in the lodge here?' asked Sir Reginald.

'Yes, sir.'

'Comfortable?'

'Yes, thank you, sir. Very cushy job all round.'

'That's good,' said Sir Reginald and then to his surprise and

disgust he said something else, something which a moment before he'd had no intention of saying, something singularly inept and a lie into the bargain. Oh, by the way, there is a sepulchre belonging to a family named Sarasen over there on the left-hand side of the cemetery. I think it just possible they may have been distant cousins of my father. I don't suppose you know anything about them?'

Could anything have been more inane! As if a cemetery warden, apparently in his early sixties, could possibly be expected to know one of the thousands and thousands of dead under his charge. Dead, in this case, for fifty-four years. Yet oddly enough, the warden looked at him in a slightly startled, wary way and then said slowly, 'Well, it's a bit funny you should ask me that, sir. Thank you, sir.'

This last remark was in acknowledgement of a brace of half-crowns which Sir Reginald had slipped into his hand. This was also out of character, for Sir Reginald was not in the habit of such riotous tipping, especially in advance of services rendered.

'Yes,' continued the warden, 'there's a story about that lot – so I don't think they can be any relations of yours, otherwise you'd 'ave 'eard about it, I suppose.'

'How did *you* hear about it?' asked Sir Reginald.

'Well, sir, it was like this 'ere. One morning 'bout a year ago, a gent rang my bell and asked me if I could tell him where the Sarasen tomb was, and as I was going along with 'im to show 'im, we got talkin', and 'e told me 'is father 'ad been a well-known lawyer who 'ad defended this Jasper Sarasen when 'e was tried for murder, and got 'im orf, as a matter of fact, and 'e'd 'eard the family was buried 'ere and 'ad come along to 'ave a look for old times sake, if you get me, sort of sentimental, becos 'e'd 'eard 'is father talk so much about the business, if you understand.'

'I quite understand,' replied Sir Reginald, looking down at his fingers and coughing and clearing his throat. 'Murdering whom?'

'Is wife and four kids, sir. Took 'em out for a row on the river, it seems. Never let 'em learn to swim. Then 'e tips the boat over and swims ashore 'isself. This gent I'm telling you of said 'is old man was sure Sarasen was guilty, dead to rights. 'E had good reasons to do it, to marry a very rich woman. 'Owsoever they couldn't quite pin it on 'im, and as I said, 'e got away with it.

'But it didn't do 'im much good, it seems, for very soon after 'e was found dead 'isself in 'is 'ouse, though this gent said it was a bit of a mystery what 'e died of. Well, that's what this gent told me, but 'e talked so fast it was 'ard to follow 'im.'

'I see,' said Sir Reginald slowly. 'Nasty little story. And is his the sixth coffin in the sepulchre?'

'Yes, sir, but as you may 'ave noticed, there ain't no tablet up to him. This gent said that was probably because none of 'is relatives 'ad any use for 'im, knowing 'e was a wrong 'un, and wanted no more to do with 'im, so they just shoved 'im in 'is 'ut and left 'im there. That's what 'e surmised anyway.

'This gent said too that this Sarasen was in business in a big way but 'ard up at the time. This gent said 'e was very cunning and sly, a real bad 'un, as wicked as they made 'em. I'm putting it in my own language you understand, sir.'

'Oh, well,' said Sir Reginald, some shame in his heart, 'they obviously weren't the cousins I was thinking of. A strange tale. This place must be full of such queer histories – enough plots buried here to keep all the writers in the world busy for years.'

'Yes, sir,' agreed the warden. 'I'll tell you something, sir, but don't say I told you because I ain't supposed to talk about the job, but when the bomb dropped – I mean the one out in the open there – some of the coffins was blown right to the surface and opened up, and in one there weren't no body at all, just some wooden blocks. And in another was a woman without no 'ead, and in another there was something very funny-shaped indeed, not nice to see.'

Sir Reginald emitted a not-very-hearty laugh. 'Yes,' he said. 'I can imagine there are some ugly secrets hidden here. Some persons, like the Sarasens, murdered, but not avenged. Unless they *were* avenged,' he added vaguely. 'Do you ever walk about here after dark? Oh, well, I'm sure that's a very silly question – of course you chaps must be quite hardened to that.'

'Not so silly,' smiled the warden. 'I guarantee this place 'ud give anyone the willies, what you calls the creeps, sir, when there's just a little moon on a winter's night, just enough to make you fancy you can see things, especially in that dark corner where the Sarasens are. To be honest, I don't go down that path more than I can help, not since the bomb dropped, anyway.'

'Why?' asked Sir Reginald.

'Dunno, sir, got a feeling about it ever since that bomb dropped. That's all I can say. Could you tell me something, sir,' added the warden, rocking slightly on his mighty boots and clasping and unclasping his hands behind his back, 'did you ever 'ear of blue lights being seen in cemeteries?'

'Blue lights?' repeated Sir Reginald. 'Well, yes, as a matter of fact I did once read of something of the sort happening – in Rome, I fancy. Why? Have you seen anything of the kind?'

'No, sir,' replied the warden quickly, 'but my mate said something about it once.'

Sir Reginald saw that he was not being strictly truthful – for rather obvious reasons. 'Well,' he said, 'I must be getting along. Thank you for a very interesting little talk. I hope we'll have another some day. Good night.'

'Good night, sir,' said the warden.

A murderer, eh!, he thought as he walked home. *Well, Jasper – so you were worthy of your conventionally sinister praenomen! You evil old spider!* He coughed. *Curse this throat!* It did not seem to be getting any better.

Nor was it any better the next morning. Swallowing was beginning to be an ordeal and that cough frequent and harassing. It remained so for the rest of a very busy week. However, it is possible that he would have completely evacuated the Sarasens from his mind and forever had he not been made the victim of a rather sour dream. On the other hand the dream might have been evidence that their affair had already deeply penetrated his subconscious and taken up its abode there.

It was on the Friday night. Suddenly out of the depths of sleep he found himself standing not far from that battered little chalet dimly lit by a dying moon. He was very tense and watchful. He dropped to his hands and knees and crept round to the door and listened. After a moment, he heard a spasmodic creaking sound which he knew was being made by the raising of a coffin lid.

Suddenly there was a clatter, a fearful stench filled his nostrils and he heard something moving inside the sepulchre. And then he awoke, his heart banging wildly and sweat bursting out on him, and the trace of that reek in his nose.

This was one of those rare and unrefreshing dreams which do not fade. It remained perfectly and dauntingly vivid in his memory. *Why?* – he irritably and a shade urgently asked himself. There was no rhyme or reason for it, no rational strand of thought linking him to this business. It was only by the purest fluke that he had ever seen that infernal little Death Ark.

The gloomy brood of Sarasens were less than nothing to him. But the human mind, one's own emphatically included, was a cypher to which no key was known. Sporadically it errupted these baffling and apparently causeless enigmas, and one had to make the best of them and laugh them off as well as one could.

He took Saturday morning off. *Now,* he said to himself, *I am going to challenge and defeat this thing, this petty but tiresome obsession.* So, not long after breakfast, with a firm step and stride, he made his way to the cemetery, turned to the left at

the cross paths, passed through the yew curtain, and a quarter of a minute later found himself observing that stark legend, *The Sepulchre of Jasper Sarasen.*

A moment before he had been feeling somewhat self-conscious, aware that he was behaving with some fatuity. Now that feeling went and at once. There was no doubting the displeasing fact that this place 'got' him a little. It was 'kinetic'. What did he mean by that? Well, that it held for him a kind of reluctant fascination. Rather more than 'reluctant' – and 'fascination' wasn't quite the word – but he could not put his tongue to a better one. That 'obsession' was stronger than he had hoped. It was partly, no doubt, its seclusion.

Outside that sable ring were lilacs, hawthorns and laburnums blooming in their hey-day, and tireless wings rustling their boughs. In here was no colour and no bird sang. And in that dismal stonecave were lying the corpses of six persons, the Slayer and the Slain. The man who had lain with the woman and begotten those children, then mercilessly destroyed them all. All six of them were lying there together night and day, year after year.

And their souls? Sir Reginald was sceptical about souls but on the hypothesis that he was wrong, what about those souls? They might all be lodging there in that repulsive little cabin too. A pleasant family gathering! *Really!* thought Sir Reginald, *what ideas! I seem to have suffered some kind of cenotaphic change into something morbidly responsive to the stir of worms here in this place where all these thousands are repaying their debt to earth, that silent intermingling metabolism.*

The trees rustled nonchantly over them, the birds played amorously but even for those their turn would come. *Well, these are not the thoughts I wish to think. No more cemeteries for me!* And then he said out aloud, 'But first I'll just have a last peep at you, Jasper.' He said it with a nervous facetiousness which disgusted him.

As he cautiously put his face to the opening something ebony-black flashed past his ear. That strange bird again! Jet-propelled, apparently! he told himself. That odd stink again too! No good enquiring into *its* origin. And there were those six sleepers, if they slept. Which was Jasper? Well, which *was* he? Certainly one of the two full-sized coffins on the top shelf with the slightly raised lid.

'Is that you, Jasper?' he muttered Why couldn't he control that fatuous babbling! That was odd! The gap between the lid and case was certainly wider than it had been the first time, and as he asked that puerile question it seemed to him as if some-

thing fluttered across that gap. An illusion due, no doubt, to the fact that the sun had just at that moment swung from behind a cloud.

He tried to change the subject of his thoughts. How absurd that the dead should have the right to clutter up the earth like this! Those six bundles of corruption were taking up quite a sizeable piece of London. Burnt and their ashes scattered, they would have gone sweetly and cleanly back to their elements – even Jasper's! How much better than that the baleful old assassin should rot away there with his victims round him. Sir Reginald could not get the sardonic conception out of his mind.

Now that's enough, he told himself. *I'll come here no more. It's becoming a foolish nuisance. Perhaps as men grow older, especially rather lonely men, they become subject to such follies at times. They have to be fought. Now I've seen all there is to see and that is precious little. I'm in no way concerned with this tragic little group. No more cemeteries or sepulchral speculations for me! No more trafficking mentally with the dead!* Firm, resolute, uncompromising words, yet somehow not bringing confidence and certainty with them.

He walked off and then, when he reached the fence of yews, glanced back. His gaze became fixed and his brow furrowed. He turned right around and still stared as though much puzzled. He seemed to be hesitating but with an effort turned around again and walked quickly back to the entrance gates. Of course his eyes must have deceived him!

On the way out he passed his friend the warden, who enquired after his health. He replied that his throat was giving him some trouble.

'You sound a bit 'oarse, sir,' said the warden. 'You ain't been putting your 'ead in any of them tombs, 'ave you?'

'Why?' asked Sir Reginald.

'Well, it ain't considered 'ealthy, so my doc says. 'E thinks they should all be emptied and pulled down.'

'I'll remember that,' said Sir Reginald with a faint smile, 'but I don't think I'll be coming here again.'

'Don't blame you!' said the man in blue. 'It ain't exactly a Fun Fair!'

As he walked back to his flat Sir Reginald wondered if there could be anything in the doctor's contention. It was a depressing possibility, especially as his throat was really painful and clearly not yielding to home treatment. In fact it had got much worse during the last hour. He would see a doctor himself on Monday, he decided, if it was not a great deal better.

He managed to swallow a little lunch and then went to lie

down on the sofa in his sitting-room. To his intense irritation he found his mind again and again reverting to that accursed Sarasen shed. If he had been feeling fit enough he would have gone to the Athenaeum Club, membership of which was his sole concession to sociability, but his temperature was rising and he became slightly lightheaded, sufficiently so to permit the entry of distasteful fantasies.

When he fell into an uneasy doze, there he was at once in the vicinity of that hut, prey to a fearful urgent curiosity as to what was happening inside it. For that something was happening he felt horribly sure. He would crouch on his hands and knees like a beast and put his ear to the stone. And then, with an effort, drag his mind back to sanity and coherence.

But the moment he relaxed his guard, there he was back again at that reeking little shed. Once he found himself peeping slyly in, the stench strong in his throat. Out flew the foul bird on lightning wings. And there was that ochre coffin with its raised lid – its rising lid!

With a stifled cry he sprang from his couch. It was really rather beastly, undermining, ghostly, necrophilic, inexplicable. Inexplicable, because as he told himself for the hundredth time he was in no way connected with this malign set. There was no tie or bond of any sort between them. Why then – *why?* It was as if he had carelessly, unwittingly strayed within the ambit of some potent vicious instrument for evil.

The concept was not entirely new to him. Sir Reginald, like so many baffled and disillusioned persons of our time when confronted inexorably and bloodily with the human dilemma, had played – the word is apt – with the concept of diabolism. One looks in the glass and sees a tolerably humane honest peaceful member of a constructive society. One glances out of the window and sees a howling mob, rifles at the ready, bombs at the belt. Unless one is very lucky, one only too soon sees oneself stamping and shouting in the crazed and suicidal ranks.

Was it possible that men left to themselves were good, in the sense that they were sane, social and capable of ameliorating their lot, however slowly, but that they were forever thwarted and opposed and partially overcome by the powers of cosmic evil? That God was the Devil?

He began to feel intolerably restless and in great mental distress. He could not bear to be alone in this room a moment longer. Ill though he was, he must go out. He got his hat and stick and walked slowly along, dizzy with fever and not far from delirium.

Presently he found himself entering the cemetery and walking vaguely and unsteadily down the main avenue. The few per-

sons he passed glanced at him casually and then more sharply. They looked back at him over their shoulders. 'Been drinking,' was their verdict.

'Why am I here?' he asked himself. 'Why am I here?' He plodded painfully on, turned to the left, passed through the barrier of yews, reached the sepulchre of Jasper Sarasen. Then he could go no further and flung himself down on the long grass which faced the tomb.

After a while the bells rang for closing-time – the dark came slowly down and the thin curve of the new moon lifted over the horizon. It was death-quiet save for the distant muted murmur of the traffic. Sometime later Sir Reginald stirred from his fever sleep and, his eyes wide and staring, began crawling like a beast toward the sepulchre.

He slunk across the path and, breathing convulsively, reached the stone against which he put his ear. For a moment he heard nothing and then there came a small sharp *creak*, then another and something clattered down within the tomb. He crawled round to the entrance and jerkily, gaspingly, raised himself till his eyes were on a level with the opening.

He found himself staring straight into something which had the ghastly semblance of a face, livid with patches of corrupted skin, eyes glazed yet fiery, deep sunken in their sockets and foul matted hair drooping past its fleshless skin. The iron door began slowly opening.

He staggered to his feet and began running in wild terror; and something, he knew, was running just behind him on silent foot. Thin blue flames sprang up around him, a dark bird hurled itself again and again into his face. And then he screamed twice and fell.

The cemetery warden leapt from his bed, threw his overcoat on and ran toward those screams. He saw a movement in the grass and dashed toward it. Sir Reginald was lying on his back and thrusting, thrusting desperately with his arms. His eyes were vilely wide and pupil-less. His breath came in great convulsive gasps. He raised himself once, fell back and ceased to breathe.

A thin blue flame coiled out from under him, ran up to his breast and shone there, straight and unflickering like a flower. The warden cried out, ripped off his coat and beat at the flame in a crazy way, again and again, crying out all the while.

And when others came running, that is how they found them.

FANTASY

'A dream-like fantasy of a very strange world.'

London Society, September 1872.

The Crystal Cup

by BRAM STOKER

I

The blue waters touch the walls of the palace; I can hear their soft, lapping wash against the marble whenever I listen. Far out at sea I can see the waves glancing in the sunlight, ever-smiling, ever-glancing, ever-sunny. Happy waves! – happy in your gladness, thrice happy that ye are free!

I rise from my work and spring up the wall till I reach the embrasure. I grasp the corner of the stonework and draw myself up till I crouch in the wide window. Sea, sea, out away as far as my vision extends. There I gaze until my eyes grow dim; and in the dimness of my eyes my spirit finds its sight.

My soul flies on the wings of memory away beyond the blue, smiling sea – away beyond the glancing waves and the gleaming sails, to the land I call my home. As the minutes roll by, my actual eyesight seems to be restored, and I look around me in my old birth-house. The rude simplicity of the dwelling comes back to me as something new. There I see my old books and manuscripts and pictures, and there, away on their old shelves, high up above the door, I see my first rude efforts in art.

How poor they seem to me now! And yet, were I free, I would not give the smallest of them for all I now possess. Possess? How I dream.

The dream calls me back to waking life. I spring down from

my window-seat and work away frantically, for every line I draw on paper, every new form that springs on the plaster, brings me nearer freedom. I will make a vase whose beauty will put to shame the glorious works of Greece in her golden prime! Surely a love like mine and a hope like mine must in time make some form of beauty spring to life! When He beholds it he will exclaim with rapture, and will order my instant freedom. I can forget my hate, and the deep debt of revenge which I owe him when I think of liberty – even from his hands. Ah! then on the wings of the morning shall I fly beyond the sea to my home – her home – and clasp her to my arms, never more to be separated.

But, of Spirit of Day! if she should be – No, no, I cannot think of it, or I shall go mad. Oh Time, Time! maker and destroyer of men's fortunes, why hasten so fast for others whilst though laggest so slowly for me? Even now my home may have become desolate, and she – my bride of an hour – may sleep calmly in the cold earth. Oh this suspense will drive me mad! Work, work! Freedom is before me; Aurora is the reward of my labour!

So I rush to my work; but to my brain and hand, heated alike, no fire or no strength descends. Half mad with despair, I beat myself against the walls of my prison, and then climb into the embrasure, and once more gaze upon the ocean, but find there no hope. And so I stay till night, casting its pall of blackness over nature, puts the possibility of effort away from me for yet another day.

So my days go on, and grow to weeks and months. So will they grow to years, should life so long remain an unwelcome guest within me; for what is man without hope? and is not hope nigh dead within this weary breast?

Last night, in my dreams, there came, like an inspiration from the Day-Spirit, a design for my vase.

All day my yearning for freedom – for Aurora, or news of her – had increased tenfold, and my heart and brain were on fire. Madly I beat myself, like a caged bird, against my prison-bars. Madly I leaped to my window seat, and gazed with bursting eyeballs out on the free, open sea. And there I sat till my passion had worn itself out; and then I slept, and dreamed of thee, Aurora – of thee and freedom.

In my ears I heard again the old song we used to sing together when, as children, we wandered on the beach; when, as lovers, we saw the sun sink in the ocean, and I would see its glory doubled as it shone in thine eyes, and was mellowed against thy cheek; and when, as my bride, you clung to me as

my arms went round you on that desert tongue of land whence rushed that band of sea-robbers that tore me away.

Oh! how my heart curses those men – not men, but fiends! But one solitary gleam of joy remains from that dread encounter – that my struggle stayed those hellhounds, and that, ere I was stricken down, this right hand sent one of them to his home. My spirit rises as I think of the blow that saved thee from a life worse than death. With the thought I feel my cheeks burning, and my forehead swelling with mighty veins.

My eyes burn, and I rush wildly round my prison-house.

'Oh! for one of my enemies, that I might dash out his brains against these marble walls, and trample his heart out as he lay before me!'

These walls would spare him not. They are pitiless, alas! I know too well. 'Oh, cruel mockery of kindness, to make a palace a prison, and to taunt a captive's aching heart with forms of beauty and sculptured marble!'

Wondrous, indeed, are those sculptured walls! Men call them passing fair; but oh Aurora! with thy beauty ever before my eyes, what form that men call lovely can be fair to me? Like him who gazes sun-wards, and sees no light on earth, from the glory that dyes his iris, so thy beauty or its memory has turned the fairest things of earth to blackness and deformity.

In my dream last night, when in my ears came softly, like music stealing across the waters from afar, the old song we used to sing together, then to my brain, like a ray of light, came an idea whose grandeur for a moment struck me dumb. Before my eyes grew a vase of such beauty that I knew my hope was born to life, and that the Great Spirit had placed my foot on the ladder that leads from this my palace-dungeon to freedom and to thee. Today I have got my block of crystal – for only in such pellucid substance can I body forth my dream – and have commenced my work.

I found at first that my hand had lost its cunning, and I was beginning to despair, when, like the memory of a dream, there came back to my ears the strains of the old song. I sang it softly to myself, and as I did so I grew calmer; but oh! how differently the song sounded to me when thy voice, Aurora, rose not in unison with my own!

But what avails pining? To work! Every touch of my chisel will bring me nearer thee.

My vase is daily growing nearer to completion. I sing as I work, and my constant song is the one I love so well. I can hear the echo of my voice in the vase; and as I end, the wailing song note is prolonged in sweet, sad music in the crystal cup.

I listen, ear down, and sometimes I weep as I listen, so sadly comes the echo to my song. Imperfect though it may be, my voice makes sweet music, and its echo in the cup guides my hand towards perfection as I work. Would that thy voice rose and fell with mine, Aurora, and then the world would behold a vase of such beauty as never before woke up the slumbering fires of man's love for what is fair; for if I do such work in sadness, imperfect as I am in my solitude and sorrow, what would I do in joy, perfect when with thee?

I know that my work is good as an artist, and I feel that it is as a man; and the cup itself, as it daily grows in beauty, gives back a clearer echo. Oh! if I worked in joy how gladly would it give back our voices! *Then* would we hear an echo and music such as mortals seldom hear; but now the echo, like my song, seems imperfect. I grow daily weaker; but still I work on – work with my whole soul – for am I not working for freedom and for thee.

My work is nearly done. Day by day, hour by hour, the vase grows more finished. Ever clearer comes the echo whilst I sing; ever softer, ever more sad and heartrending comes the echo of the wail at the end of the song. Day by day I grow weaker and weaker; still I work with all my soul. At night the thought comes to me, whilst I think of thee, that I will never see thee more – that I breathe out my life into the crystal cup, and that it will last there when I am gone.

So beautiful has it become, so much do I love it, that I could gladly die to be the maker of such work, were it not for thee – for my love for thee, and my hope of thee, and my fear for thee, and my anguish for thy grief when thou knowest I am gone.

My work requires but a few more touches. My life is slowly ebbing away, and I feel that with my last touch my life will pass out for ever into the cup. Till that touch is given I must not die – I will not die. My hate has passed away. So great are my wrongs that revenge of mine would be too small a compensation for my woe. I leave revenge to a juster and a mightier than I. Thee, of Aurora, I will await in the land of flowers, where thou and I will wander, never more to part, never more! Ah, never more!

Farewell, Aurora – Aurora – Aurora!

II

The Feast of Beauty approaches rapidly, yet hardly so fast as my royal master wishes. He seems to have no other thought than to have this feast greater and better than any ever held before. Five summers ago his Feast of Beauty was nobler than all held in his sire's reign together; yet scarcely was it over, and the rewards given to the victors, when he conceived the giant project whose success is to be tested when the moon reaches her full.

It was boldly chosen and boldly done; chosen and done as boldy as the project of a monarch should be. But still I cannot think that it will end well. This yearning after completeness must be unsatisfied in the end – this desire that makes a monarch fling his kingly justice to the winds, and strive to reach his Mecca over a desert of blighted hopes and lost lives. But hush! I must not dare to think ill of my master or his deeds; and besides, walls have ears. I must leave alone these dangerous topics, and confine my thoughts within proper bounds.

The moon is waxing quickly, and with its fullness comes the Feast of Beauty, whose success as a whole rests almost solely on my watchfulness and care; for if the ruler of the feast should fail in his duty, who could fill the void? Let me see what arts are represented, and what works compete. All the arts will have trophies: poetry in its various forms, and prose-writing; sculpture with carving in various metals, and glass, and wood, and ivory, and engraving gems, and setting jewels; painting on canvas, and glass, and wood, and stone and metal; music, vocal and instrumental; and dancing.

If that woman will but sing, we will have a real triumph of music; but she appears sickly too. All our best artists either get ill or die, although we promise them freedom or rewards or both if they succeed.

Surely never yet was a Feast of Beauty so fair or so richly dowered as this which the full moon shall behold and hear; but ah! the crowning glory of the feast will be the crystal cup. Never yet have these eyes beheld such a form of beauty, such a wondrous mingling of substance and light. Surely some magic power must have helped to draw such loveliness from a cold block of crystal. I must be careful that no harm happens to the vase. Today when I touched it, it gave forth such a ringing sound that my heart jumped with fear lest it should sustain any injury. Henceforth, till I deliver it up to my master, no hand but my

own shall touch it lest any harm should happen to it.

Strange story has that cup. Born to life in the cell of a captive torn from his artist home beyond the sea, to enhance the splendour of a feast by his labour – seen at work by spies, and traced and followed until a chance – a cruel chance for him – gave him into the hands of the emissaries of my master.

He, too, poor moth, fluttered about the flame: the name of freedom spurred him on to exertion till he wore away his life. The beauty of that cup was dearly bought for him. Many a man would forget his captivity whilst he worked at such a piece of loveliness; but he appeared to have some sorrow at his heart, some sorrow so great that it quenched his pride.

How he used to rave at first! How he used to rush about his chamber, and then climb into the embrasure of his window, and gaze out away over the sea! Poor captive! Perhaps over the sea someone waited for his coming who was dearer to him than many cups, even many cups as beautiful as this, if such could be on earth. . . .

Well, well, we must all die soon or late, who dies first escapes the more sorrow, perhaps, who knows?

How, when he had commenced the cup, he used to sing all day long, from the moment the sun shot its first fiery arrow into the retreating hosts of night clouds, till the shades of evening advancing drove the lingering sunbeams into the west – and always the same song!

How he used to sing, all alone! Yet sometimes I could almost imagine I heard not one voice from his chamber, but two. . . . No more will it echo again from the wall of a dungeon or from a hillside in free air. No more will his eyes behold the beauty of his crystal cup.

It was well he lived to finish it. Often and often have I trembled to think of his death, as I saw him day by day grow weaker as he worked at the unfinished vase. Must his eyes never more behold the beauty that was born of his soul? Oh, never more! Oh Death, grim King of Terrors, how mighty is they sceptre! All-powerful is the wave of thy hand that summons us in turn to thy kingdom away beyond the poles!

Would that thou, poor captive, hadst lived to behold thy triumph, for victory will be thine at the Feast of Beauty such as man never before achieved. Then thou might have heard the shout that hails the victor in the contest, and the plaudits that greet him as he passes out, a free man, through the palace gates. But now thy cup will come to light amid the smiles of beauty and rank and power, whilst thou liest there in thy lonely chamber, cold as the marble of its walls.

And, after that, the feast will be imperfect, since the victors

cannot all be crowned. I must ask my master's direction as to how a blank place of a competitor, should he prove a victor, is to be filled up. So late? I must see him ere the noontide hour of rest be past.

'Great Spirit! how I trembled as my master answered my question!

I found him in his chamber, as usual in the noontide. He was lying on his couch disrobed, half-sleeping; and the drowsy zephyr scented with rich odours from the garden, wafted through the windows on either side by the fans, lulled him to complete repose. The darkened chamber was cool and silent. From the vestibule came the murmuring of many fountains, and the pleasant splash of falling waters.

'Oh, happy,' said I, in my heart, 'oh happy great King, that has such pleasures to enjoy.'

The breeze from the fans swept over the strings of the Aeolian harps, and a sweet, confused, happy melody arose like the murmuring of children's voices singing afar off in the valley's, and floating on the wind.

As I entered the chamber softly, with muffled foot-fall and pent-in breath, I felt a kind of awe stealing over me. To me who was born and have dwelt all my life within the precincts of the court – to me who talk daily with my royal master, and take his minutest directions as to the coming feast – to me who had all my life looked up to my king as to a spirit, and had venerated him as more than mortal – came a feeling of almost horror; for my master looked then, in his quiet chamber, half-sleeping amid the drowsy music of the harps and fountains, more like a common man than a God. As the thought came to me I shuddered in afright, for it seemed to me that I had been guilty of sacrilege. So much had my veneration for my royal master become a part of my nature, that but to think of him as another man seemed like the anarchy of my own soul.

I came beside the couch, and watched him in silence. He seemed to be half-listening to the fitful music; and as the melody swelled and died away his chest rose and fell as he breathed in unison with the sound.

After a moment or two he appeared to become conscious of the presence of someone in the room, although by no motion of his face could I see that he heard any sound, and his eyes were shut. He opened his eyes, and, seeing me, asked, 'Was all right about the Feast of Beauty?' for that is the subject ever nearest to his thoughts. I answered that all was well, but that I had come to ask his royal pleasure as to how a vacant place amongst the competitors was to be filled up.

He asked, 'how vacant?' and on my telling him 'from death', he asked again, quickly. 'Was the work finished?'

When I told him that it was, he lay back again on his couch with a sigh of relief, for he had half-risen in his anxiety as he asked the question.

Then he said, after a minute, 'All the competitors must be present at the feast.'

'All?' said I.

'All,' he answered again, 'alive or dead; for the old custom must be preserved, and the victors crowned.'

He stayed still for a minute more, and then said, slowly, Victors or martyrs.'

And I could see that the kingly spirit was coming back to him.

Again he went on, 'This will be the last Feast of Beauty; and all the captives shall be set free. Too much sorrow has sprung already from my ambition. Too much injustice has soiled the name of king.'

He said no more, but lay still and closed his eyes. I could see the working of his hands and the heaving of his chest that some violent emotion troubled him, and the thought arose 'He is a man, but he is yet a king; and, though a king as he is, still happiness is not for him. Great Spirit of Justice! thou metest out his pleasures and his woes to man, to king and slave alike! Thou lovest best to whom thou givest peace!'

Gradually my master grew more calm, and at length sunk into a gentle slumber; but even in his sleep he breathed in unison with the swelling murmur of the harps.

'To each is given,' said I gently, 'something in common with the world of actual things. Thy life, oh King, is bound by chains of sympathy to the voice of Truth, which is Music! Tremble, lest in the presence of a master-strain thou should feel thy littleness, and die!' and I softly left the room.

III

Slowly I creep along the bosom of the waters.

Sometimes I look back as I rise upon a billow, and see behind me many of my kin sitting each upon a wave-summit as upon a throne. So I go on for long, a power that I wist not forcing me onward, without will or purpose of mine.

At length, as I rise upon a mimic wave, I see afar a hazy light that springs from a vast palace, through whose countless windows flame lamps and torches. But at the first view, as if my coming had been a signal, the lights disappear in an instant.

Impatiently I await what may happen; and as I rise with each heart-beat of the sea, I look forward to where the torches had gleamed. Can it be a deed of darkness that shuns the light?

The time has come when I can behold the palace without waiting to mount upon the waves. It is built of white marble, and rises steep from the brine. Its sea-front is glorious with columns and statues; and from the portals the marble steps sweep down, broad and wide to the waters, and below them, down as deep as I can see.

No sound is heard, no light is seen. A solemn silence abounds, a perfect calm.

Slowly I climb the palace walls, my brethren following as soldiers up a breach. I slide along the roofs, and as I look behind the walls and roofs are glistening as with silver. At length I meet with something hard and smooth and translucent; but through it I pass and enter a vast hall, where for an instant I hang in mid-air and wonder.

My coming has been the signal for such a burst of harmony as brings back to my memory the music of the spheres as they rush through space; and in the full-swelling anthem of welcome I feel that I am indeed a sun-spirit, a child of light, and that this is my homage to my master.

I look upon the face of a great monarch, who sits at the head of a banquet-table. He has turned his head upwards and backwards, and looks as if he had been awaiting my approach. He rises and fronts me with the ringing out of the welcome-song, and all the others in the great hall turn towards me as well. I can see their eyes gleaming. Down along the immense table, laden with plate and glass and flowers, they stand holding each cup of ruby wine, with which they pledge the monarch when the song is ended, as they drink success to him and to the 'Feast of Beauty'.

I survey the hall. An immense chamber, with marble walls covered with bas reliefs and frescoes and sculptured figures, and panelled by great columns that rise along the surface and support a dome-ceiling painted wondrously; in its centre the glass lantern by which I entered.

On the walls are hung pictures of various forms and sizes, and down the centre of the table stretches a raised platform on which are placed works of art of various kinds.

At one side of the hall is a dias on which sit persons of both sexes with noble faces and lordly brows, all wearing the same expression – care tempered by hope. All these hold scrolls in their hands.

At the other side of the hall is a similar dias, on which sit

others fairer to earthly view, less spiritual and more marked by surface-passion. They hold music scores. All these look more joyous than those on the other platform, all save one, a woman, who sits with downcast face and dejected mien, as of one without hope. As my light falls at her feet she looks up, and I feel happy. The sympathy between us has called a faint gleam of hope to cheer that poor pale face.

Many are the forms of art that rise above the banquet-table and all are lovely to behold. I look on all with pleasure one by one, till I see the last of them at the end of the table away from the monarch, and then all the others seem as nothing to me.

What is this that makes other forms of beauty seem as nought when compared with it, when brought within the radius of its lustre? A crystal cup, wrought with such wondrous skill that light seems to lose its individual glory as it shines upon it and is merged in its beauty.

'Oh Universal Mother, let me enter there. Let my life be merged in its beauty, and no more will I regret my sun-strength hidden deep in the chasms of my moon mother. Let me live there and perish there, and I will be joyous whilst it lasts, and content to pass into the great vortex of nothingness to be born again when the glory of the cup has fled.'

Can it be that my wish is granted, that I have entered the cup and become a part of its beauty?

'Great Mother, I thank thee.'

Has the cup life? or is it merely its wondrous perfectness that makes it tremble, like a beating heart, in unison with the ebb and flow, the great wave-pulse of nature. To me it feels as if it had life.

I look through the crystal walls and see at the end of the table, isolated from all others, the figure of a man seated. Are those cords that bind his limbs? How suits that crown of laurel, those wide, dim eyes, and that pallid hue? It is passing strange. The Feast of Beauty holds some dread secrets and sees some wondrous sights.

I hear a voice of strange, rich sweetness, yet wavering – the voice of one *almost* a king by nature. He is standing up; I see him through my palace-wall. He calls me a name and sits down again.

Again I hear a voice from the platform of scrolls, the Throne of Brows; and again I look and behold a man who stands trembling yet flushed, as though the morning light shone bright upon his soul. He reads in cadenced measure a song in praise of my moon-mother, the Feast of Beauty, and the king. As he speaks, he trembles no more, but seems inspired, and his voice rises to a tone of power and grandeur, and rings back from the walls

and dome. I hear his words distinctly, though saddened in tone, in the echo from my crystal home. He concludes and sits down, half-fainting, amid a whirlwind of applause, every note, every beat of which is echoed as the words had been.

Again the monarch rises and calls 'Aurora,' that she may sing for freedom. The name echoes in the cup with a sweet, sad sound. So sad, so despairing seems the echo, that the hall seems to darken and the scene to grow dim.

'Can a sun-spirit mourn, or a crystal vessel weep?'

She, the dejected one, rises from her seat on the Throne of Sound, and all eyes turn upon her save those of the pale one, laurel-crowned. Thrice she essays to begin, and thrice nought comes from her lips but a dry, husky sigh, till an old man who has been moving round the hall settling all things cries out, in fear lest she should fail, 'Freedom!'

The word is re-echoed from the cup. She hears the sound, turns towards it and begins.

'Oh, the melody of that voice! And yet it is not perfect alone; for after the first note comes an echo from the cup that swells in unison with the voice, and the two sounds together seem as if one strain came ringing from the lips of the All-Father himself. So sweet it is, that all throughout the hall sit spellbound, and scarcely dare to breathe.

In the pause after the first verses of the song, I hear the voice of the old man speaking to a comrade, but his words are unheard by any other, 'Look at the king, His spirit seems lost in a trance of melody. Ah! I fear me some evil: the nearer the music approaches to perfection the more rapt he becomes. I dread lest a perfect note shall prove his death-call.'

His voice dies away as the singer commences the last verse.

Sad and plaintive is the song; full of feeling and of tender love, but love overshadowed by grief and despair. As it goes on the voice of the singer grows sweeter and more thrilling, more real; and the cup, my crystal time-home, vibrates more and more as it gives back the echo. The monarch looks like one entranced, and no movement is within the hall.

The song dies away in a wild wail that seems to tear the heart of the singer in twain; and the cup vibrates still more as it gives back the echo. As the note, long-swelling, reaches its highest, the cup; the Crystal Cup, my wondrous home, the gift of the All-Father, shivers into millions of atoms, and passes away.

Ere I am lost in the great vortex I see the singer throw up her arms and fall, freed at last, and the king sitting, glory-faced, but pallid with the hue of Death.

TERROR

'A story of mounting terror about a room which is not quite what it seems.'

T.P.'s Weekly, May 1908.

The Cosy Room

by ARTHUR MACHEN

And he found to his astonishment that he came to the appointed place with a sense of profound relief. It was true that the window was somewhat high up in the wall and that, in case of fire, it might be difficult, for many reasons to get out that way; it was barred like the basement windows that one sees now and then in London houses, but as for the rest it was an extremely snug room.

There was a gay flowering paper on the walls, a hanging bookshelf – his stomach sickened for an instant – a little table under the window with a board and checkers on it, two or three good pictures, religious and ordinary, and the man who looked after him was arranging the tea-things on the table in the middle of the room. And there was a nice wicker chair by a bright fire.

It was a thoroughly pleasant room; snug you would call it.

And, thank God, it was all over, anyhow . . .

It had been a horrible time for the last three months, up to an hour ago. First of all, there was the trouble; all over in a minute, that was, and couldn't be helped, though it was a pity, and the girl wasn't worth it. But then there was the getting out of the town.

He thought at first of just going about his ordinary business

and knowing nothing about it; he didn't think that anybody had seen him following Joe down to the river. Why not loaf about as usual, and say nothing, and go into the Ringland Arms for a pint?

It might be days before they found the body under the alders; and there would be an inquest, and all that. Would it be the best plan just to stick it out, and hold his tongue if the police came asking him questions?

But then, how could he account for himself and his doings that evening? He might say he went for a stroll in Bleadon Woods and home again without meeting anybody. There was nobody who could contradict him that he could think of.

And now, sitting in the snug room with the bright wall-paper, sitting in the cosy chair by the fire – all so different from the tales they told of such places – he wished he had stuck it out and faced it out, and let them come on and find out what they could.

But, then, he had got frightened. Lots of men had heard him swearing it would be 'outing dos' for Joe if he didn't leave the girl alone. And he had shown his revolver to Dick Haddon, and 'Lobster' Carey, and Finniman, and others, and then they would be fitting the bullet into the revolver, and it would be all up.

He got into a panic and shook with terror, and knew he could never stay in Ledham, not another hour.

Mrs Evans, his landlady, was spending the evening with her married sister at the other side of the town, and would not be back till eleven. He shaved off his stubbly black beard and moustache, and slunk out of town in the dark and walked all through the night by a lonely byroad, and got to Darnley, twenty miles away, in the morning in time to catch the London excursion.

There was a great crowd of people, and so far as he could see, nobody that he knew, and the carriages packed full of Darnleyites and Lockwood weavers all in high spirits and taking no notice of him. They all got out at Kings Cross, and he strolled about with the rest, and looked round here and there as they did and had a glass of beer at a crowded bar. He didn't see how anybody was to find out where he had gone.

He got a back room in a quiet street off the Caledonian Road, and waited. There was something in the evening paper that night, something that you couldn't very well make out. By the next day Joe's body was found, and they got to Murder – the doctor said it couldn't be suicide.

Then his own name came in, and he was missing and was

asked to come forward. And then he read that he was supposed to have gone to London, and he went sick with fear. He went hot and he went cold. Something rose in his throat and choked him. His hands shook as he held the paper; his head whirled with terror.

He was afraid to go home to his room because he knew he could not stay still in it; he would be tramping up and down, like a wild beast, and the landlady would wonder. And he was afraid to be in the streets, for fear a policeman would come behind him and put a hand on his shoulder.

There was a kind of small square round the corner and he sat down on one of the benches there and held up the paper before his face, with the children yelling and howling and playing all about him on the asphalt paths. They took no notice of him, and yet they were company of a sort; it was not like being all alone in that quiet little room. But it soon got dark and the man came to shut the gates.

And after that night: nights and days of horror and sick terrors that he never had known a man could suffer and live.

He had brought enough money to keep him for a while, but every time he changed a note he shook with fear, wondering whether it would be traced. What could he do? Where could he go? Could he get out of the country? But there were passports and papers of all sorts; that would never do.

He read that the police held a clue to the Ledham Murder Mystery; and he trembled to his lodgings and locked himself in and moaned in his agony, and then found himself chattering words and phrases at random, without meaning or relevance; strings of gibbering words: 'all right, all right, all right . . . yes, yes, yes, yes . . . there, there, there . . . well, well, well, well . . . ' just because he could not bear to sit still and silent, with that anguish tearing his heart, with that sick horror choking him, with that weight of terror pressing on his breast.

And then nothing happened; and a little, faint, trembling hope fluttered in his breast for a while, and for a day or two he felt he might have a chance after all.

One night he was in such a happy state that he ventured round to the little pub at the corner, and drank a bottle of Old Brown Ale with some enjoyment, and began to think of what life might be again, if by a miracle – he recognised, even then, that it would be a miracle – all this horror passed away, and he was once more just like other men, with nothing to be afraid of.

He was relishing the Brown Ale, and quite plucking up a spirit, when a chance phrase from the bar caught him: 'Looking for him not far from here, so they say.'

He left the glass of beer half full, and went out wondering whether he had the courage to kill himself that night. As a matter of fact, the men at the bar were talking about a recent and sensational cat burglar; but every such word was doom to this wretch.

And ever and again he would check himself in his horrors, in his mutterings and gibberings, and wonder with amazement that the heart of a man could suffer such bitter agony, such rending torment. It was as if he had found out and discovered – he alone of all men living – a new world of which no man before had ever dreamed, in which no man could believe, if he were told the story of it.

He had awakened in the past from such nightmares, now and again, as most men suffer. They were terrible, so terrible that he remembered two or three of them had oppressed him years before; but they were pure delight to what he now endured. Not endured, but writhed under as a worm twisting amid red, burning coals.

He went out into the streets, some noisy, some dull and empty, and considered in his panic-stricken confusion which he should choose. They were looking for him in that part of London; there was deadly peril in every step. The streets where people went to and fro and laughed and chattered might be the safer; he could walk with the others and seem to be one of them, and so be less likely to be noticed by those who were on his track.

But then, on the other hand, the great electric lamps made these streets almost as bright as day, and every feature of the passers-by was clearly seen. True, he was clean-shaven now, and the pictures of him in the papers showed a bearded man, and his own face in the glass still looked strange to him. Still, there were sharp eyes that could penetrate such disguises; and they might have brought down some man from Ledham who knew him well.

He was turning aside, making for a very quiet street close by, when he hesitated. This street, indeed, was still enough after dark, and not well lighted. It was a street of low, two-storied houses of grey brick that had grinned with three or four families in each house.

Tired men came home here after working hard all day, and people drew their blinds early and stirred very little abroad, and went early to bed; footsteps were rare in this street and in other streets into which it led, and the lamps were few and dim compared with those in the big thoroughfares.

And yet, the very fact that few people were about made such as were all the more noticeable and conspicuous. And the

police went slowly on their beats in the dark streets as in the bright, and with few people to look at, no doubt they looked more keenly at such as passed on the pavement.

In his world, that dreadful world that he had discovered and dwelt in alone, the darkness was brighter than the daylight, and solitude more dangerous than a multitude of men. He dared not go into the light; he feared the shadows, and went trembling to his room and shuddered there as the hours of the night went by; shuddered and gabbled to himself his infernal rosary; 'All right, all right, all right . . . splendid, splendid . . . that's the way, that's the way, that's the way . . . yes, yes, yes . . . first-rate, first-rate – ' gabbled in a low mutter to keep from howling like a wild beast.

It was somewhat in the manner of a wild beast that he beat and tore against the cage of his fate. Now and again it struck him as incredible. He would not believe that it was so. It was something that he would wake from, as he had waked from those nightmares that he remembered, for things did not really happen so. He could not believe it, he would not believe it.

Or, if it were so indeed, then all these horrors must be happening to some other man into whose torments he had mysteriously entered.

Or he had got into a book, into a tale which one read and shuddered at, but did not for one moment credit; all make-believe, it must be, and presumably everything would be all right again. And then the truth came down on him like a heavy hammer, and beat him down.

Now and then he tried to reason with himself. He forced himself to be sensible, as he put it; not to give way, to think of his chances. After all, it was three weeks since he had got into the excursion train at Darnley, and every day of freedom made his chances better.

These things often die down. There were lots of cases in which the police never got the man they were after. He lit his pipe and began to think things over quietly. It might be a good plan to give his landlady notice, and leave at the end of the week, and make for somewhere in South London, and try to get a job of some sort: that would help to put them off his track. He got up and looked thoughtfully out of the window; and caught his breath.

There outside the little newspaper shop opposite, was the bill of the evening paper; New Clue in Ledham Murder Mystery.

The moment came at last. He never knew the exact means by

which he was hunted down. As a matter of fact, a woman who knew him well happened to be standing outside Darnley station on the Excursion Day morning, and she had recognised him, in spite of his beardless chin.

And then, at the other end, his landlady, on her way upstairs, had heard his mutterings and gabblings, though the voice was low. She was interested, and curious, and a little frightened, and wondered if her lodger might be dangerous, and naturally she talked to her friends.

So the story trickled down to the ears of the police, and the police asked about the date of the lodger's arrival. And there you were. And there was our nameless friend, drinking a good, hot cup of tea, and polishing off the bacon and eggs with rare appetite; in the cosy room with the cheerful paper; otherwise the Condemned Cell.

OCCULT

'A great heretofore unpublished Howard story. A touch of fantasy: a touch of myth: a touch of terror!'

Coven, January 1970.

The Little People

by ROBERT E. HOWARD

My sister threw down the book she was reading. To be exact, she threw it at me.

'Foolishness!' said she. 'Fairy tales! Hand me that copy of Michael Arlen.'

I did so mechanically, glancing at the volume which had incurred her youthful displeasure. The story was *The Shining Pyramid* by Arthur Machen.

'My dear girl,' said I, 'this is a masterpiece of *outre* literature.'

'Yes, but the idea!' she answered. 'I outgrew fairy tales when I was ten.'

'This tale is not intended to be an exponent of common-day realism,' I explained patiently.

'Too far-fetched,' she said, with the finality of seventeen. 'I like to read about things that could happen – who were "The Little People" he speaks of – the same old elf and troll business?'

'All legends have a base of fact,' I said. 'There is a reason. . . . '

'You mean to tell me such things actually existed?' she exclaimed. 'Rot!'

'Not so fast young lady,' I admonished, slightly nettled. 'I mean that all myths had a concrete beginning which was later

changed and twisted so as to take on a supernatural significance. Young people,' I continued, bending a brotherly frown on her pouting lips, 'have a way of either accepting entirely or rejecting entirely such things as they do not understand. The "Little People" spoken of by Machen are supposed to be descendants of the prehistoric people who inhabited Europe before the Celts came down out of the north.

'They are known variously as Turanians, Picts, Mediterraneans, and Garlic Eaters. A race of small dark people, traces of their type may be found in primitive sections of Europe and Asia today, among the Basques of Spain, the Scots of Galloway, and the Lapps.

'They were workers in flint and are known to anthropologists as men of the Neolithic, or polished stone; age. Relics of their age show plainly that they had reached a comparatively high stage of primitive culture by the beginning of the bronze age, which was ushered in by the ancestors of the Celts – our prehistoric tribesmen, young lady.

'These destroyed or enslaved the Mediterranean peoples and were in turn ousted by the Teutonic tribes. All over Europe, and especially in Britain, the legend is that these Picts, whom the Celts looked upon as scarcely human, fled to caverns under the earth and lived there, coming out only at night, when they would burn, murder, and carry off children for their bloody rites of worship. Doubtless there was much in this theory. Descendants of cave people, these fleeing dwarves would no doubt take refuge in caverns and no doubt managed to live undiscovered for generations.'

'That was a long time ago,' she said with slight interest. 'If there were ever any of those people, they are dead now. Why, we're right in the country where they're supposed to perform, and we haven't seen any signs of them.'

I nodded. My sister Joan did not react to the weird West country as I did. The immense menhirs and cromlechs which rose starkly upon the moors seemed to bring back vague memories, stirring my Celtic imagination.

'Maybe,' I said, adding unwisely, 'You heard what that old villager said: the warning about walking on the fen at night. No one does it. You're very sophisticated, young lady, but I'll bet you wouldn't spend a night alone in that stone ruin we can see from my window.'

Down came her book and her eyes sparkled with interest.

'I'll do it!' she exclaimed. 'I'll show you! He did say no one would go near those old rocks at night, didn't he? I will, and stay there the rest of the night!'

She was on her feet instantly, and I saw that I had made a mistake.

'No you won't, either,' I vetoed. 'What would people think?'

'What do I care what they think?' she retorted in the up-to-date spirit of the Younger Generation.

'You haven't any business out on the moors at night,' I answered. 'Granting that these old myths are so much empty wind, there are plenty of shady characters who wouldn't hesitate to harm a helpless girl. It's not safe for a girl like you to be out unprotected.'

'You mean I'm too pretty?' she asked naïvely.

'I mean you're too foolish,' I answered in my best older brother manner.

She made a face at me and was silent for a moment, and I who could read her agile mind with absurd ease, could tell by her pensive features and sparkling eyes exactly what she was thinking. She was mentally surrounded by a crowd of her cronies back home, and I could guess the exact words which she was already framing: 'My dears, I spent a whole night in the most romantic old ruin in West England, which was supposed to be haunted – '

I silently cursed myself for bringing the subject up, when she said abruptly; 'I'm going to do it, just the same. Nobody will harm me, and I wouldn't pass up the adventure for anything!'

'Joan,' said, 'I forbid you to go out alone tonight or any other night.'

Her eyes flashed, and I instantly wished I had couched my command in more tactful language. My sister was wilful and high-spirited, used to having her way and very impatient of restraint.

'You can't order me around,' she flamed. 'You've done nothing but bully me ever since we left America.'

'It's been necessary,' I sighed. 'I can think of a number of pastimes more pleasant than touring Europe with a flapper sister.'

Her mouth opened as if to reply angrily; then she shrugged her slim shoulders and settled back down in her chair, taking up a book.

'All right, I didn't want to go much anyhow,' she remarked casually. I eyed her suspiciously; she was not usually subdued so easily. In fact, some of the most harrowing moments of my life have been those in which I was forced to cajole and coax her out of a rebellious mood.

Nor was my suspicion entirely vanquished when, a few moments later, she announced her intention of retiring, and

went to her room just across the corridor.

I turned out the light and stepped over to my window, which opened upon a wide view of the barren, undulating wastes of the moor. The moon was just rising, and the land glimmered grisly and stark beneath its cold beams. It was late summer and the air was warm, yet the whole landscape looked cold, bleak and forbidding. Across the fen I saw rise, stark and shadowy, the rough and mighty spires of the ruined cromlech. Gaunt and terrible, they loomed against the night, silent phantoms from the past.

Sleep did not come to me at once, for I was hurt at my sister's evident resentment, and I lay for a long time, brooding and staring at the window, now framed boldly in the molten silver of the moon. At length I dropped into a troubled slumber, through which flitted vague dreams wherein dim, ghostly shapes glided and leered.

I awoke suddenly, sat up and stared about me wildly, striving to orientate my muddled senses. An oppressive feeling as of impending evil hovered about me. Fading swiftly as I came to full consciousness, lurked the eery remembrance of a hazy dream wherein a white fog had floated through the window and had assumed the shape of a tall, white-bearded man who had shaken my shoulder as if to arouse me from sleep. All of us are familiar with the curious sensations of waking from a bad dream – the dimming and dwindling of partly remembered thoughts and feelings. But the wider awake I became, the stronger grew the suggestion of evil.

I sprang up, snatched on my clothing, and rushed to my sister's room and flung open the door. The room was unoccupied.

I raced down the stairs and accosted the night clerk who was maintained by the small hotel for some obscure reason.

'Miss Costigan, sir? She came down, clad for outdoors, a while after midnight – about half an hour ago, sir, and said she was going to take a stroll on the moor and not to be alarmed if she did not return at once, sir.'

I hurled myself out of the hotel, my pulse pounding a devil's tattoo. Far out across the fen I saw the ruins, bold and grim against the moon, and in that direction I hastened. At length – it seemed hours – I saw a slim figure some distance in front of me. The girl was taking her time and in spite of her start on me, I was gaining – she soon would be within hearing distance. My breath was already coming in gasps from my exertions, but I quickened my pace.

The aura of the fen was like a tangible presence, pressing

upon me, weighting my limbs – and always that presentiment of evil grew and grew.

Then, far ahead of me, I saw my sister stop suddenly and look about confusedly. The moonlight flung a veil of illusion; I could see her, but I could not see what caused her sudden terror. I broke into a run, my blood leaping wildly and suddenly freezing as a wild, despairing scream burst out and sent the echoes flying.

The girl was turning first one way and then another, and I screamed for her to run toward me. She heard me and started toward me, running like a frightened antelope – and then I *saw*. Vague shadows darted about her, short, dwarfish shapes; just in front of me rose a solid wall of them, and I saw that they had blocked her from gaining to me. Suddenly, instinctively I believe, she turned and raced for the stone columns, the whole horde after her, save those who remained to bar my path.

I had no weapon, nor did I feel the need for any. A strong, athletic youth, I was in addition an amateur boxer of ability, with a terrific punch in either hand. Now all the primal instincts surged in me. I was a cave man bent on vengeance against a tribe which sought to steal a woman of my family. I did not fear; I only wished to close with them. Aye, though the whole spawn of Hell rise up from those caverns which honeycomb the moors. Aye, I recognised these – I knew them of old, and all the old wars rose and roared within the misty caverns of my soul. Hate leaped in me as in the old days when men of my blood came from the North.

Now I was almost upon those who barred my way. I saw plainly the stunted bodies, the gnarled limbs, the beady reptilian eyes that stared unwinkingly, the grotesque, square faces with their inhuman features, and the shimmer of flint daggers in their crooked hands. Then with a tigerish leap I was among them like a leopard among jackals, and details were blotted out in a whirling red haze. Whatever they were, they were of living substance; features crumpled and bones shattered beneath my flailing fists and blood darkened the moon-silvered stones. A flint dagger sank hilt deep in my thigh. Then the ghastly throng broke each way and fled before me, as their ancestors fled before mine, leaving four silent dwarfish shapes stretched on the moor.

Heedless of my wound, I took up the grim race anew. Joan had reached the druidic ruins now, and she leaned against one of the columns, exhausted, blindly seeking there the protection in obedience to some dim instinct, just as women of her blood had done in bygone ages.

The horrid beings that pursued her were closing in upon

her. They would reach her before I. God knows the thing was horrible enough, but back in the recesses of my mind, grimmer horrors were whispering: dream memories wherein stunted creatures pursues white-limbed women across such fens as these. Lurking memories of the ages when dawns were young and men struggled with forces which were not of men.

The girl toppled forward in a faint, and lay at the foot of the towering column in a piteous white heap. And they closed in – closed in. What they would do I knew not, but the ghosts of ancient memory whispered that they would do something of hideous evil, something foul and grim.

From my lips burst a scream, wild and inarticulate, born of sheer elemental horror and despair. I could not reach her before those fiends had worked their frightful will upon her. The centuries, the ages swept back. This was it as it had been in the beginning. And what followed, I know not how to explain, but I think that that wild shriek whispered back down the long reaches of Time to the Beings my ancestors worshipped, and that blood answered blood. Aye, such a shriek as could echo down the dusty corridors of lost ages and bring back from the whispering abyss of Eternity the ghost of the only one who could save a girl of Celtic blood.

The foremost of the beings were almost upon the prostrate girl; their hands were clutching for her, when suddenly beside her a form stood. There was no gradual materialising; the figure leaped suddenly into being, etched bold and clear in the moonlight. A tall, white-bearded man, clad in long robes – the man I had seen in my dream! A druid, answering once more the desperate need of people of his race. His brow was high and noble, his eyes mystic and far-seeing – so much I could see, even from where I ran. His arm rose in an imperious gesture, and the beings shrunk back – back – back –. They broke and fled, vanishing suddenly, and I sank to my knees beside my sister, gathering the child into my arms. A moment I looked up at the man, sword and shield against the powers of darkness, as in the world's youth. He raised his hand above us as if in benediction; then he too vanished suddenly, and the moor lay bare and silent.

SUPERNATURAL

'Thousands of years in the Past he died, but the scars remained even in a new life. One of Henry S. Whitehead's few unpublished stories.'

Amazing Stories, July 1946.

Scar Tissue

by HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

What is your opinion on the Atlantis question?' I asked my friend Dr Pelletier of the U.S. Navy, as he relaxed during the afternoon swizzle hour on my West Gallery. He waved a deprecating hand.

'All the real evidence points to it, doesn't it, Canevin? The harbor here in St Thomas, for instance. Crater of a volcano. What could bring a crater down to sea-level like that, unless the submergence of quadrillions of tons of earth and rock, or the submergence of a continent?' Then: 'What made you ask me that, Canevin?'

'A case,' I replied. 'Picked him up yesterday morning just after he had jumped ship from that Spanish tram, the *Bilbao*, that was coaling at the West India Docks yesterday morning. She pulled out this afternoon without him. Says his name is Joe Smith. A rough and tough bird, if I ever saw one. Up against it. They were crowding him pretty heavily, according to his story. Extra watches. Hazing. Down with the damned gringo! Looks as if he could handle himself, too – hard as nails. I've got him right here in the house.'

'What are you keeping him shut up for?' inquired Pelletier lazily. 'There isn't anybody on his trail now, is there?'

'No,' I said. 'But he was all shot to pieces from lack of sleep.

Red rims around his eyes. He's upstairs, asleep, probably dead to the world. I looked in on him an hour ago.'

'What bearing has the alleged Joe Smith on Atlantis?' Pelletier's tone was still lazily curious.

'Well,' I said, 'Smith looks to me as though he had one of those dashes of "ancestral memory", like the fellow Kipling tells about, the one who "remembered" being a slave at the oars, and how a Roman galley was put together. Only, this isn't any measly two thousand years ago. This is – '

Pelletier straightened in his lounge-chair.

'Good God, Canevin! And he's here – in this house?'

Twenty minutes later Smith stepped out on the gallery. He looked vastly different from the beachcomber I had picked up near the St Thomas market-place the morning before. He was tall and spare, and my white drill clothes might have been made for him. He was cleanly shaven and his step was alert.

Pelletier did most of the talking. He established a quick footing with Smith with an obvious view to getting his story of the 'buried memory' which the fellow had mentioned to me, and which pointed, he had hinted, at Atlantis.

At the end of ten minutes or so, Pelletier surprised me.

'What was your college, Smith?' he inquired.

'Harvard, and Oxford,' he answered. 'Rhodes Scholar. Took my M.A. at Balliol. Yes, of course, Dr Pelletier. Ask me anything you like. This "buried memory" affair has come on me three different times, as a matter of fact. Always when I'm below par physically, a bit run down, vitality lower than normal. I mentioned it to Mr Canevin yesterday – sensed that he would be interested. I've read his stuff, you see, for the past dozen years or so!'

I was getting interested myself now.

'Tell us about it,' invited Pelletier, and Joe Smith proceeded to do so:

'It began when I was a small boy, after scarlet fever. I got up too soon and went swimming, had a relapse, and the next three or four days lying in bed, I "realised" that I was *memoriter familiar* with a previous life in which I wore clothing of animal skins and used stone-headed clubs. I had the ability to run long distances and go up and down trees without much effort, and could easily club a bear to death. The thing passes off, dims out, although the recollection remained quite clear, as soon as I was well again.

'The second time was after the Spring track-meet with Yale when I was twenty-one. I had run in the 220, and then, half an hour later, I put everything I had into a quarter-mile,

and won it. I lay around and rested according to my trainer's orders for a week – not even reading a book. Then I "remembered" – not the cave-life this time – but Africa. Portuguese and Negroes; enormous buildings, some of them with walls sixteen feet thick. Granite quarries and the Portuguese sweating the Blacks in some ancient gold mines. There were two rivers. I fished in them a great deal, with a big iron hook. They were called, the rivers, I mean, the Lindi and the Sobi.

'Curious kind of place. There was one enormous ruin, a circular tower on top of a round hill which was formed by an outcropping in the granite. There was a procession of bulls carved around the pediment. Yes, and the signs of the Zodiac.'

Southern Rhodesia!' I cried out. 'The Portuguese controlled it in the Fifteenth Century, before Columbus' time. Why, man, that place is the traditional site of Solomon's gold mines!'

'Right!' Smith remarked, turning an intelligent eye in my direction. 'It was pronounced in those days – "Zim-baub-weh" – accent on the first syllable. I've often wondered if it wasn't the Romans who carved those bulls, they had the place first, called it *Anaeropolis*. Plenty of legionaries were Mithraists, and the bull was Mithras' symbol, you know.'

'And the last one, Smith,' Pelletier cut in. 'You mentioned Atlantis, Canevin tells me.'

'Well,' began Smith once more, 'the fact that it was Atlantis is, really secondary. There is one item in *that* "memory" which is of very much greater interest, I should imagine.

'I don't want to be theatrical, gentlemen! But – well, I think the best way to begin telling you it is to show you this.'

He rose and loosened his belt, pulled up his shirt and singlet, exposing a bronzed torso. Beginning a half-inch above his right hip-bone and extending straight across as though laid out with a ruler across the abdomen, ran a livid, inch-wide scar, cut to eventually form scar-tissue.

Joe Smith tucked in his shirt, tightened his belt, and sat down again. 'That's where it begins,' he said, and, as my houseman, Stephen Penn, appeared at this moment with the dinner-cocktails, he added: 'I'll tell you about it after dinner.'

It was Pelletier who started things off as soon as we were settled on the gallery again, with coffee and Chartreuse before us.

'I want to know, please, how you happen to be alive.'

Smith smiled wryly.

'I never told this before,' he said, 'and if I was somewhat pre-

occupied during dinner it was because I've been figuring out how to put it all together for you.

'It's hard to put into words but it seemed as if I were walking through a short enclosed passageway, rather wide, stone-flagged, and low-ceilinged. In front of me, beside me, and behind me, walked eighteen or twenty others, all of us armed. Up in front of us, in bronze armor, and closing our rear, marched eight legionaries of the Ludektan army assigned to us as guards.

'We came out into the drenching sunlight of a great sanded arena. We followed our advance guard in a sharp turn to the right and wheeled to the right-face before a great awninged box full of the Ludektan nobles and dignitaries, where we saluted.

'Do you get that picture? Here we were, prisoners of war – after a couple of months of the hardest training I have ever known, in the Ludektan gladitorial school, about to shed our blood to make an Atlantean holiday!

'The really tough part of it was the uncertainty. I mean a fellow might be paired to fight one of his friends. But I was fortunate that day. I was paired with a Gamfron – a nearly black Atlantean mountain lion, an animal about the size and heft of an Indian black panther – Bagheera, in Kipling's Mowgli yarn! I had been armed with a short, sharp, double-edged sword and a small bronze buckler. Otherwise I had been given choice of my own accoutrement and I had selected greaves, a light breast-plate and a close-fitting helmet with a face-guard attachment with eye holes, covering practically my whole face and the back and sides of my neck.

'When it came to my turn to step out on the sand and wait for the lion to be released, I asked the official in charge for permission to discard the buckler and use an additional weapon, a long dagger, in my left hand. I received the permission, and at the signal-blast which was made with a ram's horn, walked slowly towards the cage-entrance. I had noted that the sun was shining directly, full against that particular iron door.

'My strategy worked precisely as I had hoped.

The great beast came out blinking. Before its cat eyes became adjusted to the sun's glare I launched myself upon it, and when I sprang away, the hilt of that dagger was sticking in the Gamfron's back. The beast rolled over in the sand, hoping, I suppose, to dislodge the dagger. The hilt was twisted, I noticed, when the Gamfron again crouched for its leap at me.'

'In the split seconds before it launched itself at me I could

hear the wild tumult from the stands. The crowd swayed hysterically – screaming for blood. Mine.

'I side-stepped as the beast charged, but instead of trying another slash, I whirled, and as the beast plowed up the sand beside me, I threw myself upon it and thrust my sword into the soft flesh of its throat, severing the jugular. Then, my feet and legs wedged hard under the animal's flanks. I reached under its jaws, swinging backward from the fulcrum of my knees and hauled the Gamfron's head backwards towards me.

'The snap could be heard throughout the arena. The great beast relaxed under me. I recovered my sword, stood up, placed my right foot upon the carcass and held up my sword toward the notables in a rigid salute.

'The next thing I was directly conscious of was a hand falling on my left shoulder. I relaxed, let down my sword, and heard the voice of the official in charge of the gladiators telling me that I was reprieved. I stumbled along beside him around the edge of the arena under a continuous shower of felt hats and gold and silver coin until I felt the grateful shade of a stone passage-way on my almost melting back, and a minute later, with my armor off, I was being doused from head to foot with buckets of cold water.

'It was perhaps twenty minutes later when the official in charge of the gladiators came into the small stone-flagged room where I was tying the thongs of my sandals.

'The people demand your presence in the arena,' he announced from just inside the doorway. I rose and bowed in his direction. A public gladiator in the Ludekta had the status of a slave. Then the official announced: "You have been chosen to fight Godbor as the day's concluding event – come!"

'Half way along the passageway the official turned to me, whispering with earnestness and vehemency directly into my ear. And when he had finished I was a new man! Gone now were all the feelings of rebellious hatred which his announcement at the rubbing-room door had raised up in me. He turned and led the way out into the arena. And I followed him now, gladly, eagerly, my head up and my heart beating high.

'A thunderous roar greeted us, and the massed thousands rose in their seats like one man. A black slave stepping towards us from the barrier handed a bulging leather sack to the official. He took it and spoke to me over his shoulder. "These are your coins that were thrown into the ring. I will keep them safely for you".

'Then we proceeded to a point directly before the great can-

opied enclosure of the nobles. Here, after saluting with my arms and hands straight up above my head and not giving their spokesman an opportunity to address me, I put into immediate effect what my unsuspecting friend had whispered in my ear.

'I will fight Godbor to the death,' I shouted.

'A deafening howl went up from the multitude. I waited quietly until the tumult died and then as soon as I could be heard once more I addressed the nobles.

' "My Lords, I have proclaimed my willingness to please you despite the Ludektan Law which requires no man to fight twice in the arena on the same day. I beseech your nobility therefore, in return for this my good will to meet your desire, that you accord me my liberty, if I survive."

'There was a deathly silence about the arena, while the nobles consulted together.

'I stood there, rigid, waiting for this decision which meant far more than life or death to me. I could see the right arms of the members of that vast concourse being raised in the Ludektan voting gesture of approval.

'Then, as Bothon, who had been generalissimo of all the Ludektan armies, rose in his place to give me my answer, that sharp humming sound stilled and died and twenty thousand men and women leaned forward on their benches to hear the decision. Bothon was both terse and explicit.

'The petition is granted,' he announced.

'Remembering clearly all that the arena official had told me, I waited once more until I could be heard, and when that instant arrived I saluted the nobles and said:

' "I would gladly slay the traitorous dog Godbor without reward, o illustrious, for not even yourselves, who deprived him of his Ludektan citizenship and condemned him to the arena, are better aware of his infamy than we of Lemuria who refused to profit by his treachery. I petition you that the rules which are to govern our combat be stated here, in his presence and mine, that there be no treachery but a fair fight."

'At this, which had been listened to in a dead silence that was almost painful, the mob on the benches broke out again. Watching the nobles' enclosure I saw Bothon turning his eyes to those about him. When he had gathered their decisions he turned to me and made the sign of approval.

Back in the preparation rooms with the chief official himself over-looking every detail, I got myself ready for my last fight in the arena. I was very well aware that I was now confronted with the most serious ordeal of my life. Not only had I spent most of my strength in that conflict with the wild beast, but

also I was about to encounter in the traitor Godbor, one of the most skillful and tricky hand-to-hand fighters that the Ludektan army had ever produced. He would be fresh, too.

'At high noon, Godbor who had been similarly prepared in another room, walked beside me in the usual form of procession, proceeding through the passageway and into the blinding glare, shortly to stand side by side listening to Bothon repeat the rules of the combat.

'And then on a great square of freshly pressed and dampened sand we two stood facing each other tensed for a conflict which one or the other would never leave.

'At the single blast from the herald's horn I leaped at my enemy. He had started forward at the same instant himself. I caught his descending blade squarely on the knop of my bronze buckler, relaxing my left arm to lessen the shock of the blow, at the same time delivering a thrust above Godbor's buckler. The fresh-ground razor-like point of my sword struck his upper shoulder, severing the tendon and rendering his left arm useless. I made a rapid recovery, but the equally swift forward leap of Godbor brought him breast to breast with me. He managed to shift his sword into a dagger-like position, and I was barely able to divert the stabbing stroke which he aimed for my left side.

'We backed away from each other then for, according to the stated rules of the combat, our initial attack-and-defence was completed. Then I lowered my sword as I saw Godbor drooping forward, his knees sagging under him, his eyes closing. As I stood there, waiting for him to recover himself, he suddenly dropped off the buckler from his left arm, and, launching himself forward, drove the bronze helmet he wore against my chest.

'I went crashing down under the terrific blow and I could hear very clearly, rising above everything, the howl of rage which rose from the spectators on every side.

'Then, Godbor was upon me, his face a distorted mask of hatred. His sword slashed into my right hip bone and across the lower and unprotected edge of my ribs.

'A dull-red cloud descended upon me, and a vicious stab of pain that swelled with each second. My fast-dimming eyes caught the edge of the strange spectacle of the people of the benches leaping down on the sand in their dozens and scores and hundreds, pouring over the barriers into the arena like cascades.

'And, with the dimming chorus of their massed roars of hate in my ears, I let go of life.'

*

Joe Smith ceased speaking, rose, and walked over to the centre table. I noticed that his hands trembled as he poured himself out the second drink he had taken since he had been in my house. Deep lines, too, that had not shown before dinner, were in his clean-shaven face. It was evident that the telling of his strange tale had done something to him. He settled in his chair again before either Pelletier or I offered any comment.

'I imagine Godbor didn't survive you very long,' I said. 'That mob probably took him apart.'

Smith nodded. 'He was very unpopular – execrated, in fact.'

Pelletier's comments were in an entirely different vein.

'I beg of you, don't misunderstand me, Smith, but most people would say it's a wonderful yarn, as a yarn, but that's all. Atlantis, Zimbabwe, that cave-boy stuff! That scar of yours for a point of departure; well-known facts, open to any reader, about the ancestral memory theory; and all of 'em worked up into a yarn that is, I grant you, a corncracker! Exactly right, you see, for a couple of fellows like Canevin and me, known to be interested in out-of-the ordinary matters. That, I say, is what the majority of people would say. I'm not insulting you by putting it that way myself. I merely call attention to the fact that there isn't a thing in it that couldn't have been put together by a clever story-teller.'

Smith merely nodded. 'Precisely as you put it,' he said. 'Precisely, except for this.'

And he rose from his chair, once again loosened his belt, and exposed that frightful scar.

Pelletier, the surgeon uppermost at once, got up, came over to Smith, and peered closely at it.

'H'm,' he remarked, 'the real mystery isn't in that yarn, Smith. It's in how you ever survived this! The breadth of this scar shows that the wound must have been several inches deep. It cut straight through the intestines and just about bisected the spleen. Such a cut would kill a man in a few minutes.'

'It did, as I told you,' said Smith, a little crisply.

'My dear man!' protestingly, from Pelletier.

But Joe Smith remained entirely unruffled.

'You know, of course, what scar-tissue feels like to the touch,' he said. 'Run your hand over this, Doctor. Then tell us if you ever felt any other scar-tissue like it. It *looks* like any other scar, of course.'

Pelletier did as requested, his attitude plainly sceptical. But he straightened up from the examination with a very different look on his face.

'Good God!' he breathed. 'There's nothing to feel! This thing only *looks* like scar tissue! What – ?'

Smith carefully tucked in his shirt.

'It's precisely the way I told it to you. I was born without any appearance of a scar, although it falls within the classification of so-called "birth-marks". It did not begin to appear until I was twenty-seven. That was my age when I died there in the arena, from that wound in the same place, just as I told you.'

Pelletier looked at Joe Smith in blank silence. Then he asked, 'Did you have it on you during those two other "memory-experiences" you spoke of, as a cave boy, or there in Africa in the Fifteenth Century?'

'No,' Smith replied. 'I suppose the reason is that I was not yet twenty-seven years of age in either of those two experiences.'

'Well, I'll take your word for it all, Smith,' said Pelletier. 'It's been mighty interesting.'

The two of them bowed to each other, Pelletier smiling whimsically, Joe Smith's tired, lined face inscrutable.

Just after this Pelletier took his departure.

Half an hour later – it must have been about eleven – Smith rapped on the door of my bedroom. He was in pajamas and bathrobe, and wearing a pair of my spare slippers.

'Would you like to hear the rest of it?' he asked, coming in and taking a chair. He placed something he had been carrying beside him on the wide chair's cushion.

'There isn't much more of it,' he remarked, 'but I'd rather like you to hear it all together.'

'Fire away,' I invited, settling myself.

'That "birth-mark" of mine,' he began, 'isn't the only thing I could have shown you this evening. I had *this* around my waist, too!'

He reached down beside him and unrolled the thing he had brought into my room. It was a pigskin money-belt.

'There's between seven and eight hundred pounds in this,' he remarked, laying it on the table beside him, 'in Bank of England notes. I thought you might put it in your safe until tomorrow, and then I'll put it in the bank. And now, here's the rest of my story.

'I'd been on board the *Bilbao* nearly two months when we struck this port of St Thomas to coal. It was, to be precise, the fourteenth of August when I went on board her, in Santander. Three days before that, while I was sitting eating my dinner, a big fellow came in and took a table across the room from me. I didn't particularly take note of him except that he was big. He had an ugly face that seemed vaguely familiar.

'Then quite suddenly, it broke upon me. I knew who he was!

It was "Godbor", Canevin – Godbor to the life! The man who had killed me in the arena!

'I sat there, and just sweated. I remembered putting my face between my hands, my elbows on the table, and feeling just plain sick.

'And then he moved over to my table and sat down.

'He was civil enough. His name was Fernando Lopez. He was the first mate of the *Bilbao*, just arrived in Santander harbor, expecting to clear for Buenos Aires three or four days from then.

'Lopez proposed that we eat together. Somehow I couldn't refuse. There was almost a weird fascination about the man. While we ate I told him I was a painter and required as much time to myself, including mealtime, as I could get. I spoke, of course, without trying to insult him, but nevertheless giving the impression I wanted to be alone. But it was no use.

'We drank together, and within a few hours I had passed out. When I awoke it was morning – the morning of the day the *Bilbao* was to clear from Santander, about seven o'clock. And then I found my money-belt gone! Fernando Lopez, too, was gone! He had probably gone on board, I figured, ready for the ship's departure, confident that he had made a clean get-away.'

'He saw me, as soon as I came on board. I charged him flatly with the theft. He made no bones about it, admitted he had taken the money-belt from me after I passed out, and had it down in his cabin. I demanded its return and he shrugged, walking toward his cabin.

'As I walked in after him, something struck me over the head. I came to in a berth, with my hands ironed; and a head that seemed too big for my body.

'For three days I sweated through a period that was like a nightmare.

'The captain, an old man named Chico Perez, who was Lopez' uncle, forced me to sign on. I was watched every minute and given the work of two men to do.

'They ironed me again the day we put into Buenos Aires. Lopez was taking no chances on my jumping ship and reporting him. Then, two days after we cleared from there, the old captain disappeared. I have no doubts in my own mind about what happened to him. Lopez probably threw him overboard.

'That fact I imagine, saved me. You see, the entire crew had sailed with the old man, who was a part owner of the ship. Lopez, while he now commanded the *Bilbao*, did not dare to

risk mutiny if another member of the ship's company "disappeared" in the same manner.

'We made four or five other South American ports, Cartagena last of all, and then we were put in to St Thomas for coal. This was the first American port of the voyage. I picked up a little hope.

'We were actually in sight of St Thomas when I got my chance. It was about five o'clock in the evening, four days ago. I was on deck, and we had just made our landfall. Lopez was coming towards me across the deck. I waited until he was within a few feet of me, and then I lunged forward. My fist hit Lopez' jaw, knocking him flat on the deck.

'He was up almost instantly, snarling, and a knife appeared in his hand. I ducked his first rush and tripped him as he swept by me. His knife clattered on the deck as he hit it.

'I lunged forward and my fingers closed over the blade. I don't know what happened next, but suddenly the knife was imbedded in Lopez' back and I was on my feet, trembling with a cold sweat.

'One by one the crew members walked up. They all seemed to be smiling at me.

'I watched the knife being withdrawn from Lopez' body by one of them, and then, five men quietly heaved the body overboard.

'Nothing was said to me. There was no report, no investigation after we anchored in St Thomas Harbor.

'I had gone straight down to Lopez' cabin after the money-belt, put it on, and came back on deck.

'No one stopped me when I went ashore. I imagine that that ship's family was only too glad to get rid of the fellow who had relieved them of Fernando Lopez. The rest of it you know, Canevin. I might add that I haven't the smallest possible regret over killing Lopez. If those "ancestral memories" of mine are authentic, I have killed before, but never in *this life*, certainly.'

Joe Smith sat silent, and I sat across from behind him and looked at him. The only thing I could think of to ask, seemed an incongruity after what I had listened to that day! However I had to ask it.

'What is your real name Smith?' I inquired.

He stared at me.

'Joe Smith,' he said.

I nodded then. 'I'll put your money in the safe and we'll go to the bank with it in the morning.'

I saw him out, and picked up the money-belt from the table

and carried it over to my house-safe standing in the corner of my bedroom.

I opened the safe and was about to lay the belt inside when I felt something rough against my hand. I turned it about and looked. A name was embossed upon the fine pigskin leather of the other side. I held it up to the light to read it. I read:

'JOSEPHUS TROY SMITH'

I put the belt inside and closed and locked the safe.

Then I came back and sat down in the chair where I had listened to my guest's recital of his recent adventure aboard the Spanish tramp steamer *Bilbao*.

Josephus Troy Smith. It wasn't so vastly different from 'Joe Smith', and yet what a different viewpoint that full name had given me! Josephus Troy Smith, America's foremost landscapist Josephus Troy Smith! I recalled now whom I was having the honor of entertaining here in my house on Denmark Hill, St Thomas, Virgin Islands of the U.S.A. He was an eccentric artist, Josephus Troy Smith – or was he . . .

MACABRE

'The peculiar man had a grim part to play in the town's misfortune.'

Harper's Magazine, April 1898.

The Hero of the Plague

by W. C. MORROW

On a sweltering July day a long and ungainly shadow, stretching thirty feet upon the ground, crept noiselessly up an avenue leading to a fashionable hotel at a great summer resort. The sun was setting, and its slanting rays caused the shadow to assume the appearance of an anamorphosis of ludicrous proportions. It was a timid shadow – perhaps a shadow of strange and unnerving experiences.

The original of it was worthy of study. He was a short, stout, stoop-shouldered man: his hair was ragged and dusty, his beard straggling and scant. His visible clothing consisted of a slouch hat, torn around the rim and covered with dust, a woollen shirt, a pair of very badly soiled cotton trousers, braces made of raw-hide strips, fastened to his trousers with wooden pins, and the strangest of old boots, which turned high up at the toes like canoes being much too long for his feet, and which had a rakish aspect.

The man's face was a protest against hilarity. Apparently, he had all the appurtenances of natural manhood, yet his whole expression would have at once aroused sympathy, for it was a mixture of childishness, confidence, timidity humility, and honesty. His look was vague and uncertain, and seemed to be searching hopelessly for a friend – for the guidance of natures

that were stronger and minds that were clearer. He could not have been older than thirty-five years, and yet his hair and beard were grey, and his face was lined with wrinkles. Occasionally he would make a movement as if to ward off a sudden and vicious blow.

He carried a knotty stick, and his ample trousers-pockets were filled to such an extent that they made him appear very wide in the hips and very narrow in the shoulders. Their contents were a mystery. The pockets at least produced the good effect of toning down the marvellous ellipticity of his legs, and in doing this they performed a valuable service.

'Hullo! Who are you?' gruffly demanded a porter employed in the hotel, as the disreputable-looking man was picking his way with great nicety up the broad interior stairs, afraid that his dusty boots would deface the polished brasses under foot.

'Baker,' promptly replied the man, in a small timid voice, coming to a halt and humbly touching his hat.

'Baker? Well, what's your other name?'

'Mine?'

'Yes, yours.'

The stranger was evidently puzzled by the question. He looked vacantly around the ceiling until his gaze rested upon a glass chandelier above him: but, finding no assistance there, his glance wandered to an oriel, in which there was a caged mocking-bird.

'Jess Baker – that's all,' he answered at last, in his thin voice, and slow earnest manner.

'What! don't know your other name?'

'No, I reckon not, said Baker, after a thoughtful pause. 'I reckin it's Jess Baker – that's all.'

'Didn't they ever call you anything else?'

'Me?'

'Yes, you.'

Again Baker looked helplessly around until he found the chandelier, and then his eyes sought the oriel. Then he started as if he had received a blow, and immediately reached down and felt his ankles.

'Yes, Sir,' he answered.

'What was it?'

'Hunder'd'n One,' he quietly said, looking at his questioner with a shade of fear and suspicion in his face.

The porter believed that a lunatic stood before him. He asked –

'Where are you from?'

'Georgy.'

'What part of Georgia?'

Again was Baker at sea, and again did he seek the chandelier and the oriel.

'Me?' he asked.

'Yes, you. What part of Georgia are you from?'

'Jess Georgy,' he finally said.

'What do you want here?'

'Well, I'll tell you. I want you to hire me,' he replied, with a faint look of expectancy.

'What can you do?'

'Me?'

'Yes, you.'

'Oh, well, I'll tell you. Most everything.'

'What salary do you want?'

'Me?'

'Of course, you.'

'Want?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, well, about five dollars a day, I reckin.'

The porter laughed coarsely. 'You needn't talk to me about it,' he said; 'I'm not the proprietor.'

'The which?' asked Baker.

'The boss.'

'Oh, ain't you?' and then he looked very much puzzled indeed.

The porter had had sufficient amusement, and so he demanded, in a brusque and menacing tone, 'Now, say – you get away from here quick! We don't want no crazy tramps around here. You understand?'

Baker did not stir, but stood looking helplessly at the porter, surprised and grieved.

'Get out, I say, or I'll set the dogs on you!'

A look of deep mortification settled on Baker's face, but he was not frightened; he did not move a muscle, except to glance quickly around for the dogs.

'Ain't you going, you crazy old tramp? If you don't, I'll lock you up and send for the sheriff'; and the porter rattled some keys in his pocket.

Instantly a great horror overspread the countenance of Baker from Georgia. He looked wildly about and seemed ready to run, and laboured with an imaginary weight that clung to his ankles. He took a single step in his agitation, and suddenly realised that no such encumbrance detained him. He shook off the delusion and sprang to the bottom of the stairs. His whole appearance had changed. Humility had given way to uncontrollable fear, and he had become a fleeing wild beast that was hunted for its life. He sprang through the outer door and

reached the ground in another bound, and gathered his strength for immediate flight from terrors without a name.

'Stop, there!' called a stern, full voice.

Baker obeyed instantly – obeyed as might a man long accustomed to the most servile obedience; as might a dog that has been beaten until his spirit is broken. He bared his head, and stood in the warm glow of the fading light, meek and submissive. All signs of fear had disappeared from his face; but he was no longer the Baker from Georgia who, a few minutes ago, had trudged along the gravelled walk after the ungainly shadow. He had sought a thing and had not found it – had bitten a rosy apple and was choked with dust. Even the rakish boots looked submissive, and showed their brass teeth in solemn acquiescence to an inevitability; and somehow they looked not nearly so rakish as formerly.

The voice that had checked Baker had not a kindly tone; it was that of a suspicious man, who believed that he had detected a thief in the act of making off with his dishonest booty stored in ample pockets. Yet his face had a generous look, though anger made his eyes harsh. The two men surveyed each other, anger disappearing from the face of one to give place to pity, the other regarding him with mild docility.

'Come along with me,' said the gentleman to Baker.

Evidently Baker had heard those words before, for he followed quietly and tamely, with his dusty old hat in his left hand and his head bowed upon his breast. He walked so slowly that the gentleman turned to observe him and found him moving laboriously with his feet wide apart and his right hand grasping an invisible something that weighed down his ankles. They were now passing the end of the hotel on their way to the rear when they came near a hitching-post, to which rings were affixed with staples. Baker had been looking around for something, and as the gentleman (who was Mr Clayton, the proprietor of the hotel) stopped near the post, Baker walked straight up to it, without having looked to the left or the right. Upon reaching it he dropped the invisible something that he carried in his right hand, laid his hat on the ground, slipped the raw-hide suspenders from his shoulders, unbuttoned his shirt, pulled it over his head, and laid it on the grass alongside his hat. He then humbly embraced the post and crossed his hands over a ring, to which a chain was attached. He laid his cheek against his bare right arm and waited patiently, without having uttered a protest or made an appeal. The old boots looked up wistfully into his sorrowing face.

His naked back glistened white. It was a map on which were traced a record of the bloody cruelties of many years; it was

a fine piece of mosaic – human flesh inlaid with the venom of the lash. There were scars, and seams, and ridges, and cuts that crossed and recrossed each other in all possible directions. Thus stood Baker for sometime, until Mr Clayton kindly called to him –

'Put on your shirt.'

He proceeded to obey silently, but was confused and embarrassed at this unexpected turn of events. He hesitated at first, however, for he evidently did not understand how he could put on his shirt until his hands had been released.

'Your hands are not chained,' explained Mr Clayton.

The revelation was so unexpected that it almost startled the man from Georgia. He pulled out one hand slowly, that a sudden jerk might not lacerate his wrist. Then he pulled out the other, resumed his shirt and hat, picked up the imaginary weight, and shuffled along slowly after his leader.

'What is your name?' asked the gentleman.

'Hunder'd'n One.'

They were soon traversing the corridor in the servants' quarter of the hotel, when Baker halted and ventured to say –

'I reckin you're in the wrong curryder.' He was examining the ceiling, the floor, and the numbers on the doors.

'No, this is right,' said the gentleman.

Again Baker hobbled along, never releasing his hold on the invisible weight. They halted at No. 13. Said Baker, with a shake of pity in his voice –

' 'Tain't right. Wrong curryder. Cell hunder'd'n one's mine.'

'Yes, yes: but we'll put you in this one for the present,' replied the gentleman, as he opened the door and ushered Baker within. The room was comfortably furnished, and this perplexed Baker more and more.

'Hain't you got it wrong?' he persisted. 'Lifer, you know. Hunder'd'n One – lifer – plays off crazy – forty lashes every Monday. Don't you know?'

'Yes, yes, I know; but we'll not talk about that now.'

'They brought a good supper to his room, and he ate ravenously. They persuaded him to wash in a basin in the room, though he begged hard to be permitted to go to the pump. Later that night the gentleman went to his room and asked him if he wanted anything.

'Well, I'll tell you. You forgot to take it off,' Baker replied, pointing to his ankles.

The gentleman was perplexed for a moment, and then he stooped and unlocked and removed an imaginary ball and chain. Baker seemed relieved. Said the gentleman, as Baker was preparing for bed –

'This is not a penitentiary. It is my house, and I do not whip anybody. I will give you all you want to eat, and good clothes, and you may go wherever you please. Do you understand?'

Baker looked at him with vacant eyes and made no reply. He undressed, lay down, sighed wearily, and fell asleep.

II

A stifling Southern September sun beat down upon the mountains and valleys. The thrush and the mocking-bird had been driven to cool places, and their songs were not heard in the trees. The hotel was crowded with refugees from Memphis. A terrible scourge was sweeping through Tennessee, and its black shadow was creeping down to the Gulf of Mexico; and as it crept it mowed down young and old in its path.

'Well, Baker, how are you getting along?' It was the round, cheerful voice of Mr Clayton.

The man from Georgia was stooping over a pail, scouring it with sand and a cloth. Upon hearing the greeting he hung the cloth over the rail and came slowly to the perpendicular, putting his hands, during the operation, upon the small of his back, as if the hinges in that region were old and rusty and needed care.

'Oh, well, now, I'll tell you. Nothin' pertikler to complain on, excep' – '

'Well?'

'I don't believe it's quite exactly right.'

'Tell me about it.'

'Well, now, you see – there ain't nobody a-listening', is there?'

'No.'

'I think they ought to give me one more piece, anyway.'

'Piece of what?'

'Mebbe two more pieces.'

'Of what?'

'Pie. It was pie I was a-talkin' about all the time.'

'Don't they give you sufficient?'

'Pie?'

'Yes.'

'No, Sir, not nigh enough. An' – an' come here closer. I'm a-gettin'weak – I'm a-starvin'!' he whispered.

'You shall not starve. What do you want?'

'Well, now, I was jess a-thinkin' that one or two pieces fur dinner every day – every day – '

'Pie?'

'Yes, Sir, pie. I was a-talkin' about pie.'

'You shall certainly have it, but don't they give you any?'

'What? Pie?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, well, they do give me some.'

'Every day?'

'Yes, Sir, every day.'

'How much do they give you?'

'Pie?'

'Yes.'

'Well, I'll tell you. About two pieces, I believe.'

'Aren't you afraid that much more than that would make you sick?'

'Oh, well, now, I'm a-goin' to tell you about that, too, 'cause you don't know about it. You see, I'm mostly used to gittin' sick, an' I ain't mostly used to eatin' of pie.' He spoke then, as he always spoke, with the most impressive earnestness.

Baker had undergone a great change within the two months that had passed over him at the hotel. Kindness had driven away the vacant look in his eyes and his mind was stronger. He had found that for which his meagre soul had yearned – a sympathising heart and a friend. He was fat, sleek, and strong. His old boots – the same as of yore, for he would not abandon them – looked less foolish, and seemed almost cheerful. Were they not always in an atmosphere of gentleness and refinement, and did they not daily tread the very ground pressed by the bravest and richest boots in the land? It is true that they were very often covered with slops and chickens' feathers, but this served only to bring out in bolder relief the elevating influence of a healthy morality and a generous prosperity that environed them.

There were six hundred guests at the hotel, and they all knew Baker and had a kind word to give him; but they could never learn anything about him other than that his name was Baker – 'Jess Baker, that's all' – and that he came from Georgia – 'jess Georgy.' Occasionally a stranger would ask him with urgent particularity concerning his past history, but he then would merely look helpless and puzzled and would say nothing. As to his name it was 'jess Baker'; but on rare occasions, when pressed with hard cruelty, his lips could be seen to form the words 'Hunder'd'n One.' as though wondering how they would sound if he should utter them, and then the old blank, suffering look would come into his face. He had free access to every part of the house, and was discreet, diligent, faithful, and honest. Sometimes the porters would impose upon his unfailing willing-

ness and great strength by making him carry the heaviest trunks up three or four flights of stairs.

One day the shadow of death that was stealing southward passed over the house containing so much life and happiness and wealth and beauty. The train passed as usual, and among the passengers who alighted was a man who walked to the counter in a weary, uncertain manner. One or two persons were present who knew him, and upon grasping his hand they found that it was cold. This was strange, for the day was very hot. In his eyes was a look of restlessness and anxiety, but he said that he had only a pain across the forehead, and that after needed rest it would pass away. He was conducted to a room, and there he fell across the bed quite worn out, he said. He complained of slight cramps in the legs, and thought that they had been caused by climbing the stairs. After a half-hour had passed, he rang his bell violently and sent for the resident physician. That gentleman went to see him, and after remaining a few minutes went to the office, looking anxious and pale. He was a tall, quiet man, with white hair. He asked for Mr Clayton, but when he was informed that that gentleman was temporarily absent he asked for Baker.

'Is your patient very ill, doctor?' inquired the cashier privately and with a certain dread.

'I want Baker,' said the doctor somewhat shortly.

'Nothing serious, I hope.'

'Send me Baker instantly.'

The physician had a secret of life and death. To treat it wisely he required confidants of courage, sagacity, patience, tact, and prompt action. There were only two to whom he should impart it – one was the proprietor and the other the man from Georgia.

When Baker had come, the physician led him upstairs to the floor which held the patient's room, brought him to the window at the end of the corridor and turned him so that the light fell upon his face.

'Baker, can you keep a secret?'

'Me?'

'Yes; can you keep a secret?'

'Well, let me tell you about it; I don't know; mebbe I can.'

'Have you ever seen people die?'

'Oh, yes, Sir!'

'A great many in the same house?'

'Yes, Sir; yes, Sir.'

'Baker,' said the physician, placing his hand gently on the broad shoulder before him, and looking the man earnestly in

the eyes, and speaking very impressively – 'Baker, are you afraid to die?'

'Me?'

'Yes.'

'Die?'

'Yes.'

There was no expression whatever upon his patient, gentle face. He gazed past the physician through the window, and made no reply.

'Are you afraid of death, Baker?'

'Who? Me?'

'Yes.'

There was no sign that he would answer the question or even that he comprehended it. He shifted his gaze to his upturned boot-toes and communed with them, but still kept silence.

'There is a man here, Baker, who is very ill, and I think that he will die. I want someone to help me take care of him. If you go into his room perhaps you, too, will die. Are you afraid to go?'

'Was you a-talkin' 'bout wantin' me to wait on him?'

'Yes.'

A brighter look came into Baker's face and he said –

'Oh, now, I'll tell you; I'll go.'

They entered the stranger's room and found him suffering terribly. The physician already had put him under vigorous treatment, but he was rapidly growing worse. Baker regarded him attentively a moment, and then felt his pulse and put his hand on the sufferer's forehead. A look of intelligence came into his sad, earnest face, but there was not a trace of pallor or fear. He beckoned the physician to follow him out to the passage, and the two went aside, closing the door.

'He's a-goin' to die,' said Baker, simply and quietly.

'Yes; but how do you know?'

'Well, I'll tell you about that; I know.'

'Have you seen it before?'

'Hundreds.'

'Are you afraid of it?'

'Me?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, well, they all ought to know it.' he said, with a sweep of his hand towards the corridors.

'Hurry and find Mr Clayton first and bring him to me.'

Baker met Mr Clayton at the main entrance below, and beckoned him to follow. He led the way into a dark room stored with boxes and then into the further corner of it. There he stood Mr Clayton with his back against the wall and looked

straight into his face. His manner was so mysterious, and there was so strange an expression in his face – a kind of empty exaltation it seemed – and his familiarity in touching Mr Clayton's person was so extraordinary, that that gentleman was alarmed for Baker's sanity. Then Baker leaned forward and whispered one terrible word –

'Cholery!'

Cholera! Great God! No wonder that Mr Clayton turned deathly pale and leaned heavily against the wall.

At midnight the stranger died, and none in the house had heard of the frightful danger which had come to assail them. The physician and Baker had been with him constantly, but their efforts had availed nothing; and after preparing him for the grave, they went out and locked the door. Mr Clayton was waiting for them. The anxious look in the faces of the two gentlemen was intensified; Baker's evinced nothing but calm consciousness of responsibility.

'We must alarm the house,' whispered Mr Clayton.

The doctor shook his head sadly. 'If we do,' he said, 'there will be panic.'

They both seemed helpless and undecided, and in need of someone to determine what should be done. They turned to Baker in silence and for his decision. He seemed to have expected it, for without a word, without submitting it for their concurrence, he went to the end of that passage and rapped upon a door. There was an answer, Baker mentioned his name, the door was opened, and the dreadful news was quietly imparted. The guest was terror-stricken, but a word from Baker gave him heart, and he hastily but quietly began preparations to leave the house. Thus went Baker from one door to another, imposing silence and care and careful dressing, and advising the people to take with them such bedding as they could. Mr Clayton and the physician, observing the remarkable success of Baker's method, adopted it, and soon the three men had the great house swarming. It was done swiftly, quietly, and without panic, and the house became empty.

But selfishness appeared without shame or covering. Every one in the house wanted Baker's assistance, for all the porters had fled, and there was none other than he to work.

So he staggered and toiled under the weight of enormous trunks; listened to a hundred orders at once; bore frightened children and fainting women in his strong, sure arms; laboured until his face was haggard and his knees trembled from exhaustion. He did the work of fifty men – a hundred men.

The seeds of the plague had been sown. Towards morning the physician retired to his room, stricken down. Baker admin-

istered to his needs, and discovered a surprising knowledge of the malady and its treatment. A few of those who had scattered about in the surrounding hills were taken down and brought to the house moaning with fear and pain. Baker treated them all. Mr Clayton and a few other stout hearts provided him with whatever he ordered, and assisted in watching and in administering the simple remedies under his direction. Many recovered, others grew worse; the physician was saved.

At sunrise, while Baker was working vigorously on a patient, he suddenly straightened anxiously, and reeled backward to the wall. The strong man had collapsed at last. Leaning against the partition, and spreading out his arms against it to keep from falling, he worked his way a few feet to the door, and when he turned to go out his hand slipped on the door-facing, and he fell heavily upon his face in the passage. He lay still for a moment, and then crawled slowly to the end of the passage and lay down. He had not said a word nor uttered a groan. It was there, silent, alone, and uncomplaining, that Mr Clayton found this last victim of the plague waiting patiently for death. Others were hastily summoned. They put him upon a bed, and were going to undress him and treat him, but he firmly stopped them with uplifted hand, and his sunken eyes and anxious face implored more eloquently than his words, when he said –

'No, no! Now let me tell you: Go an' take care of 'em.'

Mr Clayton sent them away, he alone remaining.

'Here, Baker, take this,' he gently urged.

But the man from Georgia knew better. 'No, no,' he said; 'it won't do no good.' His speech was faint and laboured. 'I'll tell you I'm struck too hard. It won't do no good. I'm so tired . . . I'll go quick . . . 'cause I'm . . . so tired.'

His extreme exhaustion made him an easy prey. Death sat upon his face, and was reflected from his hollow, suffering, mournful eyes. In an hour they were dimmer; then he became cold and purple. In another hour his pulse was not perceptible. After two more hours his agony had passed.

'Baker do you want anything?' asked Mr Clayton, trying to rouse him.

'Me?' very faintly came the response.

'Yes. Do you want anything?'

'Oh . . . I'll tell you: The governor . . . he found out my brother . . . done it . . . an' . . . an' he's goin' to . . . pardon me . . . Fifteen years, an' played off . . . played off crazy . . . Forty lashes every Monday . . . mornin' . . . Cell hunder'd'n one's mine . . . Well, I'll tell you: Governor's going to . . . pardon me out.'

He ceased his struggling to speak. A half-hour passed in

silence, and then he roused himself feebly and whispered –

'He'll . . . pardon . . . me.'

The old boots stared blankly and coldly at the ceiling; their patient expression no longer bore a trace of life or suffering, and their calm repose was undisturbed by the song of the mocking-bird in the oriel.

EVIL

'A gruesome tale of a strange appetite – the story of a grisly horror.'

Weird Tales, May 1936.

The Horror Undying

by MANLY WADE WELLMAN

The sheaf of papers – I had found it under the ancient flooring that I pulled up to make a fire – intrigued me at once. The cabin offered shelter, the blaze warmth, and now I had found entertainment. I could forget the night outside, and the blizzard and this chill forest in which I had lost myself. I could forget, too, the disquieting man with the beard and the shabby clothes who had stopped me at the edge of the trees before I began my walk, mumbling something about 'haunted places'. A foreigner, evidently, who smelled abominably of garlic.

Sitting on a broken stool before the fireplace, I spread the ragged, faded sheets upon my knee.

The largest item was a paper-backed book or pamphlet, of the size of an old-fashioned dime novel. In my fancy I can see, now as then, the limp, discolored cover, tinted red by the flickering firelight, and the lengthy title in uneven ornate capitals:

A TRUE STORY
OF
THE REVOLTING AND BLOODY CRIMES OF
SERGEANT I. STANLAS, U. S. A.
HIS COURT-MARTIAL AND EXECUTION

Below this promising indication of excitement within, there

was a boldly executed woodcut of a full-length human figure. I held it close to the flames for a clearer view.

The dress, I saw at once, was the American cavalry uniform of the middle Nineteenth Century – shiny boots with spurs, stripe-sided pantaloons, a brief dragoon jacket and a round, vizored cap. Three chevrons upon the sleeve stamped the man as a sergeant, and even as I noted this my eye caught more and smaller words beneath the picture: *Sergeant Stanlas, from a drawing by the Author*, and under this the information: *Privately printed, 1848; price ten cents.*

'Ten cents!' Was it a dime novel after all, a dime novel of especially thrilling content? Remembering such shockers as *The Feast of Blood, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, The Secret of the Gray Turret*, and others, I studied the cover illustration again.

The author-artist had depicted his subject in a pose at once formilized and dashing. The booted, spurred feet were planted jauntily apart, toes pointing outward at what must have been an uncomfortable angle. The right hand was thrust into the front of the dragoon jacket, Napoleon fashion, while the left rested elegantly upon a saber-hilt. It was all a trifle ludicrous and waxworky. I might have laughed at it, except for the face.

It was a round face, framed in heavy side-wiskers. The eyes beneath the capvizor were large and expressionless, and so placed as to seem to stare out at anyone who looked at the picture. Below and between them jutted a long, straight nose, thin and sharp as a chisel. The mouth was half open and lipless, and showed two tiny, pointed upper teeth. The chin – well, there was no chin, or very little. Despite the crudity and stiffness of the old woodcut as a whole, that countenance had something of dread, authentic life. I paused to throw more floor-boards on the fire, then opened the pamphlet and began to read.

The opening of the narrative style was flat, in keeping with the style of the 1840's. It said, rather casually, that one Ivan Stanlas was born in Prussia near the Polish border about the year 1810, and that he came to America as a boy of twelve. In 1827, five years after his arrival, he enlisted in the United States army. His record, it appeared, was good, even brilliant – the anonymous biographer suggested that had Stanlas been of American birth he might have won an officer's commission. Foreigner though he was, he rose rapidly to the rank of sergeant first class, and as such did several tours of duty at forts in the south and west. At the outbreak of the Mexican War he saw active service with a dragoon regiment and was wounded at

Monterey. In 1847 he was senior non-commissioned officer of a squadron ordered to build and garrison a fort in the western part of the newly acquired territory of Texas.

Up to this point the narrator had seemed vague, as if information on Sergeant Stanlas' early career was his only by hearsay, but the incident of the fort-building and all that followed was by contrast extraordinarily clear and vivid. I, reading by the firelight, guessed that the unknown pamphleteer must have made Stanlas' actual acquaintance at that time; perhaps the forming of the squadron brought together the units in which the two men had been serving.

The fort came in for full, eloquent description – a rectangular stockade of upright logs with sharp tips, rough barracks and stables in orderly array inside, neat ricks of hay cut on the prairies, troops drilling or working under the eyes of their officers, sentries on post, and over all the brilliant stir of the Stars and Stripes. The war was over now; the garrison felt relieved and relaxed, even peaceful. But a terror was to come that would dwarf the grimmest adventure of the oldest and most seasoned veteran.

Nothing for a time but boresome routine. Then, twice in succession, the account stated, sentries were found dead in the dawn – or rather, what was left of sentries.

The bodies were mangled, mutilated, bloody, the fleshiest parts cut clean away and missing. Indian raiders, was the instant pronouncement of the commanding officer, and after the second atrocity a scouting party was sent out to find and punish the enemy. Stanlas himself rode with that party and it was he who found, or appeared to find, a trail. Following him, the avengers rode for four hours across the prairie and came at last upon an emcampment of Comanche hunters.

Taken by surprise, a full half of the Indians fell before the first deadly volley of troops. The others fled on their swiftest ponies without offering battle. Several wounded Indians were captured and questioned, but all denied attacking or even visiting the fort. They feared, it seemed, a devil that sneaked and hunted around their campfires at night and devoured women, children and even full-grown warriors – a devil that lurked and laired among the white men.

The soldiers naturally scorned this story as fantastic and brought back the prisoners, five of them. As they approached the fort, it was recorded, the Indians trembled fearfully. That night they were placed in the hospital building, and on the following morning one was missing. He was reported 'escaped despite severe wounds and close guard,' and double vigilance

was instituted. A day and a night passed, a new sun rose, and a second Indian had vanished.

Stanlas happened to be sergeant of the guard on this particular morning, and the commander of the garrison, investigating in the hospital, called upon him for a report. As Stanlas entered, the three remaining Indians set up a wild and unwarriorly wail of terror. All jabbering at once, they expressed sudden dread of the sergeant. He, they charged, had killed and carried away their two comrades – he was the 'devil of the fort' which they now knew would be their ultimate destroyer.

Stanlas listened in scornful silence for a moment or two, then broke in upon their frantic charges with angry denials. When they refused to retract, he whipped out his saber and slashed the nearest Indian across the face. Disarmed by two troopers, he was placed under arrest by the commander. A routine search of his quarters was ordered.

As senior sergeant of the garrison, Stanlas had a one-room cabin to himself, and the flooring in it proved loose (reading at this point, I glanced down nervously at the vacant space I had torn in the floor of my own shelter). The boards lifted, searchers saw loose earth. A few probing digs with a spade discovered the skeletons of the two missing Indians, stripped almost entirely of flesh.

From this point forward the narrative grew tense and fascinatingly dire, as if the author was bringing a morbid warmth to his work. Sergeant Stanlas, confronted with the grisly findings, confessed to cannibalism. He had murdered and eaten, not only these and the other Indians, but the two butchered sentries and many other white men and women in the East. How many, he did not know; all he could say was 'more than fifty, perhaps a hundred.' Explanation he could not or would not give, except that he was tormented with an overpowering hunger for human flesh. He relished most the heart and the liver.

Facing the court-martial, he pleaded guilty and made a singular request. That speech of Sergeant Stanlas sticks closest in my memory, for I returned later and read it again:

'Burn me to ashes, I greatly wish it. Only thus can my soul be redeemed.'

The officers of the court-martial – they must have been a shocked and pallid gathering – passed sentence, but decreed a less painful death than the one for which the confessed man-eater had begged. He was placed before a firing-squad, to make which, the pamphlet said, every one of his former comrades volunteered. After Stanlas had fallen before their shots, the sergeant in charge of the detail walked close to examine him.

The bloody form was seen to move, the eyes slowly opened. Drawing a pistol, the sergeant fired a bullet point-blank through Stanlas' brain, and a few minutes later a medical officer pronounced the guilty one dead. The riddled corpse was buried outside the fort at a considerable distance from the regular cemetery and was left unmarked.

That was the end of the account, at least of the printed part. But at the foot of the final page was a rusty-looking smudge. I drew a brand from the fire to shed brighter and more direct light. With difficulty I made out a single word, written crabbedly and in ink so ancient and faded as to be almost invisible: *'Fools.'*

I closed the pamphlet and gazed once more at the portrait of Ivan Stanlas upon the cover. As before, the expressionless eyes seemed to stare fixedly at me; even so, I mused, must the real man's eyes have looked while his fellow-sergeant gave him the *coup de grace*. And the loose mouth seemed to smile at me in mockery. I felt suddenly nauseated with the blood-boltered tale. Whether it was true or not I refused to guess. My chief desire was to forget it as quickly as possible, to find more pleasant reading-matter for a lonely night in a strange, isolated cabin. Dropping the pamphlet to the floor, I turned my attention to the other papers in my lap.

There remained a couple of loose sheets or scraps, fastened together with a corroded pin. Removing this, I studied the topmost fragments.

It was a roughly torn upper quarter of an inside page from an old newspaper. At the top margin I could make out a part of a heading: '. . . *ita Eagle, July 11, 1879.*' The torn piece was three columns wide and filled with short news items, mostly paragraphs with date-lines, grist of the journal's telegraph mill. To such inner pages might a reader turn leisurely after he had satisfied a more pressing news hunger with long accounts on the front page of war in Europe or scandal at home. Around one of the small items, centrally located on the middle column of the sheet, was drawn a bold circle in dark ink, as if to direct attention to it.

The headline, also included within the circle, was in small type, and I remember it as follows:

MERCY FOR SOLDIER-MURDERER
Sgt. Maxim's Death Sentence Commuted

Beneath this I read, substantially in these words:

Fort Fetterman, Wyo., July 9 – The War Department today ordered

the sentence of Sergeant Wilfred Maxim, previously condemned to death by court-martial, to be commuted to life imprisonment.

Maxim, who was convicted of a strange and brutal crime – the killing of a civilian laborer and the drinking of his blood – had been hanged in full view of his former comrades some weeks ago. Pronounced dead and cut down, he revived. When ordered to mount the scaffold and be hanged a second time, he protested that, being once certified deceased, the full penalty of his crime was paid and he should be set free. He was held prisoner while the highest authority at Washington was consulted and handed down the commutation of sentence.

A special guard will take Maxim to Fort Leavenworth for confinement.

Just below this final short paragraph came the juncture of the two ends of the line that formed the inked circle, and the pen had apparently wavered over them. No, not exactly; on closer examination I was sure that a word had been written beneath the item and upon the line of the circle, a scrawled, crabbed word: *'Fools.'*

I twitched nervously, and my hands involuntarily clenched. The crackling sound of the old paper as it squashed in my grip made me start violently. I frowned in uneasy mystification.

Brief as the news article was, and almost deadly dull in its patterned journalistic phraseology, it reeked with unvoiced dread. What did it mean – it and the pamphlet which told a tale so ghastily parallel??

Two murderers had lived, two veritable vultures in man's guise, one exposed in 1847, the other thirty-two years later in 1879. Each was an army man, each had the special ability and personality to win himself a sergeant's stripes. Each killed his fellow-man in secret, for the gratification of a horrible hunger. Each was condemned to death, and each proved almost impossible to kill. Each man's story had been published, and some collector of strange and revolting data had found both accounts, hiding them together under the floor of this old cabin – yes, and each published story had come under the hand of a commentator who, through scorn or unbelief of macabre humor, had stamped each with the words: *'Fools.'*

I pored over the inked circle and the written word upon the newspaper. They, too, were faded, but not as much as the scrawl in the pamphlet, and the handwriting was strikingly similar. My judgment was that they were the work of the same penman, and that each was jotted down at the approximate time of the publication date of the acount thus distinguished.

I laid the half crumpled fragment of newspaper on the floor beside the pamphlet. The remaining sheet stared up from my knee – a simple handbill, once folded small and now falling apart along its smoothed-out creases. It bore bold-faced type:

$100 – REWARD – $100
For the Capture of
WILFRED MAXIM
ESCAPED MURDERER
July 14, 1879

A description followed, which I do not remember clearly except for one phrase: *'Age about 36.'* So Sergeant Maxim and Sergeant Stanlas, at the times of their respective captures, had been alike in age as well as profession, rank and depraved appetite. I shook myself, as if to dislodge panicky thoughts that crept upon the fringes of my consciousness. A corner of the reward notice, I saw, dropped heavily. Something was pasted to its back. I turned it over.

A photograph looked up, a faded and discolored likeness of a uniformed man's head and shoulders. Under it was written, *'Bill Maxim, Jan. 7, 1872.'* I knew that crabbed handwriting at once. I knew, too, the face – but that was unbelievable, unspeakable. . . .

The old soldier's cheeks and jaws were thickly bearded. I could barely see a loose, greedy-looking mouth in the midst of that bushy hair. But the eyes were wide and vacant under their joined brows, the nose jutted straight and chisel-sharp. I started to voice an exclamation, but my lips were gone dry and numb. I stopped slowly for the discarded pamphlet. My hands trembled as they held the two portraits toward the flickering light – the photograph and the wood-cut.

I was sure then, and grasped inarticulately with the fearful knowledge.

Ivan Stanlas, shot almost to pieces, had not rested in his disgraced, unmarked grave. He had struggled up from under that burden of earth, had walked again. He had joined the army under a new name, had risen in rank, and was caught as before in the act of feeding loathsomely. Better for him and for the world had his first court-martial done as he had pleaded – what were the words?

I fumbled through the pages to the back of the pamphlet. Again I read: 'Burn me to ashes, I greatly wish it. Only thus can my soul be redeemed.'

A certainty that was more terrifying than blackest mystery drew in upon me, like a strangling net. With all my strength I hurled pamphlet, newspaper and handbill into the fire. The flames crackled greedily over the old sheets, threw up bright tongues; yet I trembled with a chill that was not of the outer blizzard. And a voice soft as a sigh and fierce as a snarl from the door: *'Fool! . . .'*

The door was open. A figure in a long, dark formless garment

like a cloak or blanket was standing there, shaking wreaths of snow from its head and shoulder. As I gaped, silent and helpless as a charmed bird before a snake, it glided forward to the fire. The enveloping robe sagged open, then slid gently downward from the upper part of the figure.

I saw a round face, pale as bleached bone. Coarse, bushy hair grew low and rank upon a narrow forehead. Wide, expressionless eyes fixed mine, gleaming above the thin nose that seemed to point the way for them with its tip. A shallow chin relaxed, a loose, lipless mouth fell open. Two pointed upper teeth grinned at me.

I tried to say something, to threaten or beg, but I could not. I only shrank back, and he stole forward, into the stronger light. A hand extended toward me. I saw curved talons, thick hair matted upon wrist and back and palm. . . .

Then came a cry, powerful and ringing as a bugle, a torrent of strange, challenging words. Another figure was bursting through the door and toward us. The first comer turned hurriedly from me. For a moment I saw his pale, chisel-beaked face in profile, heard the cloak rustle like dried skin. Then the other was upon him in a rush.

Fierce eyes above a bristling beard, an assailing odor of garlic, drove into my mind that this was the mumbler I had met at the forest's edge. His upflung hand flourished a staff, a heavy, straight rod with a piece lashed upon it to form a cross. It did not strike, but the sergeant squeaked fearfully, like a bat, and cowered swaying before it. A foot tripped him and, as he fell sprawling, the same foot gave him a spurning shove that slid him in among the coals of the fire.

White flame sprang up all around and over him, as though he had exploded. I shuddered, and the next moment all was black silence to me.

I woke laggingly, to the touch of ministering hands, and found myself lying limply on the floor. Above me stooped the bearded face, anxious and kindly now.

'It is all over,' came the grave, accented voice, with a note of triumph in it. 'Long have I hunted and hoped, and today, when you entered his domain, I knew you would serve for bait. I made preparations and followed.' He drew something from his pocket. 'A stake through his heart and holy water would have been better, but the cross of whitethorn and the fire and this herb' – he threw a handful of garlic into the fireplace – 'will serve. He – Stanlas or Maxim or whoever he is – will walk and raven no more.'

Weakly I rose. Something made a feeble scuttling noise on

the hearth, and I looked. The dying fire, now rank with the garlic vapors, was full of dark, fat-looking ashes that never came from wood. Out of these was scrambling some small creeper – a rat or lizard, perhaps. Before I got a fair glimpse of it my companion thrust it back with his staff. It did not appear again.

'Perhaps that was his cursed soul,' commented my rescuer. 'Do not be afraid, I know that all will be well. Before the Russian Revolution I was a priest in Moscow, and studied these things. By dawn his last shred of foul flesh, his last splinter of undead bone, will be consumed in the cleansing heat.'

Stopping, he began to gather floorboards.

'You're a priest?' I repeated stupidly. 'I was beginning to understand before you came. His story said that he wished to be burned.'

'I knew of those writings, but I did not disturb them lest he be warned and guard against me. The ancient legends are not legends; they are truth denied by fear. In his first existence he was *volkodlok* – werewolf. Facing death, he must have had a desperate hope of salvation, and he made that request. He knew that, if he were killed painlessly and his body left whole, he would still live as *upir* – what you call vampire.'

He threw his armful of wood upon the fire, and it began to crackle with bright, merry warmth.

'My son,' said the priest, 'have the fear of God before your eyes.'

BIZARRE

'Hitler had his own personal ideas on how this time machine could change history – and, in a sense, he was right, it did change history!'

Science Fiction Stories, July 1943.

The Machine That Changed History

by ROBERT BLOCH

'Victory!'

The word had resounded through the halls of Berchtesgaden before. But this time they carried a new meaning, for they came from the lips of Adolf Hitler.

The sallow little man standing before him in the private apartment smiled humbly.

'I am pleased and honored that the Fuehrer approves of my work,' he whispered, huskily. 'If the Fuehrer desires, I can explain the principles on which my time-chamber operates.'

Hitler's hand rose to comand silence.

'Your theories? My dear Schultz your theories do not matter. Your time-machine has been inspected, tested, and approved by the most eminent physicists in the Reich. We of the Reich are thorough. If your claims were not founded in truth, you would not now be my guest in Berchtesgaden.'

Adolf Hilter rose, leaned forward. 'Ah, no. I do not concern myself with your theories of invention. It is enough that you have achieved the seemingly impossible. You have constructed a working model of a machine capable of transporting men or objects through time itself.'

'Yes – '

Hitler's frown cut off the sallow inventor's reply.

'It means victory, do you understand? Victory!'

He advanced across the room to the vast, gleaming silver

shell which rested weirdly in the center. His fingers rose to press against the metal surface.

'We of the Reich move swiftly, Schultz,' he whispered. 'Already the Geopolitik has prepared for me a complete documentary survey of the potentialities inherent in this remarkable invention. It shall be of invaluable assistance to us in the days to come.'

Schultz smiled.

'I too have dreamed,' he murmured. 'We could build many hundreds of these and with them move forward or backward in time as we willed. We could attack – '

Hitler shook his head.

'The expense is too great. Besides, I have other plans. Plans I mean to execute swiftly. Which reminds me. You have the documents concerning this invention of yours?'

Schultz nervously proffered his briefcase.

'The method of operation is simple. A child could master the controls. Mathematical calculations are almost unnecessary, due to the principles of spatial inhibitation embodied in the construction.'

'In other words, it is all here in this briefcase – all that is essential to the building and operation of the time-chambers?'

'That is correct.'

Hitler smiled.

'Then, Herr Schultz, our little interview is at an end.'

His hand went to a buzzer.

The blackshirted man entered quietly. He took Schultz by the arm and ushered him out.

'Heil Hitler!'

Hitler nodded. 'Germany will not forget your contribution, Schultz,' he said.

The door closed. Hitler sat alone in the room, staring at the briefcase, then at the silver chamber of the time-traveller.

He pressed a buzzer on the intercommunications system.

'Kellzer? Bauer has taken Schultz. He has his orders. Dispose of the body quickly. Notify his relatives of the accident as planned.'

He released his fingers. Again Hitler sat back, his stare intensified. Again he sounded the buzzer.

'Kellzer? Send Eglitz to me at once. Eglitz. Gestapo staff. The linguist.'

Within a space of a few minutes, young Karl Eglitz clicked his heels smartly before the Fuehrer's desk.

'Heil Hitler.'

'Eglitz – you have heard of what has been going on?'

'The Fuehrer refers to this Schultz person and his invention?'

'Yes.'

'I assisted in drawing up the report on it.'

'Good. Then you understand Eglitz – do you think you could *operate* this machine?'

'I do.'

'Eglitz – do you speak French?'

'The Fuehrer must know that I have lived in France.'

'So.' Hitler was silent for a moment. 'Eglitz – I have heard good reports of your character and ability. You are a reliable man.' He paused. 'I have a mission for such a man.'

'I am honored.'

'It is a mission of the utmost importance, and as such it is extremely confidential. No one will know of it but the two of us.'

'The Fuehrer forgets that the Geopolitik knows of the uses to which the machine will be put.'

'Wrong, Eglitz. This is a mission of my own – one that the Geopolitik never dreamed of. Eglitz, I have conceived of a use for this time-chamber which will stagger humanity. And you shall carry it out!

'It is a mission that will win the war – win the world! It embodies an idea so stunning in its impact that even I, whose inspiration conceived it, am humbled before it.'

'The Fuehrer can trust me.'

'Then listen, Eglitz. Listen to the mission I have planned for you. Listen intently.'

Hitler whispered. Eglitz listened. His mechanical smile never left his face, but as the Fuehrer continued, a little gasp rose involuntarily from his throat. Beads of moisture appeared upon his forehead. His hands clenched. And still Hitler whispered on.

'So. That is your mission, Eglitz, Do you think you can carry it out?'

The Gestapo man's voice quavered. 'I – might,' he managed. 'It will take several days of preparation. Research. I must find out when he was in Cologne. We must take the machine there, too. I must study documents pertaining to his daily routine pick a time.'

'The resources of the Reich are yours to command,' Hitler answered. 'You must not fail. If you succeed we shall triumph beyond our wildest dreams.'

'I shall prepare.' Eglitz backed towards the door.

'Heil Hitler.'

Hitler sat alone once more, smiling still. Suddenly he rose and walked to a corner ledge.

A little bronze bust rested there – the head of a stout man

with piercing eyes; a man whose hanging forelock rested on a majestic brow.

Hitler stared at the bronze head and his smile widened.

'They say you were master of Destiny, too,' he whispered. 'But I wonder if you ever dreamed of an enterprise as great as this? An enterprise defying space and time? You crossed the Alps – but I cross centuries. Napoleon, the world will soon learn you have a master!'

The time-chamber, the bronze bust, and the ruler of Germany stood motionless in the twilight while Destiny wove a web to enshroud them all.

The smile had not faded from Adolf Hitler's face before the wavering outlines of the metal chamber disappeared from sight. The room in Hitler's Cologne headquarters still pulsed with the humming vibrations of the time-chamber. Eglitz had entered it and disappeared. And now the chamber had disappeared.

For a moment there was nothingness. Then slowly the blurring contours of the silver machine materialized, looming irrationally out of the air in the way a slide specimen emerges from a blank microscopic field. The humming vibration increased as the chamber solidified.

Then came silence.

Hitler strode forward abruptly.

'Something has gone wrong,' he rasped. 'A mistake – '

The compartment door opened slowly in the silver side. The tall figure of Eglitz emerged stooping through the doorway. Eglitz drew himself erect in formal salute.

'Heil Hitler.'

Adolf Hitler stared in astonishment. Eglitz had changed. His usual uniform was gone. Instead he wore a gaudy scarlet coat with green pipings, and his braided yellow trousers were tucked into shiny black boots. A sword dangled from an elaborate scabbard fastened about his waist by a white sash. In one hand he carried a bushy black busby with a green cockade. Moreover, his usual smooth-shaven countenance had disappeared under an imposing false mustache which quite dwarfed Hitler's own.

'Eglitz – back so soon?'

'Surely the Fuehrer realizes I have been absent a week?'

'A week? Are you raving, imbecile? You have been gone less than ten seconds.'

'Time – a week to me, ten seconds to the Fuehrer. It is relative, as Einstein has it – '

'Do not mention that person's name,' Hitler scowled. Then, 'Speak up, man! What of your mission? Did you get there?

Was he there *Did you bring him?'* Hitler's voice quivered with frantic impatience.

'I am pleased to report to the Fuehrer that, according to instructions, I arrived at the Imperial Palace at Cologne on July sixth, 1807, at 9.15 p.m. In keeping with my orders, I assumed the disguise of military attache of the Grand Army – '

'Where is he?'

Hitler's voice was a knife.

'I am here.'

The low tones came from the throat of the man in the doorway of the time-chamber.

Hitler stared.

The short, stocky figure descended. Hitler stared into the swarthy, fleshy face, stared at the majestic brow and the hanging forelock, stared into the deep-set, burning eyes of:

'Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor of the French!'

He whispered the words.

The little man inclined his head.

'Indeed, sire. And you are – '

'Reichsfuehrer Adolf Hitler.'

Two hands clasped. A fat, pudgy hand, and a lean, limp one. Two hands clasped – hands that had held the earth and crushed it, each in their time. Two hands clasped across the centuries. The hands of Napoleon and Hitler. Hands that wrote history.

Eglitz stood there, gaping.

Hitler turned.

'Eglitz – I'd forgotten about you. You may go now. You deserve a rest after your journey to secure our distinguished guest.'

'The Fuehrer is kind. I assure the Fuehrer that my task was not easy. This Fouche, the Emperor's Chief of Police, has a system equal to our own Gestapo. In order to – ah – abduct the Emperor – '

'I've no time for that now, Eglitz. You may go. Germany will not forget your contribution, Eglitz.'

'Heil Hitler.'

Eglitz left.

Hitler's hand went to a buzzer.

'Kellzer? Eglitz has just left my apartment. Send two troopers and place him under arrest. No, not the camp. Treason trial. He must be disposed of within the hour. That is all.'

Hitler turned again to face his visitor.

'So,' he breathed: 'You are here.'

Of the two, Napoleon was more at ease.

'So I observe.'

'You are calm.'

'Resigned, let us say.'

'This must be a strange experience for you.'

'I am accustomed to the unusual. Besides, your aide – this Eglitz, is it not? – told me much on the voyage. Despite the fact that he knocked me over the head; virtually kidnapped me as it were, I bear him no ill will. He seemed both friendly and intelligent.'

'He was – is,' Hitler agreed.

'He told me much of interest. This is 1942, is it not? So much seems to have happened. Naturally, I am a bit confused as to the reasons for all this.'

'Allow me to explain,' Hitler urged.

Napoleon smiled.

'Very well. Your french, sire, is somewhat – rusty.'

'Perhaps. But I could not risk an interpreter for what I am going to tell you. Please be seated.'

Emperor and Dictator, seated at a table in the quiet room. Emperor, Dictator, and the time-chamber. Bridge between two worlds of war. The room that had hummed to the vibrations of a machine which defied space and time now held the whisper of voices whose echoes had shaken continents.

'And so you see, that is why I brought you here.' Hitler was hoarse from his hour-long monologue. 'I am the master of my world. You were the master of yours. Together we can exercise twice the power.'

Napoleon nodded.

'Besides,' Hitler murmured, 'I need you. I would admit that to no living man. But I need your knowledge of military science – and the inspired genius behind it. I have made – mistakes. Mistakes which must be rectified.'

Again the voice droned on, as darkness deepened. From time to time the two men rose and consulted maps, charts, documentary material which was brought from the other rooms.

It was nearly midnight when the two weary men faced one another across the long table.

'But there must be some solution,' Hitler sighed.

'Your military position is perilous,' Napoleon answered. 'What is worse, that position is irrevocable. It cannot be changed.' Imperial shoulders shrugged. 'It was useless for you to send for me. I had best go back to my own day and place. I tell you frankly – your offer of joint partnership in this war is enticing, but it leads only to a hopeless end.'

'You must help me,' Hitler grated. 'You must! You are Napoleon!'

'Yes. I am Napoleon. But I cannot change what exists,' answered the Little Corporal, sadly.

Then his head jerked up.

'Wait. There is our solution!'

A pudgy finger stabbed towards the time-chamber.

'What do you mean? Are you mad?'

'No madder than you, Sire, when you sent your aide to kidnap me through time. My solution is simple. Attend.

'As we have seen, your difficulties began at the outset of this war. In September, 1939. You missed the opportunity to invade England. You did not check Russia. You failed in your mission in the United States.'

'But that is past – over two years ago. It is too late to change.'

'Is it? Why can't we enter the time-chamber and return to 1939? Return to July of that year and plan the war anew for September?'

Hitler was on his feet.

'Could we – dare we – ?'

'You want the world? Very well, we can obtain it. If you have the courage to make the journey. Once in 1939 we can rectify your previous errors, anticipate the others. Profit by experience. The war will be waged properly then, with you and me in command.'

Blurred voices in a midnight room. Blurred figures moving towards the silver machine. A nightmare vision in a nightmare world. Napoleon, Hitler, and a time-machine.

And then – only an empty room, after all. The machine was gone. Somewhere in the reaches of infinity, two dictators sped back to remould the past. The earth trembled in anticipation.

It was Napoleon who handled the controls. The pudgy fingers of Bonaparte, ex-lieutenant of artillery, mastered the intricacies of the machine's working parts.

His interest in the principles of operating the chamber had almost exceeded his curiosity regarding the operations of the war itself. But Hitler had been patient. After all, a visitor so distinguished must be humored. And if Napoleon chose to guide the time-chamber, it was well. He, Hitler, had chosen to guide the destinies of the world instead.

So they sat there, in the curiously vibrating metal shell. Napoleon's hands moved over the silver surface of the panels in silent concentration. Hitler's hands twisted nervously in his lap.

There was silence, save for the humming vibration – the silence of two men moving through the unknown, the un-

nameable; twisting through time on a mission to remould the fate of the world.

Just two men – but two men unlike any of the myriad billions who had preceded them on the face of earth. Two men each of whom in his time had remoulded the face of the earth; remoulded it with ruthless surgery that left it torn and bleeding.

Never two such men before, and never such a journey. . . .

Something of the import must have occurred to them both, as they sat there waiting for the vibrations to cease. For they glanced at one another suddenly, and their eyes met.

The eyes of Hitler met the eyes of Napoleon, somewhat within the emptiness of space and time. Met and mingled in a flaming resolve. It was the Fuehrer who addressed the Emperor.

'In just a moment,' he whispered, 'we shall arrive. And the work will begin. It was meant to be. You and I – our greatness is such that Fate itself has willed our union. Your sun and my star shall rise together in the heavens.'

It was the voice of the mystic that rose above the humming; the voice of megalomania triumphant.

'Perhaps?' Bonaparte echoed. His dark eyes were filmed with sudden wonderment. 'And yet I wonder if man can cheat his Fate?'

'I am Fate.' The harsh voice of the Fuehrer rose. 'As you shall see.' His hand rose, extended. 'Master of the world, and now master of time and space itself! We have gone far since your day, Napoleon. Your armies would be blasted to bits by a single *panzer* division. But you've seen that. You know how death can leap from the skies, or hurtle through the air from a hundred miles away. You know how death creeps on, above, and under the seas. You know how entire continents may be ravished by the flaming breath of war.'

Napoleon smiled. 'I too have made speeches,' he declared, sardonically. 'But perhaps I have learned to regret some of the deeds accompanying them.'

'I do not regret and I shall not regret,' Hitler retorted. 'We are returning to 1939. This time there shall be no errors. England shall be invaded swiftly. And France shall – '

He checked himself in time. A frown had appeared on the Little Corporal's forehead. Did the fool suspect? No. How could he? He did not know what had happened to France. He had been taken from Germany in 1807 to Germany in 1942. He didn't know – but Hitler worried about the frown.

'And France?' Napoleon echoed softly. 'What of France?'

'France shall share its rightful place with Germany,' Hitler amended, hastily.

*

The frown disappeared. In its place came a slow smile. For some reason Hitler didn't like the smile any better.

'That is well,' answered the Emperor. 'France shall hold its rightful place, yes.'

Hitler was silent. His thoughts raced swiftly. In a moment they would arrive – arrive in 1939. It would be late summer again. He and Napoleon would enter into council. The war would be plotted afresh; with Hitler's memories of two years to come as an aid. Napoleon would be helpful. His unbiased viewpoint would aid in pointing out various weaknesses even Hitler and his staff might overlook.

And then the war. Hitler's war.

For he had decided finally. When Napoleon's work was over, he must go. Hitler didn't trust his frown or his smile. The fool would never stand for what would happen to France. He'd be disposed of – this self-styled Emperor.

Hitler's dream of triumph glittered in his eyes. What a final irony! Men had always compared him to Napoleon. Thought it a compliment when they termed him an equal. Well, Hitler would be superior to the French conqueror. His greatest victory.

'Wait! Do you feel that?'

Napoleon's voice cut through Hitler's meditations.

'I think we've arrived.'

Yes. The vibrations were diminishing. The humming and droning within the metal chamber slackened. In a moment there was a curious little bump – not a physically-felt bump, but a sort of shifting and settling sensation in the consciousness of both men. As though they had been spinning in a void and suddenly set down on something solid.

'Yes – we're here!'

Napoleon rose. His pompous little body moved towards the compartment door. Hitler followed. Now his smile was broad. Napoleon couldn't see him. Instead he led the way – led the way to Hitler's triumph and his own doom.

The door swung open as the Emperor's fingers moved over the bolts and handles. Napoleon stood on the threshold, breathed deeply. Then he clambered out.

Hitler moved forward swiftly. He could hardly wait. To emerge again on the eve of victory –

Hitler stepped out.

Into the arms of two waiting guards.

'Hold this man!'

Napoleon's voice barked the order.

Hitler struggled in the grip of giant hands.

'What is this? Why – '

He stared upwards into the mustached visages of two Grenadiers. They wore huge shakos and gaudy green uniforms. The uniforms of Napoleon's troops!

Hitler's eyes roved wildly about the great chamber in which the machine rested. It was a court apartment – luxuriantly appointed in the styles of Napoleon's day.

And standing before him, no longer an incongruous figure, but with the air of a master in his own time and place, was Napoleon.

Again Hitler saw the smile on the lips of the Emperor.

Hitler heard his voice through a swirling mist.

'We are here, Adolf Hitler – but in a time and place of my own choosing. The hour has arrived – but it is the hour of my destiny, not yours!

'We have returned to the day on which you abducted me. We are in Cologne, in my German palace, in 1807.'

'But – '

Again Hitler saw the smile and shuddered. Napoleon advanced and whispered.

'You fool! Did you believe I would forsake my own destiny for yours? I handled the controls – and I set them for this day again. I want to live my own life, complete the mission of conquest on which I embarked. So I have returned to my own time.'

Hitler's head whirled. He temporized swiftly.

'But you and I – we could have ruled a greater world together – I offered you everything – '

'Adolf Hitler, I do not want your kind of world.' The Emperor's voice rose to a knell of doom. 'Your aide, the man who brought me to you, was careless. He let hints slip on the journey through time. He told me *what you did to my France.*'

'France?'

'Did you think I was fooled? No, I knew all along. You and your hordes trampled over my land, ravaged it. And I swore to avenge my country. I shall do so, in my own way.

'Hitler, I am a warrior, a conqueror. But I am not a mad butcher! And I do not intend to unleash you once again upon my people.

'You and your crazy theories of racial superiority – of men who must kill like beasts in order to live! I am going to save France and the world from you.'

Hitler wet his cracked lips. 'What are you going to do?' he whispered.

Napoleon gestured curtly.

'Guards – place this man back in the machine.'

The Grenadiers dragged the Fuehrer across the floor. His face was ashen. His voice rose to entreaty. 'What are you going to do?'

Napoleon shrugged.

'There is no place here in my world for your kind. There is no place in the world to come – 1939 or 1942, or any year. There never will be a place again for men with your debased dreams!

'In all the ages, I know of only one time when the world would welcome your vile ideas. There you must go, to a world where the weak perish and only the strong survive. And I wish you joy!'

They were inside the chamber now. Napoleon's hands were moving over the controls. A tinkling sound splintered the silence.

'What was that?'

Napoleon turned.

'I have smashed the adjustment dials,' he announced. 'You are embarked on a one-way journey.'

The guards backed out of the compartment. Napoleon followed. He stood in the metal doorway before closing the door.

'Goodbye, Adolf Hitler,' he murmured. 'You are going to seek your rightful destiny at last.'

Hitler rose with a snarl, lunged forward.

But the iron door of the time-chamber clanged hollowly in his face. And a humming rose to mingle with Hitler's anguished scream.

The humming rose and rose. It filled Hitler's head, throbbed through it. It was a dark drone, filling his brain with the black muttering of doom.

Hitler lay in the darkness while fear pulsed through his being. Lay there for endless eons, lay there for an eternity – as he sped through eons and eternity alike.

But when the humming finally subsided, he had conquered his dread.

He sat up sharply when he felt the curious *adjustment* sensation which meant the time-chamber had arrived. Hitler drew a deep breath.

He was here.

Napoleon had done it. The controls were beyond repair. He was here, and he'd face the future unafraid.

Napoleon had outwitted him, yes. But no use crying over spilt milk. The Emperor was crafty – but a fool, for all that! He was back again in 1807, strutting across the stage of history, playing the tyrant – but Hitler knew what Napoleon did not

know. Knew that there was a Waterloo lying ahead for the Emperor in eight short years. What sweet revenge! That long exile ahead!

And he, Hitler, had been exiled. But he could still mould his future freshly, in whatever time he found himself.

Hitler smiled grimly. Yes, Napoleon forgot that he, Adolf Hitler, could shape his own destiny. Hadn't he risen from humble house-painter to mighty warlord in the complexity of the modern world? Well, with his brain and vision, his knowledge of men and the future, he could start again.

He wondered where Napoleon had sent him.

'Where the weak perish and only the strong survive.' That might be ancient Rome. Barbarian times. Well, that was hardly a sad fate. He'd learn. He'd make adjustments. He knew men and he knew History. Wherever it was, Adolf Hitler could always rule in a world where strength ruled over weakness.

He rose, stepped to the chamber. He unbolted it slowly, pushed it open. He drew another deep breath. The fresh air was sweet and clean.

Smiling, Adolf Hitler stepped out onto a grassy sward. His eyes blinked in the sunlight.

He stood on a hillside which rose like a grassy island amidst a sea of lush vegetation. Why, it was like a tropical forest!

Blinking again, he walked across the turf. The ground was soft, almost steaming with moisture beneath his feet.

Where was he? In what time did he exist? Where were the cities of Germany, the people?

Hitler shook his head. His vision cleared.

Then he saw them emerge from the forest at his right. They came swiftly. He wheeled in panic.

Too late! The others were creeping up on him from the rear, cutting off his return to the door of the time-chamber.

Adolf Hitler stood surrounded by a ring – a ring of advancing figures. He stared at the figures and understood Napoleon's parting words at last.

He stared at a band of ape-like shamblers – shamblers that had only the faces of men. Their shaggy bodies were covered with long, yellowish fur. Blonde fur. They were powerful, grinning in their strength. And their deep, chuckling laughter was filled with hatred – the hatred of the strong for the weak.

Strong. Blonde. Brutes living in a time where he could find his rightful destiny –

As the monsters closed in on him, Adolf Hitler's screams rose from the little forest hillside in the Stone Age.

WEIRD

'The proprietor pronounced the candle an implement of destruction.'

Weird Tales, November 1942.

The Candle

by RAY BRADBURY

Under other circumstances it might have been idle curiosity that caused Jules Marcott to pause before the little hardware store window; but tonight it was a cold lump of hopelessness and anger knotted in his heart.

Now there was nothing to be done but stare at hard, glittering objects, metal objects with triggers and barrels, wondering whether bullets and steel really ended all worry.

'Which they do not,' muttered Jules to the bearded, tousel-haired reflection of himself in the glass.

A cold winter wind was busy in the street and busier in Jules Marcott's mind. His thin lips pursed against the bladed chill, blue and quivering.

In the shop window a clutter of bric-a-brac, knick-knacks, metal ornaments and artillery had been heaped haphazardly, catching the uneasy, snow-white glare of the street lamp.

Grimly Jules thought of the display as a symbol of his own life; heaped, jumbled, rusted, forgotten, useless. No point.

He stared into the jumble of metal; antique guns, matchlock, blunderbusses, Lugers, sawed-off shotguns, miniature garter-pistols and a million and one other rusted weapons idling there.

'A good gun,' mused Marcott, squinting dark eyes, hunching lean shoulders in his overcoat. 'A good *aim* – a good *shot*.' But

he shook his head. 'And the rest of my life in prison. That wouldn't do. That's not solving it, but working myself deeper – '

He cursed, was about to turn away, when something oddly out of place caught his eye. His black brows arched up on his slender pale face.

In the very center of the window, in the midst of the cluttered metal, rose a blue-pastel candle, slim and tall and worked in the figure of a young, long-haired maid, naked and fine-limbed.

It was such a strange candle and it occupied such a unique position that Jules Marcott momentarily forgot his marital problem to center his nervous attentions upon it.

Jules admired it for a number of seconds, casting about for the reasons why the proprietor of this untidy hardware shop should place such an incongruously ethereal figure in the tangled whirlpool of penny-nails and pistols.

The candle held center stage, misting the weapons into the background. It pervaded all, seemed, rather, to be already aflame and spilling a steady, pure glow over all the window; and out, touching Jules' face with a soft finger of pastel light.

But it was not lighted. And yet it emanated light, it was luminescent.

There was something infinitely peaceful about this candle. The figure was postured erect, but it seemed relaxed, contented. The face had the unrippled, dream-like contour of the Lotus Buddha. It promised many things with its serenity.

It offered surcease from worry and – something *else*. Something ominously fleeting. Other lights flickered within the candle torso, things uninterpretable. Jules considered the guns again, and then the candle, and, once more, the guns.

And even in these hours of many emotions, predominant in Jules was curiosity. Curiosity and appreciation of beauty.

So it was that Jules' thin hand was upon the knob of the shop-door before he realized it. The door sagged in on hoarse hinges, shut behind him, complaining.

Momentarily, Marcott had forgotten his wife, Helen. Now he had seen something intangible and wished to touch it, perhaps even buy it.

A candle so unusual that it offered to fill the vacant portions of his soul. A candle that offered – what ?– better things than guns to solve his problem.

Out of the cool cavern of the shop, from a gloomy alcove behind a counter, appeared the proprietor. He was a contrast to Jules.

Where Marcott was tall, pale, jet-haired and thin, this proprietor was short, round, apple-cheeked. A toothless, big-

nosed ancient with a shock of winter-snow hair tangling about full ears.

The proprietor moved quietly, smacking his lips, wiping hands on a dirty smock that covered his bulging stomach, wagging his head. He was a little too cheerful amidst the dust and rusted metal and shadows.

'What, sir?' he said, cheerfully. 'There's no doubt but you'll have either a pistol or the candle!'

He sized Marcott up with two quick thrusts of his eyes, which, though blue, did not offer the friendliness displayed by the body. They were strangely alert and not warm.

Jules felt a distinct dislike for the man, for the man's abrupt attitude. It was a little too sudden and strange.

Marcott did not speak immediately. He could give no reason for entering the shop; could find no explanation for his curious action. He was bewildered.

'No. No,' he said suddenly, awkwardly. 'I – I don't want a *pistol*!'

'Of course you don't.'

The proprietor blinked rapidly, shaking a finger. 'Of course you don't. Pistols are much too messy.' The fat body waddled between cluttered counters thick with nails, knobs and other glittering objects. Reaching the window he bent, breathing asthmatically, and with gentle, chubby hands picked up a pale-blue candle. His face creased into a toothless grin as he returned to Marcott.

'And if you do not wish a pistol, then you want the candle. Everyone who comes to my shop buys either a gun or this taper.' He shook his head. 'The fools use the guns in their desperation.'

He offered the unlighted taper to Jules. 'And the wise man lights a taper. Here.'

The candle was bedded in a small heavy circlet of bronze, exquisitely carved with puckish elfin heads and an inscription in some ancient scrawl.

As Jules clasped it he felt a quick warm snake of confidence strike him and crawl twining up his arms into his being. It was like dawn after a thunderstorm.

The proprietor gestured to the window. 'I do a great business,' he declared, heartily. '*Not* in hardware, and *not* to the ordinary person. I sell to fools and wisemen. Mostly fools.' The red lips smacked moistly. 'The world is full of them. Now – this candle – '

He paused, and his eyes became slits, his voice dropped. 'This candle, when lighted of an evening, will perform many tasks in many ways. Both pleasant and unpleasant.'

He tapped the bronze candle base.

'The inscription – '

Marcott could not readily translate it. Its foreign scrabble gave no message to his dark eyes. He shook his head.

The proprietor translated:

'The man who will in trouble be,
Soon surely sees the light in me.'

Marcott stared unblinkingly at the blue tallow, his fingers tight upon the base.

'How do you know I am in trouble?' he asked.

A streak of white moved across the dim shop floor. A milk-furred kitten ceased running and stopped to play tag with Marcott's overcoat. Jules ignored it as the proprietor gave answer.

'All who come here bear one form of trouble or other. None enter here for nails and hammers. I have seen to that. And you, like the others, are tormented. I know not what shape or form this torment may assume, but now it darkens your existence and you wish to forget it. And forgetting can only be accomplished, at times, by destroying something. What do you wish to destroy?'

Marcott did not trust the proprietor. He did not speak aloud. But in his brain six words materialized instantly, vividly:

'I wish to kill a man!'

The shadows in the hardware shop wavered a fraction closer. The blue candle, though flameless, glowed, and the milk-white kitten who gamboled at Marcott's feet, paused and cocked its head up, staring at him with large green eyes, as if it knew his every thought.

Marcott wet his lips thoughtfully, feeling that he should say something. So, he said, 'This candle isn't a weapon,' rather matter-of-factly.

'The kiss of a woman,' replied the proprietor, 'is the most lethal of all weapons. Yet, who looks on it as such? Judge a thing not by its looks, but by its deeds.'

Jules doubted.

'This candle will destroy,' said the proprietor.

'How?'

Jules thought angrily of Eldridge, the man he hated, the man he wished to kill. And he thought of Helen.

The proprietor answered. His voice was cheerless.

'You light the candle in the evening hours. You wait until it has flamed steadily for a number of minutes. Then, three times, you breathe the name of the person you wish to destroy.'

'This done, the designated individual will conclude his existence immediately.'

Marcott was wary. The passing minutes had given him opportunity to collect his wits. It sounded too utterly simple to be accepted in the sunlight of reason, to stand the probing of the scalpel of intellect.

But Marcot's problem demanded a solution. This trouble with Helen, his wife, and Eldridge, her lawyer friend, was not an easy one.

Marcott held the candle close, forming words.

'How do I know that this candle works?' he said. 'What sort of witchcraft is this?'

'You do not believe?'

'No. I do not.'

'Then – I will show you.'

The proprietor struck a match. The flame glittered in his deep blue eyes, and on the snowy hair and ruddy face.

He lit the candle. He waited a few moments.

Previously, without flame, the candle had filled the room with soft, wonderous light from its phosphorescent body. Now, flamed, it shot out torrents of soul-filling brilliance that was like the illumination of a great full moon.

Marcott sensed something moving softly against his legs. He looked down. It was the furry white cat with the huge green eyes still staring up at him, mewing, clawing at his coat-tail, exposing a red tongue.

Marcott heard the proprietor murmuring three times. Three times the old man spoke, and his breath made the candle flame lean to one side, quivering.

The candle flickered....

And the cat, one moment playfully alert at Jules' feet, the next crying out in animal pain, leaped as if kicked, clawed the air rolling and writhing and spitting.

For a moment it recovered. It leaped up, gained a hold upon the counter next to Jules and tumbled over into a nest of metal. Then it spit froth and blood, snarling. Its little, milk-colored head twisted as if an invisible hand were wringing it. The green eyes bulged nightmarishly. The little red tongue was caught between clamped teeth. It gave one last convulsive shudder, jerked, and fell silent, its tail twitching.

It was dead.

Jules sickened suddenly. His face paled, his thin lips were dry and he swayed unsteadily. He turned away from the kitten and looked at the candle with the oddly peaceful feminine figure, the contented face.

The proprietor blew the flame out. 'You see – it works?'

Jules nodded.

The proprietor handed the candle back to Marcott. 'I cannot sell you the candle,' he said, softly. 'But I can rent it to you for a short period of time. You pay half when you rent, half when you accomplish your work and return. Fair?'

A throng of thoughts crowded Jules' mind. He had little money saved. And he had proof, horrible proof, that the candle worked. Here in the shadows he could not doubt. Rationality had fled. But he didn't want to spend too much money. A bullet might be cheaper – maybe –

He feared to ask the price.

'Three thousand dollars . . . ' came the answer to the unworded question.

THREE THOUSAND DOLLARS!

As well demand a ton of soil from the planet Mars! Jules Marcott's bank account advanced to three pitiful figures.

But with the unreasoning blindness of a potential killer, Marcott would not, could not give up this candle and its alleged powers.

He whirled and started for the door.

'I have no money,' he said. 'Let me use the candle and pay later!'

'Money!' The proprietor poked out a red fist. 'Or return the candle, quickly! I hold no commerce with the poor!'

'I'll pay you when I get the money! I – '

'Wait, then!'

The proprietor lunged at Marcott with open hands.

Jules wheeled to one side, snatched up the first fistful of metal touching his hands, a cumbersome blunderbuss and struck with it, clumsily.

The weapon hit. The proprietor shrieked with pain, fell flat, unconscious. Not dead.

Hastily, hiding the blue candle figurine in his overcoat, Jules departed the shop of cluttered shadows. He hurried into the marrow biting chill and strode down the street. Through his mind slipped the vision of the kitten dying, the translation of the ancient inscription on the bronze candle-base:

'He who will in trouble be,
Will quickly see the light in me!'

And now – to mete out vengeance on the head of the man who loved and took Helen away. And simultaneously to teach Helen a lesson she would never forget.

Her divorce from Jules would be of no avail now. Eldridge, her lover, would die.

Marcott walked swiftly, confidently.

Jules Marcott fitted the red ribbon bow to the package with trembling fingers. Then he penned a carefully worded note to his wife, slipped it into an envelope and attached it to the box containing the blue candle.

It was much better this way. To send the package, the candle and the curse directly to Helen, let her follow slightly altered directions. Let hers be the lips to pronounce the doom and death of Eldridge, hers the white fingers to light the taper, bringing destruction.

Better this way. More ironic. More searing, more unbearable for her. He wanted to hurt her intensely. For now, with all the power of a blighted existence, he hated Helen.

Jules thought, was it not Oscar Wilde who wrote: 'Each man kills the thing he loves?'

So let Helen kill John Eldridge.

Jules checked the package very carefully. He picked it up, handed it to the waiting Western Union messenger.

'Deliver this immediately – to Helen Marcott, 413 Grant Street.'

The messenger left.

Marcott broke seal on a new packet of cigarettes. He noted the time. Eight o'clock. A night wind mourned outside.

It would take the messenger twenty minutes to deliver the candle. And Helen scheduled her leave for Reno in the morning, to divorce Jules and marry Eldridge.

Twenty minutes for the package to be delivered. Five minutes for her to open it, read the enclosed note.

And then – how long?

How many minutes before Eldridge died? An hour, two hours, and, if Helen were rushed, perhaps not tonight, but surely tomorrow night. Helen was sentimental. Jules counted on that quality. She would follow directions implicitly.

Marcott lit his third cigarette.

When he finished his tenth cigarette it was nine-fifteen. The package had been delivered. Now, all he had to do was wait. Go to bed and restlessly count the hours? No. Better to get out and walk in the park, breathe the night air. He'd know soon enough about Eldridge.

Marcott chuckled. What if Eldridge fell dead right in front of Helen? Lord, would that be revenge.

Jules laughingly ground out his cigarette and left his small, transient apartment.

So Helen was going to get a divorce. She disapproved of Jules and his meddling with psychology and mental diseases.

She didn't like this and she didn't like that. So she was skipping off to Reno like a confused little animal.

Marcott smiled as he locked the door and pocketed the key. What was it she had said only three weeks ago? Something about Svengali, meaning Jules, and herself as Trilby? That was funny.

Strange that a woman could run off because of one quarrel. But Helen was a changeable woman. Anyway –

Tomorrow morning – obituary column – the name Eldridge –

Busy with his thoughts, Jules scarce noticed the direction in which he wandered until it was too late. He strode in a mist of hopes and desires, until his ears, coming out of the fog of thought, heard brisk scuffling heels catching up with him. The sound of asthmatic breathing filled, the night air.

A fat hand clutched Marcott's coat, twisted him about. A red, chubby face, toothless and angry, was thrust close. 'Where is the candlestick?'

The hardware store proprietor!

Marcott expressed no immediate excitement. After all, Helen had the candle. Even now the final curtain in John Eldridge's life was being rung down.

Jules quietly lit another cigarette before he answered the shopkeeper. Then:

'I don't know your name, but you're definitely impolite. I assure you that if I did know your name I would promptly light the candle and put an end to you.'

The shopkeeper clenched thick fists in rage. 'I'll call the police!'

'Come now.' Jules laughed softly. 'Being in your sort of business, such an action wouldn't pay, would it?' He flicked his cigarette ashes disdainfully. 'I'll return your candlestick when it has done its work.'

'I demand it *now*!'

'I don't have it.'

'Who – '

'I sent it to my wife.'

'What's your name?'

The dark smile did not leave Jules' face. 'If you knew my name and retrieved the candle, then I'd be in a pretty fix, wouldn't I?' He shook his head. 'You won't know it. Because if you did, then I'd take measures to insure your never finding your precious candle again.'

The fat shopkeeper stopped breathing as hastily. He waited a moment, licking fat cherry-red lips, fingers shaking, the fat body swaying. Finally: 'You – you will – you *promise* to return

the candlestick?' There was a flicker of pleading in the voice.

'Was that your *only* wonder-working device?' laughed Marcott. 'How inefficient! Yes, I'll return it as soon as possible, granting of course that you never know my name. You should be thankful I didn't look you up in the phone book to give your life to the flame.'

'You should not have let it get out of your hands,' muttered the old man. 'What if it is lost?'

'It will not be lost. I sent it to my wife, enclosing a note, telling her it was – well, it was a clever idea of mine, all around. She's divorcing me, plans on marrying a man named Eldridge. They plane to Reno in the morning. But I thought of a rather interesting and different way of utilizing the candle to get rid of Eldridge. I'll let Helen – '

A brisk wind came up, drowning out Jules' voice, so that he had to speak louder, but speak he did. The little shopkeeper listened, nodding, approving in spite of himself, almost smiling.

The wind blew wilder and the stars were very clear. Jules thought, it is a glorious night. But –

One more question.

'The victim of the candle,' asked Jules. 'When the spell is cast, what happens? Is it very bad?'

The shopkeeper nodded ominously.

'You saw what happened to the cat? Well – '

Helen Marcott jerked back as the hand cracked across her cheek for the second time. Tears started to her full brown eyes and the marks of John Eldridge's fingers scarred her face.

Eldridge stood over her. Then he whirled and went to the door. He turned, his face ugly and suffused. His eyes cut first at Helen Marcott and then at the freshly opened box in which reclined the feminine blue-pastel candle.

'Gifts from your husband! Behind my back!' he grated. 'What am I supposed to think? After all we supposedly meant to each other! Well, if you want *me*, you'll find me at – '

The door slammed, slicing off Eldridge's voice.

Helen Marcott heard his footsteps drumming down the hall out of her life. And tears streaked down her cheeks over the fresh red marks left by Eldridge's hand when he had slapped her.

He had *slapped* her!

All over a gift from Jules. All over a blue candle. Helen Marcott tried to think clearly. She was seeing Eldridge concisely for the first time.

She was still crying, thinking about her disillusionment in Eldridge, when she struck a match. Carefully she set the candle

on the table next to herself and lit it.

She paused. The candle looked so peaceful and contented.

Helen Marcott picked up the letter Jules had thoughtfully enclosed. How gentle, how nice of him.

She read the letter over again, taking in every word.

'Darling Helen: A little remembrance to show that there are no hard feelings. This is a prayer candle. To bring good fortune and happiness to the one you love, light the candle in the evening and, three times, repeat the name of your beloved.

'With fond memories,

'JULES.'

Helen Marcott brushed away the tears. She turned to the flaming candlestick. Her gentle breath touched the flame, three times, quietly, fervently, longingly, as she said: 'Jules – Jules – Jules – '

The candle flame flickered.

SHOCKING

'For those readers with stomach enough, we offer a most chilling tale.'

Venture SF, January 1966.

Unholy Hybrid

by WILLIAM BANKIER

With soil like this, Sutter Clay said to himself, it's a wonder the stones don't put down roots and grow. Pressing his long, white fingers into the ground, he scooped up a double handful of damp earth and let it fall in clods and crumbles back into the black furrow.

Why, if I let my hands stay in this soil long enough, Clay continued his thoughts, they'd take root themselves. A thin smile bent the corner of Sutter Clay's pale mouth as he imagined his fingers thrust deep into the nourishing ground while a shiny filigree of roots crept from beneath his fingernails in search of food and moisture.

Good soil had been a factor in Sutter Clay's success as a gardener. No question about that. But there was more of Clay himself in the things he grew than there was of luck or nature, and if thumbs ever really were green, this thin young man would have had one of emerald and one of jade.

The few people who knew Sutter Clay, for he was a lonely man living out here on the edge of town, claimed he could grow oak trees in the Sahara Desert. At the County Exhibition every Autumn, when folks treked out to the Fair Grounds for the harness racing and the midway, those who knew what real wonders were would head for the produce pavilion to see what

Sutter Clay had brought in this year. And Clay never disappointed them.

There, spread out in extravagant display as from a cornucopia, lay all the ripeness and abundance, all the browns and greens and reds and yellows of harvest home. Pumpkins the size of carriage wheels lay beneath the table lest they split the sturdy trestles that supported the rough planking. Egg plants almost obscene in their bursting purple opulence; squash in a riot of bizarre shapes and textures; golden ears of corn with the husk shucked back in an immodest exposition of giant kernels straining for a hold on cobs scarcely big enough to hold so many; and even the humble turnip, inflated to the size of a football and ringed about like Saturn with alternate shades of mauve and ivory.

And the hybrids! Clay placed these on a separate table, each strange item carefully labelled with its name and details of its odd ancestry. Here was a cluster of crab apples with translucent skins, clinging to one stem like emperor grapes. Beside them, a bunch of carrots . . . carrots in name, shape and size, but tinted the deep purple of beets. And ranged in rows were ears of spectacular corn spotted with multi-colored kernels, some sparse as dominoes, some speckled like terrazzo floors, a moziac of rainbow corn.

And behind it all, jealously watching lest someone touch part of the display, hovered the gaunt form of Sutter Clay, his long wrists dangling inches out of the sleeves of his shiny blue suit, his pale hair spread long and fine across the dome of his head looking like nothing else so much as a swatch of silk from one of his precious ears of corn.

Yes, Sutter Clay could make things grow. He could make them grow bigger and different than they had ever grown before. But there was no denying this deep, sweet-smelling black loam had a lot to do with it. As Clay crumbled a clod, a fat dew worm, belted and banked with rings of copper, humped and glistened between his fingers. He let the cold pulsing worm slip gently to the ground and watched it thread its way into the soil.

'Go, my little cultivator,' he said aloud. And as he spoke, a chilly April breeze fanned across the field and touched him through his scanty shirt. The spring afternoon was falling away into the woods behind the house and the pale blue silence of day's end was hanging in the sky.

Sutter Clay stood up and took his hoe and trowel and fork in one hand and his jacket in the other and headed for the house. There was smoke rising from the chimney. He wondered what Bonina would have for him tonight.

She was a girl who had come alone down the highway one night in January when snow whipped sideways past Sutter Clay's kitchen window. The car whose hospitality she had accepted turned off on the Brightsville Road and let her out a hundred yards from the small blue and white farm house. On such a night she could barely make it to Sutter's door. Nobody could ask her to go farther.

Bonina Ames was from a city up North. She had no family left and having heard tell of friends in Lauderdale, she had set out down through the mountains to try to find them. Unless something worthwhile happened along the way. She smiled with watery eyes when she said this and would tell him no more. So he never did find out any more about Bonina Ames or where she came from.

But he knew as he looked at her that she was one of the homeliest women he had ever seen. Her head was the shape of a gourd, small at the top where not much hair at all struggled to cover a thin, boney forehead, then bloating and distending downward to an inflated jaw with puffed cheeks and a wide mouth that rippled when she talked and collapsed into a fat pout when she was silent. Her eyes were pale green and constantly wet like sliced grapes. She had, Clay noticed when she stood up, a tolerable body, poorly managed.

Well, there was nothing else for it but to have her stay the night. Then the storm stayed on for another day and night and so did Bonina Ames. By this time, she was making meals and knew where the dishpan was. When the weather cleared, Sutter never got around to asking her to leave and she showed no signs of gathering her meagre belongings together in the shopping bag which was all she had carried when she arrived. So she stayed, doing a good job of cooking and cleaning, and sleeping in the spare room on a cot that Clay knocked together with some two-by-fours and a spring of chicken wire.

And this was where Sutter Clay found Bonina when he entered the house on the cool April evening. There was a fire in the stove and the kitchen was warm. But there was no pot in sight, nor any sign of activity around the counter top. A sob from the bedroom caught Clay's ear. He went in and stood over her.

'Are you sick?' he asked.

'Not actually.'

'Then what's the matter? Where's supper?'

'I just couldn't keep my mind on it. I'm so worried.'

'Then something is wrong. What is it?'

She turned over and exposed the bloated face, glistening with tears. Her nose was running.

'Blow your nose,' Sutter said.

'Oh Sutter, I'm worried to death. I was hoping all along something would happen. But nothing has. I'm sure I'm pregnant.'

Clay put his hands together and cracked his knuckles, sucking in his pale lower lip. 'It was the end of January, wasn't it?' he said.

'Yes.'

'Then why didn't you say something sooner? Three months. Pretty hard to do anything about it now.'

'I know.' She sat up and put her head in her hands. 'What are we going to do?'

Sutter Clay looked at her for a moment. Then he said, 'Don't you worry, everything's going to be all right.'

Into her hands, Boninia said, 'How can it be unless we get married?' But Sutter did not hear her. He was on his way out to the porch. Here, he ran his fingers over the shining handles of the implements, selecting, finally, the spade. Then he went back inside.

He found Bonina Ames unmoved, sitting on the edge of the cot, her head in her hands, bowed almost to the level of her knees. Without a word, Clay swung the spade above his head and brought the sharp edge of it down on her extended neck with all the force he could muster. The blow almost decapitated her. She hung, her buttocks raised a few inches from the mattress, for a full second. Then she toppled forward against the wall of the room and sank to the floor.

It became a busy night for Sutter Clay. First he went down to the far corn field and used the same spade to dig a pit in the soft, rich earth. It was easy digging, which was just as well since he had to work in darkness. Then he returned to the house, gathered Bonina's belongings and put them in a bundle with the body and carried all together down to the grave. When she was covered over, he spread the excess earth about and broke the ground in the area into a series of furrows. Tomorrow he would plant and that would be the end of it. He would make a point of telling them at the store that his domestic had packed and lit out as suddenly as she had come. Must have been waiting out the winter. No family. No friends who knew her whereabouts. No questions. Let it lie.

And it all happened just as Sutter Clay had planned it. No questions were asked. No enquiries were made. And the warm summer days came and cast their sunlight and rain on all the fertile seeds Clay had planted in the earth. In the farthest field the corn grew tall, taller than ever, Sutter told himself with a grim smile. Then, with his natural sense of land economy, he

planted pumpkins at the foot of the cornstalks.

Thus August followed July, and there was no drought this year. Sutter Clay smiled up into the friendly sky and the sun smiled back and gave way to just the right amount of rain at the proper time. Then September followed August and impressed its long, ripening days on the fields which were not becoming heavy with the fruits of the land. Clay busied himself with final cultivation before harvest time but there was little for him to do now. He had done his work. The good earth was now doing her share.

When October arrived it became obvious that this was a bumper year, even for a Sutter Clay. Day by day now, with admirable efficiency. Sutter began bringing in the produce.

'All things bright and beautiful,

All creatures great and small . . . ' he sang as he bent to the baskets and trundled wagonload after wagonload to root cellar and kitchen.

It was late October, Hallowe'en was only a few days away, when Sutter worked his way to the farthest field. The corn was superb and he harvested it quickly, selecting superior ears for showing at the Exhibition.

And it was then that he saw the pumpkin. It was not a large pumpkin, about the size of a human head, resting on the black earth over the spot where Bonina Ames was buried. It was the obscene shape of the orange vegetable that stopped Clay rigid in his tracks. The thing was gourd-shaped, small at the top, then bloating out at the base like a gross, misshapen jaw. Above this, two inflated areas puffed out like cheeks and atop the whole unsightly growth there rested a swatch of pale corn silk that hung down in a shiny fringe around the gnarled dome.

Clay could not believe his eyes. Was the stuff actually growing there as it appeared to be? Or had it fallen from an ear of corn during the harvest, assuming this bizarre position to mock him? Sutter knelt down and grasped the silky substance. Then he drew back his hand in horror. The stuff felt more like hair than corn silk, and it seemed warm between his fingers. What hellish hybrid was this?

Later that night, Clay told himself that the stuff was warm only from the days of the sun. As for the fact that it was growing on a pumpkin, well anything can happen in a garden. He had proved it many times himself. Some sort of accidental cross-pollenation. There was the explanation. Naturally, his imagination had been ready to play tricks on him once he found himself in the far field. He would just go down there tomorrow and root the thing out.

But Sutter Clay did not go into the farthest field on the morrow. Instead, he busied himself cleaning up off bits of harvesting on other parts of the farm. Then he went into town the next day and let it be known that had a surfeit of pumpkins on his land which were free for the taking.

The response was spectacular. By the carload the people came, anxious to pick up a pumpkin or two, what with Hallowe'en only a day away and all. Sutter Clay locked himself in his house while the people were on his land and didn't stir till he had heard the last car depart.

When he did step outside he almost fell over the pumpkin on the porch. Its ugly head was tipped backward so that it stared full up at him over bloated cheeks, and the fringe of yellow hair glistened palely in the vanishing rays of the sun. There was a note slipped under one side of the protruding jaw. Sutter bent down and fished it out, feeling a chill of revulsion as his hand brushed the skin of the thing.

'Mr Clay,' the note read, 'this one appears to be some sort of a mixture. We thought you would want to keep it for the Exhibition.'

Clay crumpled the note and dropped it to the ground. His first impulse was to kick the thing as far down the lane as his boot would send it. But for some reason, the impulse died. Instead of kicking, he bent down and picked up the pumpkin and carried it into the kitchen. It was surprisingly heavy for only a medium sized vegetable. He set it on the kitchen table and went to find the whisky.

With the bottle of bourbon on his lap and a glass in his hand, Sutter Clay sat near the window in the dusk and stared at the pumpkin on the table. As he drank, the room darkened and with each new wash of grey that overlapped the scene, the malevolent creature on the table took on a new dimension. Where there had been only fat cheeks, now there were tiny eyes; the jutting jaw now had pouting lips, and the whole evil head seemed to shift and frown and cast all manner of rueful glances at Sutter Clay.

By midnight the bottle was empty and Clay had fallen into a fitful sleep. Suddenly he woke up with a start. Was the table closer to him, or was it a trick of the darkness? The murk was now pierced only by a shaft of milky moonlight.

Clay looked at his watch; twelve-fifteen. So, it was now the 31st of October. All Hallow's Eve. A day for torment and wickedness if ever there was one. Sutter Clay stood up and took three unsteady steps toward the table. The last one brought his thigh up heavily against it and set the table rocking on its legs. The pumpkin lurched and moved an inch closer to Clay.

He grunted with fear and rage and struck out at it with his fist. Was it more imagination or did the thing feel soft and yielding under his knuckles? It was fresh from the field. It should be crispy solid.

Suddenly, Sutter Clay knew what he was going to do. Stumbling to the cabinet by the sink, he fumbled about and found matches and a candle. Striking a light, he dropped hot wax in a saucer and stuck the candle upright. Then he opened a drawer and selected a sharp knife.

Returning to the table, he set the candle down beside the pumpkin and pulled his chair over with one foot. He sat down. Oh, what winking, grimacing faces the thing made now, contorting its bloated features under the dancing light of the candle.

'So, it's a face you want?' Sutter Clay said aloud. 'Then we'll give you the one you deserve!' And with that, he plunged the knife full depth into the pumpkin shell.

As he drew the knife out, there was a hissing sound, almost as though a child had sighed, and the room was suddenly full of the fetid odor of the grave. Clay, however, was beyond terror now. Snorting his nostrils clear of the foul, musty gas, he made further incisions in the husk of the pumpkin until he had cut the top off in a clean circle.

Lifting the section off by the hair, he began scooping out the pulp, letting the cold, stringy slime fall writhing onto his trousers and down the legs of the chair. When all was scooped out, he punctured gross, triangular eyes, a small round nose, and a wide, grinning mouth with one pointed tooth hanging down in the traditional Hallowe'en fashion. No jack o' lantern had ever looked so evil.

'Now, let your light so shine before men,' Sutter Clay said as his brain spewed thoughts from a church service of long ago, 'that they may see your good works.' With that, he took the candle from the saucer, poured hot wax into the hollow skull and set the candle inside. With the fringed cap replaced, the job was done.

Clay pushed his chair back a foot or so and inspected his work. The jack o' lantern guttered and winked and a liquid hiss escaped its leering mouth. Clay slapped his knees and laughed hysterically. The force of the laugh burst against the pumpkin and caused the flame to dance wildly inside the crackling head.

Then Sutter Clay fell silent. For as he watched, the mouth of the creature which had been a mischievous grin sagged at the corners and collapsed into a grievous pout. And two drops of wax appeared at the corners of the triangular eyes and

trickled slowly down the golden cheeks.

Clay's lips were dry. He licked them with a tongue that was no longer moist. Then, as he watched transfixed, a tiny tongue of fire darted from the corner of the drooping mouth and ran swiftly across the table. Clay could only watch as the liquid fire dripped in a sparkling cascade from the edge of the table and splashed in a pool of sparks on the floor. Fed from above, the pool grew. Then it overflowed and moved across the floor toward the toe of Clay's boot.

Fascinated, Sutter Clay watched as the fire gushed from the livid mouth. He could smell leather burning, but he could not move. Then, as the flames caught hold and surrounded his chair, father and son sat in the burning kitchen and watched each other die.

Down in the town somebody looked at the northern sky and said, 'Looks like Sutter Clay's place is on fire.' So they called out the fire engine but it got there too late to save anything.

Raking the cold ruins next day, a fireman found the charred husk of the jack o' lantern with its stump of candle.

'Must have been some crazy Hallowe'en prank,' he muttered. 'What kind of children are we raising these days, anyway?'

FEAR

'He was without hope. Justice was a word, love was a word; mercy, too, was just a word.'

Argosy, April 1970.

Ten Minutes on a June Morning

by FRANCIS CLIFFORD

Weeds grew between the worn cobbles and the wall which enclosed the courtyard was scabbed with lichen. Behind the post set in the ground against the wall the ochreous stone had been smashed raw, and about chest-high the post itself was freshly splintered. A few metres along the wall from the post a gibbet rose out of a low planked dias. The rope was in position, running through a pulley fixed above where a man would stand.

Manuel Suredez noticed these things.

With the heightened awareness of fear his eyes took in every detail, his ears every sound. The courtyard was narrow, like a sealed-up alley, and no windows overlooked it. Half a dozen soldiers were present. Their uniforms were shabby, and one of them wore a cap with a broken peak. The Lieutenant, a little apart from the others, was smoking a cigarette.

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour . . .

The morning sun had barely cleared the wall and the long shadows of the waiting soldiers lay crinkled across the cobbles. Suredez was wearing rope-soled sandals, but the drag and clatter of the boots of the two guards between whom he walked reverberated about the enclosure. There was no priest. The

guards did not speak. They led him past the post towards the gibbet; it was of pine and Suredez, one-time carpenter, noticed this also as the guards turned him and started to fasten his hands behind his back. One of the guards whistled tunelessly between his teeth.

Suredez quailed. A withering contraction began to shrink his insides, as slow and inexorable as the passing seconds. The last things he saw before a strip of cloth was tied over his eyes were the hairs poking through the pock-marked chin of the guard who blinded him and the Lieutenant heeling out his cigarette against the cobbles.

Holy Mary, Mother of . . .

He heard the two guards shuffle away. Then someone stepped on the dais and flipped the rope roughly over his head, tightening the noose around his neck. Light splintered through the coarse mesh of the cloth. Straining his ears Suredez tried to stifle the hammer-like thud of his pulse, desperate to identify the last few sounds that would measure off his remaining moments.

Not far away someone coughed, spat. A slovenly scrape of boots on the dais. He heard the pulley squeak as the slack was taken up; felt the rope quiver.

'Ready?'

The echo of the Lieutenant's voice fluttered around the courtyard. Suredez stiffened, trying to lift himself on to his toes, finger-nails digging into his laced hands, mind whirling. There was no need to drown to remember . . . Now it would come.

Oh Jesus . . .

Silence.

Look down in mercy. Forgive me. Forgive us our . . .

Then a sound, slow and deliberate. The sound of someone walking. Half right. Coming closer. Suredez held his breath. His lips continued to move, but no words, no gabbled whisper escaped them. Now he was listening again, wits resurrecting, still capable of wondering, senses clinging to life.

The footsteps approached casually. Two of three metres away they stopped. Another silence, careful, thought-out. Finally the Lieutenant spoke.

'The Colonel has changed his mind, Suredez.' His voice was low, mocking. 'He wishes to talk with you instead.'

And Manuel Suredez slumped unconscious on the rope.

The man who dreamed this dream stirs on the bed in a room overlooking the Calle Sotelo in the city of Villanueva. The courtyard where this thing happened to him is seven hundred and fifty miles from Villanueva, but when he sleeps and the nightmare possesses him – as it always does – time and distance

are destroyed. He surfaces with a start, the light of day breaking hard against his eyes, and a shiver passes along the length of his body as he stares about him and comes slowly to terms with actuality.

The girl is already awake. She sighs and moves closer, soft thigh, soft shoulder, dark hair touching his cheek.

'You're sweating again, Manuel.'

June 14 . . . The date leaps at him across the width of the room. He has escaped the nightmare, but not its consequences. Today is a day of obligation, *the* day, and he thinks with dread of the rifle in its case under the bath and what he must do before the morning is out; why he must do it.

'It is because you dream? You always seem to wake this way.'

Suredez licks his lips as if to rid himself of the taste of death, but he does not speak. The girl chuckles through a yawn.

'What did you do, Manuel? What bad thing have you done?'

The office was small, pressed down on them from a leprous ceiling. A fan with only one blade churned above the desk like a dog in pursuit of its own tail. They had given Suredez an hour after pretending to hang him before bringing him in to face this Colonel with the narrow head and beady eyes. There were some papers on the desk, weighted down by a glass ashtray. The Colonel frequently fingered his pencil-line moustache, as if to check that it was still there.

'Why do you imagine that you continue to be alive?'

Suredez had no answer.

'Yesterday we executed sixteen of your friends. They were shot. Did you know?'

'I was told.'

The Colonel said quietly: 'You personally killed five of my men.' He tapped the desk. 'Answer me. Is that not a fact?'

'If you say so.'

'Five of the People's Militia. And the story is that you killed them in extraordinary fashion. The Captain who took you prisoner says he has never seen such marksmanship.'

Suredez waited.

'Where did you learn to handle a rifle? Who taught you?'

'No one taught me.'

'Have you always been so efficient with a gun?'

Suredez shrugged again.

'Captain Lozano is not given to exaggeration. But I should like to witness your skill myself.'

They went outside into a yard. Another officer was waiting, a Captain, though not the one to whom Suredez had surren-

dered at Dove Bay. He was cradling a carbine. At one end of the yard were two poles with a rope slung between. Dangling from the center of the rope was a metal plate of the kind prisoners ate from. The Captain walked away from them and plucked the rope. The plate jigged and swung in unpredictable fashion.

As the Captain doubled back, the Colonel said to Suredez, 'Take the carbine from him. It is loaded. Take it and fire at that plate. But do not permit yourself any wild ideas. I will have a pistol against your spine the moment he hands it to you.'

Suredez took the carbine from the Captain, his peasant's mind baffled, unable to grasp that he was already trapped. He fired six times at the plate as it jerked and spun in the bright air, hitting it four times despite the lingering nausea and the carbine seeming over-heavy.

The Colonel nodded admiringly and motioned to Suredez to precede him into the office. Once there he lit a cigarette.

'You are every bit as good as Captain Lozano reported. In fact I would say you are exceptional. Not many could do what you have done, let alone an hour after having a rope around your neck.' He blew a thin stream of smoke which flattened and spread as the desk deflected it. 'How did it feel then?'

Suredez had nothing to say.

'Not pleasant, eh? Not willingly gone through again, eh?' He tapped the desk. 'Answer me.'

'No.'

'I do not expect it will be necessary,' the Colonel said. He smiled, showing stumpy yellow teeth. 'You look mystified, Suredez.'

'I am.'

'No glimmer of what we have in mind?'

'No.'

'Then I shall tell you.' The Colonel inhaled a curled mouthful of smoke. 'We have a job for you. A unique job. In the first place it will mean your being set free.'

Suredez frowned his disbelief.

'I assure you,' the Colonel said, 'that I am speaking the truth. By tomorrow you will be on your way, though not your own master. No one will watch over you, but you will do what we require as surely as if you were still on the rope.'

'What job is this?'

'You will dispose of someone. Tomorrow morning you will be on your way to Villanueva.'

Suredez leaned forward incredulously. 'But that is – '

'Exactly.'

The Colonel watched him, narrow head tilted, a smirk on his lips.

After a lengthy pause, he said, 'I can read you like a book, Suredez. I can almost see your mind working. There are two frontiers between here and Villanueva and you are thinking: 'How will they control me at such a long range? You have a mother and a father and a sister. They live in the village of Los Santos de Maimona. Already they are under surveillance. This evening they will be taken from that village. Tomorrow they will be brought here. And if you do not do what you are going to be released to do they will be led out here and hanged. One by one. That is why we gave you a taste of it – so that you would remember. It wasn't nice, eh, Suredez?'

In the room overlooking the Calle Sotelo the girl sighs when Suredez does not answer and flounces on her back, reaching round to switch on the radio. Music crackles softly. The sun is pushing long level rays over the rooftops of the city and a reflection shimmers on the ceiling.

Four nights,' she says peevishly. 'Four nights, and you have become as moody as a husband.'

Suredez closes his eyes, the trauma of that other morning merging into the tension of the present. There must be no mistakes; no suspicions aroused. Soon the girl will rise and light the gas under the saucepan; wash and dress. Soon they will eat the claw shaped rolls and drink the sharp, black coffee. Within an hour she will leave for the shop on the Plaza de Colon where she works in the shoe department. Then the waiting will begin.

'I'm sorry.'

Now it is she who does not reply.

With satisfaction the Colonel noted the effect of what he had told Suredez – the blaze of hatred in the dark, bloodshot eyes; the clenching of hands.

'You wouldn't wish them to suffer in such a fashion, would you?'

'They have done nothing . . . Nothing.'

'We aren't concerned with them, Suredez.' He flipped his fingers twice, arm crooked. 'But you are, which is as it should be.'

Suredez reviled him, veins branding his forehead.

The Colonel merely spread his hands.

'Listen, Suredez. Listen well.' Now there was menace in the voice. 'You are as good as dead already, so we needn't dwell on the obvious. But if you refuse to travel to Villanueva, you will have murdered your mother and your father and your sister.

If you change your mind after leaving here and do not go through with the assignment, the result will be the same. And even if you do not change your mind, but fail to achieve what you have been sent for, they are the ones who will become fertilizer. Is that understood? There are no two ways about it. You will go to Villanueva as planned, you will make the necessary arrangements and you will ensure that the job is successfully completed. It is as simple as that.'

The Colonel turned his back and stared out of the window, fingering his thin moustache. The silence closed in on Suredez. He put his face into his hands. Anguished little cameos of his sister and parents rose up to fill him with dread and appalled grief. He wanted to abase himself, to fall on his knees and plead, to tell the Colonel they had never indulged in politics or violence, how they had been dismayed that he – son and brother – should have done so. But even as his thoughts reeled and blundered in desperation he was without hope. Justice was a word, love was a word, mercy was a word.

He raised his eyes, staring at the Colonel through meshed fingers. Even hatred had been bludgeoned out of him.

'Now d'you understand, Suredez?'

He nodded.

'You have no choice, d'you see?'

In a dry whisper Suredez said: 'What am I to do?'

'I have told you. You will go to Villanueva and kill a man.'

'Who? How shall I know him?'

You will know him.' The Colonel returned to the desk and sat down, grinding his cigarette-butt in the ashtray. 'Your difficulty will be to get close enough. Have you ever been in the city?'

'No.'

'That country?'

'No.'

'In the morning you will be escorted over the frontier. At the town of Chitros, ten kilometres beyond the border, you will board the Central American express. By nightfall you will be in Villanueva. There will be no problems as regards entry into the state. Your papers will be in order and we will provide you with sufficient money so that you will be able to fend for yourself during the required time.'

'Who is the man?'

The Colonel propped sharp elbows on the desk. 'The man,' he said, 'is the personal envoy of the President of the United States.'

Beyond the Patio de los Naranjas in this alien city the great

green bells of the cathedral boom the hour. The sound throbs into the room through the guitar-twang of the radio.

'What time is it?'

'Eight,' the girl Dominga says.

'You'll be late.'

'I won't, you know.'

A movement distracts him. A small bird alights on the window-ledge, a cricket in its beak. There is no end to death. Suredez watches it, thinking, thinking. He will use this ledge himself before long; squeeze the trigger-finger and kill. Somehow he has to shut his mind to the victim's identity and think in terms of one life against three.

'You want coffee?'

He grunts.

'How pleasant you have become,' Dominga says tartly.

She gets up and goes through the curtains into the recess which contains the bath and the tiny cold-water sink and the butane gas-bottle. He hears her strike a match and the gas 'plop' as the stove ignites.

Suredez stiffened against the back of the chair. 'No!' he said. 'No!'

'What difference does it make? A man is a man, no more and no less. As far as you are concerned his office is unimportant.'

'But – '

'You have killed before.'

'Strangers. In action.' He stared at the Colonel, mumbled in a new way, in awe. 'Oh, Jesus Christ,' he said. Then: 'Why? Why him?'

'It is considered necessary.'

'Did you never believe in the revolution?'

'I took part in it.

'Then went sour. Lost faith. Turned traitor.'

'New filth was being substituted for the old.' Oh Jesus, Suredez thought. What has happened to me? His lips trembled. 'I will fail,' he said. 'You expect the impossible.'

'Nothing is impossible. In forty-eight hours you will be in Villanueva. In exactly a week from now so will the President's envoy. We cannot do more than bring you as close together as that.

'You know what will happen if you refuse to go. You also know what will happen if you do not succeed. The same things will happen if you should breathe a word where you are from – and this even after you have succeeded.'

'And if I succeed?'

'You will have shaped the way the world is marching.'
'What of my parents? My sister?'
'They will be released.'
'For how long?'
'For as long as you remain silent.'
'On what charge will you arrest them this evening?'
'We do not require to make a charge.'

It always worries him when Dominga is behind the curtain, close to where the gun is hidden. He listens to her run the tap and begin to wash herself. A bed-spring clicks as he shifts his weight. Almost simultaneously there is a thud at the door as the delivery-boy tosses the newspaper across the landing. Suredez starts, nerves already wire-taut. He rolls off the bed and goes to the door, collects the newspaper and gazes down at it.

The headline reads: WELCOME SENOR! But it is on the thick-set middle-aged face below that his eyes rivet.

The final thing the Colonel said to him was, 'Do not have any illusions about your importance to us. Think rather of your importance to three people who will have been brought here from Los Santos de Maimona. They're expendable. Remember that should the fresh air of freedom affect your judgment. A thousand like them are expendable if need be. You won't be the last of our puppets if you fail.'

He was taken away after that and photographed. Later, in a room somewhere off a musty labyrinth of corridors, he was given a cheap suit, shoes, underwear, socks, two shirts, a tie and handkerchiefs. They also gave him a second-hand grip and one hundred and fifty pesos in used bills. Early in the afternoon he was presented with a well-thumbed passport in which he saw himself recorded as Manuel Rodriguez, carpenter, born in a place he did not know by the name of Quelta. With it was an exit-entry visa on which was a Villanueva date-stamp.

After three hours of drilling, Suredez was word perfect. Eventually, he was left alone. There was no window to his cell. A raw electric-bulb gave light and his shadow moved endlessly across the flaking walls as he paced the floor, pride gone, courage gone, his will already tied to the strings that would ensure servility. Whenever he dwelt on what he must do his mind was pole-axed with renewed dismay, and when he thought of why he would attempt it if he was almost unable to unclench his hands and unlock his jaws.

Home was the place where they always took him in, where his mother fussed to prepare a meal and his father listened to

him but did not understand and his sister gazed in rapture at the advertisements in old magazines that sometimes found their way to the small, cactus-fenced house. And now, because of him, the hard self-sufficiency of their lives had been stricken with alarm. Already they were on their way to this place, bewildered and afraid. And here they would be kept while he went about their salvation. There was no way off the high wire unless he walked its full length and made himself an instrument of vengeance out of love for them.

Food was brought to him in the cell, but he had no stomach for it. Nor could he sleep. He lay on the straw-filled palliasse that served as a bed and watched a moth beat at the light until it killed itself; listened to the silence and wished himself already dead. At two in the morning he was still awake. They came for him then – three men with quiet shoes and sallow, joyless faces. The grip was already packed. Suredez picked it up and followed them through devious passages until they reached a door which opened on to a street and the quivering diamonds of the night sky. A car was waiting. He sat in the back between two of the men while the third one drove.

Nobody spoke, though once he was offered a cigarette. After nearly an hour they all quit the car and moved in single file through sugar-cane; then climbed between the steep, scrub-strewn breasts of hills. For five or six Kilometres they kept together, more cautious sometimes than at others. At last they halted and one of the men said to Suredez, 'We will leave you now. Keep on, as near to straight as you can, until you come to the high-tension wires. Go left – left, understand? – and follow them. They will guide you into Chitros before sun-up.'

He was there at a quarter to six, entering the town as a crab-red dawn began to swell behind his back. At seven-twenty he caught the diesel express which came snaking out of the folded mountains.

And so it was that at eight that evening he finally reached Villanueva and went in search of a rooming-house.

'Ayee,' the girl Dominga sighs approvingly as she wriggles into her clothes. 'I like his face. I consider he has a good strong face. *Muy simpatico.*' She has taken the newspaper from Suredez. Now it lies unfolded on the bed. 'A pity his wife does not come. It would be something to see her, too.'

There is no traffic in the Calle Sotelo, cordoned off since midnight. Already the more curious are beginning to gather. The national flag and the Stars and Stripes hang limply from a score of windows opposite. In two and a half hours the pro-

cession will pass – first the jingling cavalry escort, then the wedge of motorised outriders, then the big black Cadillac and the accompanying cars. For perhaps twenty seconds the Cadillac will be within infallible distance of this second-floor window.

Dominga slowly zips up her skirt. She has to be at the shop by eight-thirty, but she seems in no hurry, humming as she studies the paper.

'You'll be late,' Suredez tells her again. 'It'll take you more than ten minutes the way things are shaping down there.'

'Who cares?'

He masks his anxiety with a shrug. 'It's your job, not mine.'

'I wouldn't see much from the shop anyway,' she says, and his heart misses a beat.

'What do you mean?' He faces her. 'What d'you mean by that?'

The morning after he arrived in the city Suredez left his chosen rooming-house and went in search of the Central Post Office. His instructions were that a letter would await him. He entered the cool, echoing vault of the main building and approached the counter; spoke to the clerk.

'What is the name?'

'Rodriguez,' he lied. 'Manuel Rodriguez.'

'Can you identify yourself?'

He placed his passport on the counter. Presently the clerk returned holding a long manilla envelope.

'You will sign, please.'

Suredez signed awkwardly, lead in his heart. The strings were attached to him as surely as the Colonel had promised they would be. He walked across the patterned floor-mosaic, stopping by a battery of telephone kiosks. Furtively, feeling himself watched, he slit the envelope and extracted its contents. A folded rectangle of paper dropped into his hand. Opening this he found a small key with a cardboard tag attached. On the tag was typed a post-box number – Apartado No. 53. There was no note, but an explanation was unnecessary; they had told him what he would find when he used the key.

The glare of the Plaza del Pilar greeted him. He made his way to a café and, early though it was, braced himself with a cognac. He had six days in which to devise a plan. 'The tactical details are your concern,' the Colonel had said. 'You know your capabilities. Like God, we are giving you a certain amount of choice.'

A poster in a travel-agent's window caught his eye. U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ENVOY IN VILLANUEVA, it read.

ROUTE SEATS NOW AVAILABLE. He went in and spoke to a girl at the desk. Yes, there were still seats to be had. Momento, and she would show him the diagram. She was back quickly.

'Here,' she said, pointing a scarlet finger-nail. 'This is the route the procession will follow from the airport to the Palace of Victories.'

'They range from twenty-five to one hundred pesos.' Now, as if for the first time, she seemed aware of his peasant's face, the too-large suit, his awkward hands, the cotton tie. And the tone of her voice changed. Acidly, she said, 'How many do you want?'

'Gracias.' He backed away. 'I will think it over.'

Once outside he took a horse-drawn barouche to the Gran Via. Along much of its length scores of men were languidly at work erecting the timbered stands. He walked from one end to the other. It was wide, too wide. So was the Plaza de Colon. The Plaza del Pilar was more compact, but the Avenida de Zamora was even more spacious than the Gran Via. Yet he wasn't entirely discouraged. The Plaza del Pilar was linked to the Avenida de Zamora by a comparatively narrow street, the Calle Sotelo. Tallish, slightly down-at-heel buildings solidly walled its sides. Offices, consulting-rooms, apartments, a consulate – he studied the nameplates; gazed up at the balconies and windows.

Here? Somewhere here?

An hour later he retraced his steps, oblivious of the burning heat. Later still he rode in a bus to the airport, then turned about and travelled into the city as far as the Palace of Victories. By early evening he had seen nothing more suitable than the Calle Sotelo.

By then he was parched and weary. He ate and found his way back to his room, where sleep was merciful for once in that it claimed him quickly and allowed him to forget what he had been about, and why. In the morning, though, reality was waiting for him. He went early to the Calle Sotelo and began inquiring whether there was accomodation to be rented. He tried door after door, climbed stairs, rang bells, knocked, spoke with janitors and receptionists and tenants. And always he drew a blank. No, they said. Not even for a day? For half a day, even? No . . . By nightfall he despaired.

'Your problem,' the Colonel's words had been, 'will be to get close enough.'

Choosing a pavement table beneath some blurred pustules of neon he watched the passers-by, filled with a terrible envy for the normality of their lives, their safety, their freedom;

jealous even of the beggar who whined from the gutter. He ordered a cognac and sipped it; glanced at the newspaper. A White House advance party had already flown in, and as he read the list of names and their individual functions and considered the deadly efficiency of their security the certainty of failure intensified. What chance had he got? How could he hope to match their elaborate precautions with nothing more than a gun and whatever crude cunning desperation might lend him?

'A match, *por favor?*'

It was a girl's voice. He looked up. Unknown to him she had seated herself at his table.

'A match?'

Suredez nodded and fumbled for his box. As the match flared he held it to her cigarette and she steadied it, fingers touching his. Then, as the smoke cleared, quietly but point-blank asked, 'Would you like to come with me?'

He shook his head.

'It isn't far.'

'No.'

'Across the street, that's all.'

Something turned in his mind. 'Where?'

'Just over there.'

'In the Calle Sotelo?'

'Yes.'

He swallowed, pulse quickening. 'All right,' he said.

As they crossed the street together she was talking to a man who felt no lust, only relief.

Now she frowns. 'What do I mean by what?'

'Not being able to see anything from the shop.'

A puzzled lift of the shoulders. 'Exactly what I said.'

'But the parade goes through the Plaza de Colon.'

'So?'

'So you'll be right on the route.'

'And here I'm not, I suppose?'

'Here?' Alarm clenches in his chest like a fist. 'I don't understand you.'

'You would if you hadn't drunk so much last night.'

'You're talking in riddles.'

'I told you when you arrived back.'

'Told me what?'

She let it drop like a stone. 'That I wasn't going to the shop today.'

A kind of vertigo assails him, as if he is actually falling. 'Not going?'

'No.'

'But you must.' He feels his face twitch. 'You must.'

Another shrug, this time dismissive. She turns a page of the newspaper and begins to hum again.

In a voice that doesn't sound like his own, Suredez begins: 'For the love of God, Dominga – '

'Oh, cut it out, can't you?' she flares. 'Don't go on about it. I couldn't go there even if I wanted to. They've closed the shop up for the day.'

When he first entered that tawdry room and saw the window overlooking the Calle Sotelo he knew at once that he would never find a better place. During that first half hour, when for five pesos he did what was expected of him, the hard core of his mind remained fastened on the promise of another possibility. Afterwards, as they lay on the bed and the neon blinking from across the street tinted their bodies, she said with meaning, 'Was it because you were lonely?'

'Perhaps.'

'Manuel, isn't it?'

'That's right.'

'Where are you from, Manuel?'

'Quelta.'

She laughed softly. 'Country boy.'

'Not any more.'

'How long have you been in Villanueva, then?'

'Since yesterday.'

'Doing what?'

'Looking for work,' he said.

'What's your trade?'

'Carpenter.'

'Well, I wish you luck.' She got up and began to dress. 'I also work, you know. Does it surprise you? I'm in the shoe department of this big store on the Plaza de Colon, but – ayee – the pay is criminal.' She blew smoke, sighing. 'Criminal,' she repeated indignantly. Outside, the neon pulsed on and off, on and off. 'Where will you go now?'

'I haven't thought.'

'You're an odd one,' she said. 'You didn't really want to come with me, did you?'

'I'm glad I did.' As lightly as he could he went on: 'And I wouldn't mind staying.'

'Oh, sure.'

'Why not? It's an idea, isn't it?' He watched her intently.

'It's an idea, all right. I'll give you that.'

They were silent for a while, but he could tell that he had

planted a seed. More than most she knew about loneliness and the hunger for companionship. And presently she said, 'Were you serious?'

'Of course.'

'For how long?'

'A week, say. Until I find a job.'

'How much would it be worth to me? I need to make fifty. Fifty clear.'

'I could manage that.'

'In advance?'

He nodded.

She'd been fooled before. 'Let me see.'

He reached for his jacket and extracted the rubber-banded wad of notes. Loose change apart he had ninety-five pesos left.

'What d'you say?'

Her answer was to count fifty pesos from the wad. Chuckling she held them up. 'Bed and breakfast, eh? God above, you have made me almost respectable! . . . But you'll have to be quiet on the stairs all the same.'

And so began the mornings when they woke together and she hurried to the shop; the evenings when she returned and he fed her with myths about his day-long search for work; the nights when she lay with him and offered more than a few minutes of bought kindness. On the first morning he transferred his grip from the rooming-house. On the second he went to the Central Post Office and collected the gun from Apartado No. 53. It was discreetly cased, but as he carried the case back to the Calle Sotelo he sweated, half-expecting to be stopped and asked to explain what it contained.

Several times thereafter he took it out from its hiding place under the bath and fitted the gun together; renewed acquaintance with its balance and characteristics. He looked for a way of retreat once the crucial moment had come and gone; timed himself along the corridor and down the stairs that led towards a maze of alleys at the back.

Only on the third evening did he have a passing moment of alarm. Quite casually Dominga mentioned that she understood there had been a security check on the house. Good muscular control had never been one of his assets, but Suredez believed that he had managed to keep his face blank.

'What for? When?'

'The other day. Because of the American, I suppose.'

'What did they want?'

'You'd better ask the janitor if it worries you. It's flattering, I think. Makes one feel important, somehow.' Her lips curled.

'All the more reason for you to be quiet on the stairs, *amigo*. The janitor fleeces me five pesos a week as it is.'

The days moved steadily towards the brink. For all the waiting Suredez wasted no time, repeatedly rehearsing himself, checking and rechecking the schedule of the official programme, handling the gun, watching the pace of the traffic in the Calle Sotelo and calculating distances, seconds. So long as he remained alone he was better able to numb his mind to the reality of what was to come, but when Dominga returned from the shop and their two worlds overlapped the strain of deceiving her and of masking his tension somehow tightened the skin of dread in which he existed. Sometimes, as she recounted the trivia of her day or sympathised with him over his failure to find a job, scenes from the nightmare overlaid his natural vision and he felt himself begin to tremble is if a fever were about to take him. Once, in the night, he woke twisting on the bed, roused by his own voice calling, *'Madre! . . . Padre!* Dominga slept on, but Suredez remained awake until dawn, engulfed by the ever-fresh terror of the courtyard and the blindfold, knowing these awaited them if he failed.

'Merciful Christ,' he whispered to the fading dark. 'How can you permit this?'

'Closed?'

'Closed, yes. Closed. Shut. Locked . . . Does that satisfy you?'

'What are you doing today, then?'

'I'm not doing anything. I told you last night. Why should I do anything?' Furiously, she mops the stove. 'Anyway, what's it to you?'

'But you want to watch the parade.'

'And so I shall.'

Hysteria beats through him. 'Look,' he blusters, 'I'll see what the agency can do about tickets. 'There are still some to be had, and if I'm – '

'You'll *what*?'

'Get some tickets.'

'Have you gone mad?' Her look is incredulous. 'What do I want with tickets? What's wrong with where I am?'

'A stand would be better.'

'At a hundred pesos a time? It should be!' Arms akimbo now, lips curling. 'And what d'you propose using for money?'

'I'll manage the money.'

'Not for me you won't.' She flings up her hands. 'Jesus, Mary and Joseph, what's this all about? I've got a free day. I've also got a view of the route – a good one, too. And you start

going off your head about it, pretending you're a millionaire – you without a job and only a handful of pesos.'

Appalled, Suredez seems unable to move. Demented thoughts spin in his mind. This room is the lynch-pin, and he must have it to himself. *Must* And soon. No one must stand in his way.

'Listen,' Dominga says. 'You can do what you like, but I'm staying here.'

Something explodes in Suredez, releasing him from paralysis.

Suredez hit her, harder, and she screamed again. The sound sliced through his brain like a knife. He dragged her from the window and flung her on to the bed, but she didn't stop; and every scream from her gaping red mouth was destroying his family seven hundred and fifty miles away. In panic he knew it, and in panic he could not quieten her. Vaguely he heard the stir in the Calle Sotelo; feet thudding on the stairs.

'Open up!'

He thought of the gun under the bath and started frantically towards where it was, at bay, reason gone. But the door burst open and two armed policemen shouldered in. He fought them off with a chair, but it was only a matter of time before they had him down on the floor. They pulled him to his feet, right hand levered behind his shoulder-blades. Dominga lay sobbing on the bed, nursing her face.

'Murderer!' he bawled at her. *'Murderer!'*

The two policemen pushed him on to the landing. He continued to struggle. On the stairs, in the lobby, through the lane of sightseers he fought and shouted. The people stared and thought him drunk; shrugged their shoulders. Women. The trouble was always with women . . . A wagon drew up and Suredez was pitched into the back. And the sound of his agony could still be heard as the wagon accelerated away under the streamers hung to welcome the approaching cavalcade.

GHOULISH

'You all know The Beetles? Er, we mean The Beatles. Well meet The Spiders.'

Fantastic, December 1964.

They're Playing our Song

by HARRY HARRISON

Love, love, love-lee love – my love's forgotten me-eee . . . ! *stomp-stomp-stomp* –

STOMP – STOMP – STOMP!! echoed through the cavernous Paramount as the thousands of teenagers stamped their feet in hysterical unison, drowning out the amplified efforts of the quartet on the stage, writhing and tearing at their guitars unheard but not unappreciated. Squealings and stampings shattered the air and more than one flat-chested thin-flanked and orgiastic young thing leaped in frenzy and collapsed unconscious in the aisle. The bored ushers – with ear plugs – dragged them onto the waiting stretchers and carried them out.

The closing number was The Spiders' top-hit-favorite, *Were My Pitying Heart To Break From Pitying You* and they hurled themselves into it with reckless abandon, black hair falling low over their foreheads, arms thrashing and hips rotating like epileptic marionettes. They ended with a flourish and their enamored audience had one last sight of them bowing as the curtains closed, and with love swelling their hearts hurled after them a final hoarse chorus of cries of worship. There had never been anything like it in the history of show business – well, there had been things like it – but The Spiders were surely the latest and best.

*

They were ushered down a back stairway and through an unmarked exit to avoid the press of autograph hounds at the stage door.

Their yellow Rolls-Royce spun them back to their hotel and the bowing manager personally showed them into the service elevator and up to their suite.

'Quickly!' he cozened. 'Screams approach – they are coming down the hall.' They pushed in hurriedly and Bingo locked the door just in time.

'That was close,' Wango said, throwing his guitar onto the couch.

Then the door to one of the bedrooms burst open and at once four lank-haired, autograph-book clutching girls rushed out: they had bribed a chambermaid and lain there in concealment the entire day.

'Shall we?' Bingo asked.

'Sure,' Lingo said and unbuttoned his coat.

The girls screamed even louder when they saw the many, hairy arms concealed there, and tried to flee. But the black suited figures leapt with strange agility and arrow-sharp egg-laying ovipositors penetrated the quivering flesh.

Their heightened screams were drowned in the other screams from beyond the door:

'The Spiders! The Spiders!! We want THE SPIDERS!!'

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"Isolated from all others,
a man is seated.
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And why those wide,
dim eyes and that pallid hue?
It is passing strange..."

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