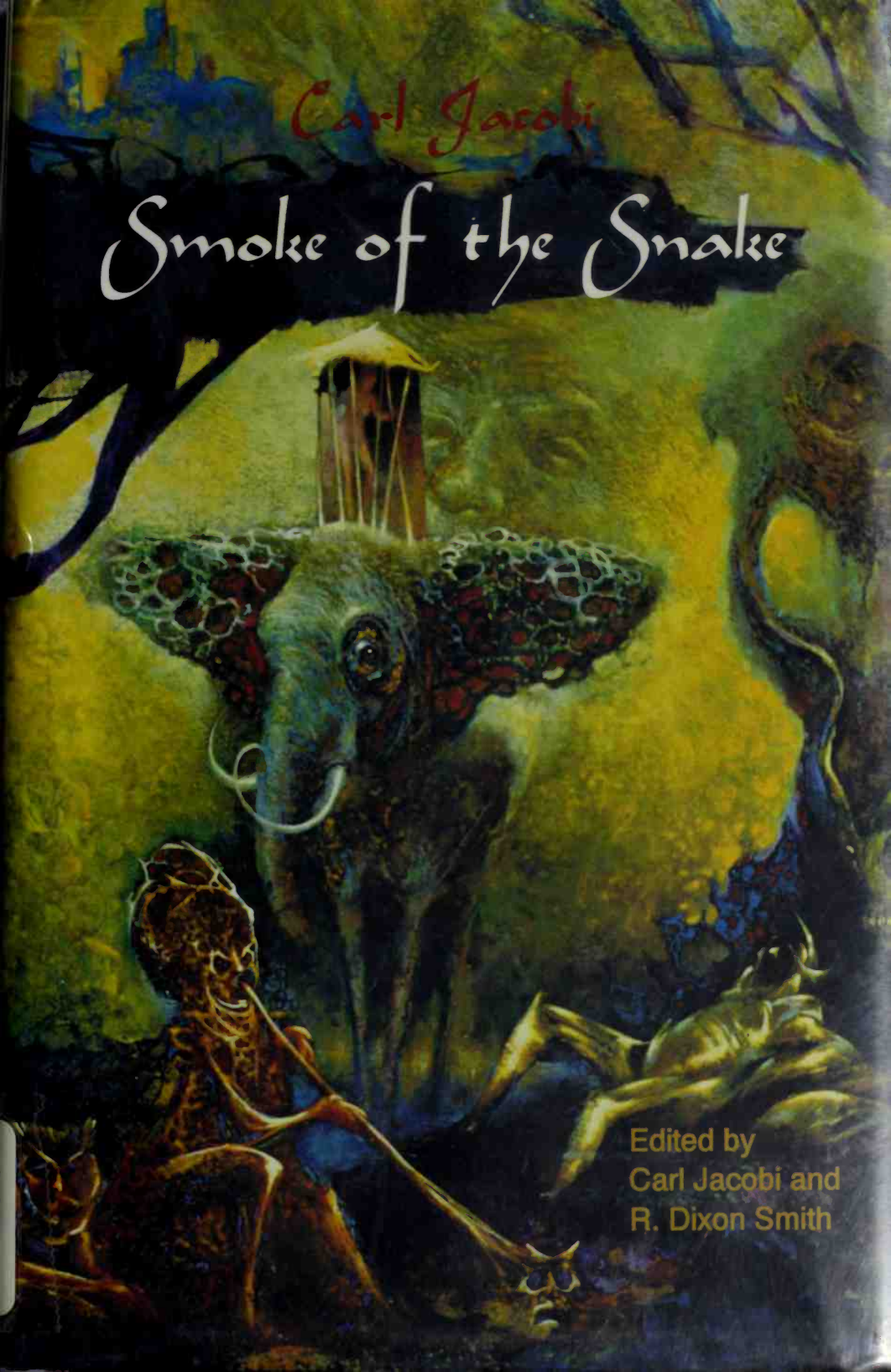
Carl Jacobi
Smoke of the Snake
Edited by
Carl Jacobi and
R. Dixon Smith

$28.00

Smoke of the Snake

by Carl Jacobi

Smoke of the Snake was originally intended to be Carl Jacobi's fourth hardcover collection—first under the title *Levitations in Lavender* and, later, *Wayfarers in Darkness.* The death of its intended publisher scuttled the project, and for the twenty-some years it circulated in manuscript it underwent further changes in title and contents. In its final form *Smoke of the Snake* includes some of Jacobi's earliest professionally published stories and all of his most recent work in the fields of horror and dark fantasy.

Fifteen previously uncollected horror tales have been gathered by the author and his co-editor, R. Dixon Smith. Stories include "The Monument," "Hamadryad," "The Elcar Special," "The Street That Wasn't There" (with Clifford D. Simak), "Smoke of the Snake," "The Black Garden," "Test Case," "Chameleon Town," "The Chadwick Pit," and "Josephine Gage." Jacobi's biographer R. Dixon Smith provides an informative bio-bibliographical introduction. Interior illustration by Rodger Gerberding, jacket art by Jon Arfstrom.

Cover illustration: "The Other Side of Midni
by Jon Arfstrom.

Smoke of the Snake

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Edited by
Carl Jacobi
and
R. Dixon Smith

Illustration by
Rodger Gerberding

Minneapolis, Minnesota
1994

FIRST EDITION

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For Basil and Annie Copper
"Hullo, darlings!"

—RDS

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Introduction

"Waking Up Dead"

R. Dixon Smith

IT IS APPROPRIATE to ask, in a volume which collects some of Carl Jacobi's earliest and all of his most recent horror fiction—stories written nearly fifty years apart—what attracted him so strongly to the genre. What caused him to devote his life to the creation of supernatural horrors and gruesome goings-on? Jacobi has an answer, and a simple one. He has admitted for years to having had a recurrent nightmare, one that fueled his creative energies for nearly two-thirds of a century: in it, he always dreams that he has awakened . . . *dead!*

This collection has existed in manuscript form for more than twenty years. Its title changed more than once. Jacobi originally called it *Levitations in Lavender,* a reference to the Lavenders' levitation act in "Offspring," a work in progress, and an obvious attempt to fashion a title which bore a similarity to those of his earlier Arkham House collections. When agent Kirby McCauley dissuaded him from using it, after explaining that the

choice was perhaps inapt, Carl changed it, first to *Wayfarers in Darkness* and finally to *Smoke of the Snake,* the title of one of its earliest tales. Its contents too were altered through the years. Many of the stories finally included were not, in fact, yet written when their author offered the collection to Arkham House. Jacobi continued to produce new fiction throughout the Seventies and into the Eighties, from time to time adding or substituting titles. I used one story in *East of Samarinda,* deleted others, and added key early works that had never appeared in professional publications.

Smoke of the Snake, then, finally released under the imprint of Fedogan & Bremer, represents a judicious sampling of Carl Jacobi's output in the fields of horror and dark fantasy that spans his entire career, though it concentrates on material written since the publication of his last macabre collection, *Disclosures in Scarlet.* Included, for instance, is "The Monument," one of the earliest supernatural tales Jacobi wrote for professional publication ("Mive" and "Moss Island" came earlier, but they were written for high-school and university literary magazines), as well as a number of late efforts from the Seventies, among them "Chameleon Town," "The Elcar Special," "The Black Garden," "The Tunnel," "Offspring," and "A Quire of Foolscap." Also included are four stories that ran in one or another of the revivals of *Weird Tales,* one of the most legendary magazines to emerge from the Golden Age of the Pulps. Since its original run, from March 1923 to September 1954, *Weird Tales* has been disinterred and resuscitated four times. Sam Moskowitz edited a four-issue revival in the early Seventies; a four-volume paperback incarnation, edited by Lin Carter, appeared in the early Eighties; a California-based operation failed after putting out just two issues in the mid-Eighties; and George H. Scithers, Darrell Schweitzer, and John Betancourt launched an impressive revival in 1988 that continues today. Carl Jacobi contributed eighteen stories to the original *Weird Tales,* and has sold yarns to all but one of the revival ventures. At the time he became a full-time writer in the

early Thirties and wrote "The Monument," Jacobi was struggling to develop an authorial persona, and in fact considered submitting his work to the pulps under an assortment of pseudonyms. The 22-year-old novice found his own name harsh-sounding. Carl's earliest regular correspondent during this formative period was fellow pulp writer Hugh B. Cave of Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Cave reacted to his friend's fussing with characteristic directness:

> Now, about the nom-de-plume. I'd do a lot of thinking about it before I used one. You see, there are any number of pit-falls into which you may stumble. . . . it is better in the long run to stick to your own name. Incidentally, your own name is unusual enough (as is mine) to be taken for a pen-name. Undoubtedly, half of the people reading your stories will believe that the name is assumed, just as they believe that mine is.
>
> There is, however, one advantage. When you are selling about everything you write, you will find that some magazines are returning your yarns simply because they haven't the space to give you. In that case, many well-known writers use a nom-de-plume in order to sell more stories to certain magazines. I know of one specific instance where a single author had TWO stories in the same issue of a magazine for four months in succession, although readers and editor knew nothing about it. This, too, is a tricky undertaking. It means that you must be a master of two distinct styles, that you must be decidedly careful in endorsing checks, etc, in order to keep the editor in the dark. It isn't strictly legal, I'm sure; and it certainly isn't worth the accompanying risk. Once an editor learns that you have been putting something over on him, your chances of selling that magazine are nil.
>
> No. Stick to your own name. After all, if your name was Tom Thumb, and the story was good, the editor wouldn't care a damn. He'd buy it. On the other hand, your name might be John D. Rockefeller and if your yarn didn't suit *Action Stories, Action* wouldn't even deviate from the pink rejection slip. Names don't mean a thing

> unless you intend to write for *Good Housekeeping* or *Cosmopolitan.* (Letter, Hugh B. Cave to Jacobi, 30 August 1930.)

Jacobi had also been exchanging letters with adventure-pulp veteran Arthur O. Friel since July 1928, just before Carl's first pulp narrative came out in *Secret Service Stories.* Writing from his home in Brooklyn, Friel also responded to Jacobi's query about the merits of using a pen name:

> As for the advisability of a nom de plume, well, I dunno. To me your own name looks distinctive, and rather more forceful than either of the two alternates you suggest. Moreover, the penalty of using a nom de plume is that anybody can claim he or she wrote the stories, and you'll find it hard to prove that you did. Not that the editor cares a hoot, but some time you might. Yes, and it's even possible that the editor might care too; his reaction might be: "If this chap's ashamed to sign his own name to this, I guess I don't want it." And then again, an assumed name is often used by the plagiarist, out to swindle an editor out of some quick money and then disappear. So you see there are drawbacks to the use of an alias (pardon the word, but that's about the size of it). Personally, I have always found that it paid to use my own name and be able to prove that it really was my own. You'd be surprised if you knew what queer things arise after an author becomes known. (Letter, Arthur 0. Friel to Jacobi, 13 April 1930.)

One of the two pseudonyms that Jacobi had mentioned was Stephen Benedict. It is worth noting that, although he never actually employed a pen name, Jacobi did compose his most famous story, "Revelations in Black," under the Benedict byline, only striking it out and substituting his own handwritten signature just before sending the manuscript off to Farnsworth Wright at *Weird Tales.* Stephen Benedict would remain a favorite Jacobi alias—always there if needed—for the rest of his career.

A series of recurrent thematic concerns courses through Carl Jacobi's macabre fiction, among which we find the traditional ghost story ("Josephine Gage," "The Elcar Special," "Chameleon Town"); narratives in which malevolent objects threaten their possessors ("The Monument," "The Music Lover," "Hamadryad," "The Elcar Special," "A Quire of Foolscap"); tales of voodoo or satanic cults ("Josephine Gage," "The Chadwick Pit," "The Elcar Special," "The Black Garden," "The Tunnel," "Offspring"); stories involving the *Doppelgänger* or alter-ego motif, which clearly reflect Jacobi's obsession with pseudonyms ("The Music Lover," "The Chadwick Pit"); and the occasional science-fiction or science-fantasy tale, in which is posed an extraterrestrial threat to humankind ("The Street That Wasn't There," "Test Case").

The first story in this collection, "The Music Lover," was written in 1968 and ran in the Summer 1974 issue of *Weird Tales.* In it, an insurance agent discovers that his new phonograph has created his own alter ego. More a fantasy than outright horror, it evokes memories of one of Jacobi's earlier *Weird Tales* narratives, "Matthew South and Company."

"Hamadryad," which appeared in the June 1975 issue of Stuart Schiff's *Whispers*, returns us to the landscape Jacobi traversed in more than a dozen Borneo adventure yarns he had sold to the action pulps of the Thirties and Forties, but this time with a supernatural cast. It concerns a mysterious woman, fished from the sea by the crew of a vessel bound for Bandjermasin, and her equally strange teakwood chest, which contains a priceless emerald . . . and a bizarre carving of a hooded king cobra. "Hamadryad" is a slighter piece than the much earlier "Smoke of the Snake," but nearly as hallucinatory.

West Indian obeah worship and vintage automobiles prove a deadly amalgam as the ghost of a murdered woman drives "The Elcar Special" to destruction, in a story published in Stuart Schiff's 1979 anthology, *Whispers II.*

"Eternity When?" was written in 1948 and finally placed in *WT50,* a 1974 Robert Weinberg publication. A minor work, this cautionary short-short tells of an elderly man's apocalyptic roadside signs and the preternatural power they inspire.

The defilement of a sacred Central American shrine dominates "The Tunnel," a chiller littered with Aztec sorcery, fearful rites, and bloody retribution. Although written in 1975, it first appeared in the Winter 1988–89 issue of *Weird Tales.*

Throughout his career Jacobi was fond of concocting entire libraries of fictitious, fearsome lore, a tradition begun by H. P. Lovecraft in the Twenties. The willingness of readers to believe that such books really exist, or ever existed, is reinforced by Jacobi's references to them—and liberal quotes from their ghastly texts—again and again in his own fiction. Carl's favorite fabrication was always Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence,* to which he first alluded in 1933; the volume turns up in "The Tunnel," as does a new concoction, *Central American Profundity.*

Set in a flooded English graveyard in 1923, "The Monument" tells of a lifesized cemetery figure sculpted in commemoration of a deceased woman, and her living sister whom the sculpture begins to resemble. Jacobi wrote the story in 1932, at the beginning of his professional career, and would appear to have submitted it only once, to *Weird Tales,* whose editor, Farnsworth Wright, rejected it in February 1933. Jacobi apparently gave up on it and filed it away in a cabinet, where I discovered it exactly fifty years later while completing my biography, *Lost in the Rentharpian Hills: Spanning the Decades with Carl Jacobi* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1985). One is at a loss to explain why it never landed in a pulp magazine, or why Wright, for that matter, failed to take it for *Weird Tales,* for both its atmosphere and its denouement are suitably chilling, making it the equal of many of the Jacobi narratives that did appear in the pulps during the Thirties. Its only previous appearance was in a 1985 issue of

Robert Price's limited-circulation fan magazine, *Crypt of Cthulhu.*

What if the entire foundation of matter were to crumple, dissolve, slip away like grains of sand? Such is the premise of "The Street That Wasn't There," one of only two stories the shy, solitary Jacobi ever wrote in collaboration with another author. In 1939 Wisconsin-born science-fiction writer Clifford D. Simak moved to Minneapolis, where he'd been offered a job as a newspaper copyreader. There he met Carl Jacobi, Donald Wandrei, and other local fantasists; was instrumental in forming the Minneapolis Fantasy Society, a fraternal organization of writers and fans; and eventually wrote two stories with Jacobi. Only "The Street That Wasn't There" was published; it ran in the July 1941 issue of *Comet.* Whether one considers it science fiction (as Simak did) or fantasy (which Jacobi maintained it was), the tale is one of the most imaginative pieces either writer ever produced; its closing sentence, for example, "There was a tingling sensation in his feet," is a near-masterpiece of suggestion and understatement.

"Smoke of the Snake" was the first Jacobi narrative set in Borneo, an exotic locale which figured in numerous stories he wrote for the adventure pulps during the Depression and afterwards. But despite its supernatural content, this tale too appeared in a straight action pulp, *Top-Notch,* in January 1934. Out of the stench-filled, rat-infested alleys of Samarinda appears seaman Herrick. His destination, a vile opium den and a writhing, drug-induced king cobra—an eerie prefiguration of the psychedelic era of the Sixties. So congenial was its subject matter to that later generation that the story was collected by Michel Parry and published in a drug-oriented 1977 British paperback anthology, *Spaced Out.*

Many of Jacobi's narratives are set in his favorite rural locale: Carver County, Minnesota, into whose commonplace milieu the most harrowing events are introduced. (For years Carl owned a lake cabin there.) "The Black Garden," which came out in the 1981 Lin Carter-edited paperback, *Weird Tales #3,* chronicles the activities of an ageless woman arrayed in black who has

come to the Carver County town of Cologne (a deliberate and obvious pun) to produce perfume. But, it is soon discovered, her brew requires the blood of young virgins! Jacobi bolsters his outré theme by quoting once again from Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence;* by mentioning *Elixir of Life,* a discussion of the attempt to halt the aging process written by the notorious eighteenth-century sorcerer, Count Cagliostro; and by alluding to *The Dark Elements of Survival,* "a curious work concerned with the postponement of death by occult means."

"Test Case," another Carver County tale and one of Jacobi's most effectively claustrophobic science-fiction yarns, appeared in the Summer-Fall 1975 issue of Gary Hoppenstand's fan magazine, *Midnight Sun.* In it, citizens of rural Waconia discover that they have been invaded by visitors from another planet. Jacobi handles their only clue with characteristic understatement: the town sheriff notes that newcomers to the community have strangely elongated ears.

Although "Josephine Gage" is one of Jacobi's more satisfying voodoo tales, it took nearly forty years to see print. Carl wrote it for *Weird Tales* in 1947, and editor Dorothy McIlwraith in fact accepted it in October of that year. But he had made the mistake of submitting two manuscripts simultaneously, and McIlwraith soon decided to run the other, "The La Prello Paper"—an admittedly superior story, one of the most classic fantasies Jacobi ever produced—instead. A tale of vengeance from beyond the grave, "Josephine Gage" shares its setting, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, with two of its author's best-remembered *Weird Tales* efforts of the Forties, "Portrait in Moonlight" and "Matthew South and Company." Gage, an active student of psychic phenomena, had committed suicide. But now she's back, with murder on her mind. The manuscript lay in Jacobi's files until 1983, when I unearthed it and placed the story with Robert M. Price, who ran it in *Crypt of Cthulhu* in 1984. This is its first wide-circulation appearance.

"Offspring" too was published in *Crypt of Cthulhu,* in 1986, although written a decade earlier. This tale of tor-

ture and human sacrifice concerns the revival of a sixteenth-century satanic cult. Jacobi lays the bibliographic groundwork skillfully; another mention is made of Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence*, and an even more forbidding title is introduced: Zode's *Gomacian Crypt*, "thought to have been destroyed centuries before."

The murder of a man who hasn't existed for the past two years, in a New England coastal village that hasn't existed since the beginning of the century, distinguishes "Chameleon Town," Jacobi's contribution to Gerald W. Page's 1975 Arkham House anthology, *Nameless Places*.

An attorney receives a package of foolscap from someone long deceased, and what he begins to write upon it is dictated from the grave. The last horror narrative Jacobi completed, "A Quire of Foolscap" ran in the October 1987 issue of Stuart Schiff's *Whispers* and recalls one of Carl's best-received *Weird Tales* offerings from the Thirties, "The Satanic Piano." It contains as well a charming in-joke: an unfaithful wife and her lover check into a motel "out on Carcosa," an obvious reference to both Ambrose Bierce's "An Inhabitant of Carcosa" and Robert W. Chambers' *The King in Yellow*, as well as affectionate praise for Karl Edward Wagner's newly established publishing firm.

"The Chadwick Pit" has a complicated history. It was written as a weird tale, but soon revised and published as a straight murder yarn, "McIver's Fancy," in the December 1976 issue of *Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine*. It later appeared, in its supernatural form, in Lin Carter's 1980 paperback, *Weird Tales #1*, but there Carter shortened the title to "The Pit." Herewith Jacobi's original title is restored. Set near Chaska in Carver County, it tells of a serial killer, an alarming number of missing women, and an ancient death cult. We met Chaska's Sheriff Tom Blunt earlier in this collection, in "The Black Garden." And Jacobi once again invents another crumbling volume of unspeakable cruelty: *The Prehistoric Hopewell Culture*. "An utterly strange culture preceded the North American Indian by several thousand

years," it informs us. "It was unique for its burial mounds and its so-called 'Cult of the Dead.'" The story also contains another delightful in-joke: one of the young women who have disappeared is named Mary Philbin. The real Mary Philbin was a once-popular Hollywood actress of the Twenties, who appeared in such films as Erich von Stroheim's *Merry-Go-Round* and Paul Leni's *The Man Who Laughs,* and is best remembered today for her co-starring role opposite Lon Chaney in *The Phantom of the Opera.* Fantasists Robert Bloch and Basil Copper are well-known silent-film connoisseurs; Carl Jacobi is another, although his expertise is less well heralded.

For years Jacobi spoke of the existence of a manuscript he always referred to as his "fourth Arkham." It was, he would explain, a short-story collection accepted for publication by Arkham House a year or so before the death of the firm's owner, August Derleth, in 1971. Had it appeared under the Arkham House imprint, it indeed would have been his fourth Arkham House title, following *Revelations in Black* (1947), *Portraits in Moonlight* (1964), and *Disclosures in Scarlet* (1972), the latter released the year following Derleth's death. But because of Derleth's death, Carl Jacobi's "fourth Arkham" was never published.

Until now.

The Music Lover

THE LAST THING in the world George Bainter thought of buying that August afternoon was a record-player. But the music department of Elwell's Department Store was on the same floor as the general offices, where he had called on an insurance client, and he heard the muted throb of melody in the air while he waited for the down-elevator.

You might say Bainter had a tin ear. He liked any music with a firm beat, a simple tune, and a race-track tempo. As far as classics were concerned, he could detect little difference between a Chopin Sonata and a Bach Fugue.

Bainter didn't know it but the Elwell store's crack salesman was on duty that afternoon. He spotted the insurance agent waiting for the elevator, noticed him looking over his shoulder at a walnut cabinet that stood attractively just off the aisle. The salesman sauntered over.

"Good afternoon," he said. "Can I interest you in our home-theater console?"

The home-theater console retailed for one thousand two hundred fifty dollars which was of course beyond Bainter's means, but the salesman's low-pressure tactics and shrewd character analysis were moderately successful. After due time, infinite persuasion and friendly

chit-chat, he wrote an order for one Harmony Deluxe Stereo, fifty percent down, balance in ninety days, delivery Wednesday.

Pleased with his purchase, Bainter thought his wife, Madge, would likewise be pleased, considering her devotion to things musical, but she wasn't.

"A stereo!" she said. "And you with nothing but a bunch of old rock-and-roll 78's. What are you going to do with it?"

Bainter replied that the instrument would play records of all speeds and besides it was a good-looking piece of furniture.

But on Wednesday, the day of the phono's arrival, Madge apparently did an about-face. She presented Bainter with a thin package tied with a white ribbon.

"If you've forgotten today is our anniversary, I haven't," she said.

Smiling guiltily, he opened the paper-wrapping to reveal a twelve-inch record in an old-world, gaily colored envelope. *Double Concerto in B Flat Minor,* read the label, *Piano and French Horn, Sebastian and Moratime Talbot. Belgian Symphony Orchestra. Stereophonic Recording.*

"Play it," Madge said.

Bainter dropped the record on the turntable. He had some hesitation in adjusting the bass, treble, and presence studs, for he was unfamiliar with the controls. But presently the needle arm swung over and the instrument began to play.

Even to an untrained ear like Bainter's the music was entrancing. The sound of the piano was not only reproduced with a timbre and tonal quality that was amazingly lifelike but the speakers had a mystic, fairy-like beauty to the listening ear. At the same time, the French Horn obligato seemed to emerge from hidden caverns in the opposite wall. It was as if two complete orchestras were on either side of the room, each striving for his attention.

"Separation," said Bainter. "That's what the salesman said stereo is. Division of the music into separate but homologous parts. But I had no idea . . ."

He listened ecstatically. Yet as he did some of the pleasurable qualities seemed to fade and the sense of division increased. He got the impression that one of his ears was drawing farther and farther away without, however, decreasing the sound. A faint spell of nervousness seized him.

Bainter got up, walked to the instrument and lifted its cover. The needle was but an inch from the starting edge. It seemed a long time since it had started to play. He pushed the control to *stop.*

And now in one corner of the record label he saw several lines of printing he had not noticed before. *For best results,* it read, *listener should sit eight feet from phono, four feet to right of center. Excessive clothing will tend to muffle sound.*

Bainter frowned slightly in puzzlement. Then, shrugging, he slipped out of his coat, placed his chair in the specified position and started the record again.

The second playing left him slightly breathless. His hands trembled a little as he put the record away in the cabinet. Madge, noting his queer look, asked if anything was wrong.

"Because if there is," she said, "let me know and I'll be glad to cancel the party."

"What party?" asked Bainter.

"I told you; it's our anniversary. I invited a few friends over. Just Bill and Patty, Clair and Joe and Ellen. And Eric Waverly, of course."

"Of course," Bainter said. "That guy gives me a pain."

"Now, George, you know he's a bachelor and all alone."

"That's just what bothers me," Bainter said.

It did bother him. Not the fact that Waverly was a bachelor, but the fact that he made eyes at Madge whenever he thought Bainter wasn't looking. Only last week when Waverly had stopped by, ostensibly to return a borrowed book, Bainter had seen him holding his wife's hand.

Waverly was an electronics man and in far better financial circumstances than Bainter. He was big, mus-

cular, and handsome, with a widow's peak and a perpetual smile. What he saw in Madge was a mystery.

On the wrong side of forty, interested in little save her collection of music first editions and manuscripts, she had allowed herself to go to seed. Her hair was greying rapidly and her eyes were red and watery from a constant allergy. It was not love but the right of possession that aroused Bainter's jealousy.

Two hours later the guests arrived. The women went into the kitchen and Waverly began to examine the new stereo.

"Should've told me you were interested in one of those things," he said patronizingly. "I could've got you a better deal."

"I did all right," Bainter said.

"For a package job maybe. I could've got you some high-grade components—speakers, amplifiers, a much better turntable—and saved you money to boot. Play it."

Bainter hesitated. A little reluctantly, then, he placed the record Madge had given him into manual operation and sat down in the chair which was still in the specified position.

The music began and again he was charmed by its lifelike qualities. Again he got the impression that one of his ears, or rather his auditory nerve, had detached itself from his body and was moving sideways across the room.

Then he received a profound shock.

Looking through the open doorway into the dining room, he saw the three women and Madge gathered about a familiar figure who was smiling and speaking amiably. As from close range he heard the figure's voice and this was also familiar. He completely forgot Waverly, who now moved to join the group in the dining room.

The complete realization dawned upon him gradually. It was himself—his alter ego—who stood there. But it was more than a separation of his corporeal self into two images. With the phenomenon came a twofold

awareness of his surroundings from each of the two vantage points.

Like the phono which had electronically divided the grooved recording into separated vibrations, so now he had two source stations. That is to say, he could see himself from the parlor in the dining room, and from the dining room, as he occasionally glanced through the doorway, he could see himself—image-number-one—in the parlor. After the initial shock, Bainter wondered about the guests. What would they think if they saw him in two places at the same time?

But the phenomenon apparently didn't work that way. As he strode after Waverly toward the dining room, he was aware that image-number-two faded from the gaze of image-number-one.

Panic seized him. He was seized by a fear for survival. What did they call a splitting of personalities? Schizophrenia. Perhaps he faced a breakdown of his mental-nervous system. Perhaps he was undergoing the first step in losing his sanity. If so, what had induced it?

The double effect remained, but was not noticeable to the others during the meal. The second image seemed to lurk in the shadows near the kitchen. It didn't move or speak, but Bainter was so unnerved he barely touched the baked meat loaf which was Madge's pride. He only drank repeated cups of coffee.

He said nothing to his wife or to the guests. After the supper, Madge remained behind to clear the dishes, refusing all aid in the task. In spite of his perturbed state of mind, Bainter was acutely conscious that his other self stood in the shadows of the doorway drapes, watching his wife.

Presently Waverly, who had been describing one of his company's newest electronic gadgets, got up and strolled toward the kitchen. Instantly Bainter-number-one came on the alert as jealousy swept like a cloud over him.

He watched Waverly move toward the doorway out of his field of vision into the field of his second self. He saw his wife enter the kitchen as Waverly came through the swinging door. He saw them go into each other's

arms, cling there in a passionate embrace. He heard Madge say, "Careful. George might see us. I think he's suspicious already."

Next morning, to his almost overwhelming relief, Bainter found that the double effect was completely gone. But the experience had left him with extreme hypertension.

He phoned his office that he would not be in that day. In the afternoon, still concerned for his mental health, he called at the offices of one of the city's most prominent neurologists where nervously he began to outline his symptoms.

"What's schizophrenia, Doc?"

The physician smiled. "I can assure you that isn't your trouble. But frankly, yours is an unusual case. Why do you connect your symptoms with a record player?"

"I don't know. It just seems the source, the focal point."

Bainter came away disturbed and unsatisfied; the medic had said little to console him. Back home he found Madge also nervous and ill-at-ease. From time to time, she glanced sideways with a sudden turn of her head. Bainter was about to ask her what was wrong when the skirling of the telephone interrupted him. Madge answered it, instantly lowered her voice:

"Are you mad? Why did you call me here? Yes, he's in the other room."

Unseen, Bainter maneuvered himself behind her until he could hear the voice at the other end of the wire.

He listened to them exchange words of affection and then he heard Waverly say, "Hasn't there been any reaction yet?"

"Yes, he stayed home from the office today. But later he went out. I don't know where he went."

"It should work faster than this. Are you certain he followed instructions?"

"Of course I'm sure. What's it supposed to do?"

"I'm afraid it's too involved for your pretty little head. Besides, I don't want to speak of it over the phone."

"But I still don't understand."

"Just leave everything to me."

"Eric, I want to know," Madge said vehemently.

There was a silence at the other end for a long moment. Then Waverly said slowly, "It has to do with ultra sonics. Bombarding the body with thousands of cycles produces all sorts of effects; destroying the marrow in the bone structure for one thing. I went a bit farther than that. That record was made to . . ."

"Eric, I've not been feeling myself the last day. Could it be . . . ?"

"No, of course not." Waverly said quickly. "You're just tense, that's all."

At that moment, Bainter made a movement and Madge saw it out of the corner of her eye. She said, "I'll have to call you back, I'm busy now."

A slow, all-encompassing wrath swept over Bainter. Shoved aside was concern for his health. He knew the source of the trouble now and the significance probed deep into him. He had little or no money to leave behind; if he had, he could have understood such a motive. But simply to make the way clear for their desires—that was staggering. An icy deliberation settled over him. Two could play that game of chess, he told himself. Forewarned was forearmed.

He went into the parlor, pulled the record player away from the wall, undid the turnscrews on the back panel and gazed at the wiring within.

Satisfied, he shoved the instrument across the room until it was abreast of the radiator.

A single thought brooded far back in a corner of his brain: *In the event anything happened to Madge, he would have an alibi.* Everyone knows that a man can't be in two places at once.

He let two days pass. When Madge left for a shopping trip, he took the opportunity to search her room. He found no savings bonds or jewelry of any value or insurance policy. Madge had her own ideas about insurance and had refused to invest in such "intangibles."

But in a bureau drawer, he came upon her collection of music originals, most of which she had inherited from her father.

On top was the Mozart with its date of 1779. He didn't know how much it was worth but he remembered that her father had been offered thousands for it.

Continuing his preparations, Bainter bought a step-up casola plug and proceeded to wire it to the amplifier of the stereo. The casola would multiply the voltage and short to ground at a trigger touch. It would also consume itself while completing its operation. One had only to touch the ornamental metal band on the cover while dusting to make contact with the deadly charge.

Several times during the days that followed Bainter interrupted his wife in little incidents he was sure were a part of the plot against him.

She terminated phone calls abruptly and hastily swept aside pieces of correspondence when she became aware of his presence. She also suggested from time to time that he play the stereo.

For this Bainter needed no urging. Though he knew he was playing with fire, he couldn't help himself. Like a magnet the record player drew him and the attraction of Madge's record was even more potent.

Entering the parlor, he would become an automaton, go to the cabinet, take out the record and place it on the turntable, careful not to disturb the casola. Then he would close his eyes and listen.

A moment later, the feeling of separation would sweep over him.

Simultaneously, as his secondary self took form, he again possessed that double point of view.

But as time went on, these transitions became harder to control. Once his wife queried him, "Where did you go just now?"

"What do you mean?"

"I thought I saw you go into the kitchen. But now you're here."

"You're seeing things," Bainter replied blandly.

One September day, he took the Mozart manuscript and four others of Madge's collection to Dan Rollard, an

antique and rare book dealer with offices on Jennifer Street. Rollard, who was an old acquaintance, studied them through an eye-loop.

"They're all originals," he said. "Of course, the Mozart is most valuable. I'll give you eight thousand for it, two for the other four."

Bainter nodded. "Thanks. I'll think it over."

On the way home, it pleased him to make plans for the spending of the money. He would quit his job and use the free time to branch out into something else more profitable. Or he might pick up that inboard deep-water cruiser he had seen at the Sportsman's Exhibit last week.

Ten thousand wouldn't finance all of it but it would constitute a substantial down payment. Or he might take an extended vacation down to Miami and live it up on the town.

He was sitting in the cross-town bus, musing in this fashion when he chanced to look at the man across the aisle.

A little delayed shock swept through him. His secondary self sat there, likewise reading the evening paper. Up to that time, the dual entity had been confined to his house. Somehow he had never thought it would go beyond those portals.

He got off the bus at Twenty-seventh Street, his intersection, and stood for a moment on the curb. Several persons followed but no one was familiar. He began to walk through the September dusk, scuffing the fallen leaves, halting at intervals to glance over his shoulder. He reached home without incident.

But there he saw at once that all his plans had culminated. A police car was at the curb and a group of neighbors stood silent and grim-faced in the yard. As he ran up the steps, the flash of a newsman's camera shone through the window.

The first thing Bainter did after the funeral was to destroy the Concerto record. The double-self spells, however, continued intermittently. If the record didn't cause them, what did?

As he relaxed somewhat, he began having strange dreams. He dreamed of his wife and Waverly, which was normal, and he also dreamed of himself in a curious fashion. In his sleep, he was two . . . three . . . sometimes four men, jogging in double time down the deserted Minneapolis streets. Now he stood at the roulette table of a luxurious gambling casino and the other players around the wheel were duplicates of himself. So too was the croupier. Again he was in a concert hall, a member of a symphony orchestra and, looking about him, he saw that other players were all Bainters, as were the occupants of the boxes and those in the parquet-circle as far as the footlights permitted him to see.

The disturbing thing about these dreams was that a residue of their background lingered over into the world of reality. When he entered his Nicollet Avenue office, he thought for a moment he saw the velvet drapes and the crystal chandelier of his nightmare gambling casino. When he emerged from the elevator into the lobby, he fancied he was in the concert hall of his dreams.

From time to time, he was aware of his double self following him. But gradually it grew fainter and fainter until one day it was gone altogether.

He wondered what Madge's thoughts had been during the time she, too, had been affected by a dual entity. For he knew that she had been set upon by the same phenomenon not long before her death. He had seen the confusion and fear in her eyes, had discovered evidence of her playing the recording in his absence.

Briefly he wondered what would have happened had she lived, but then he dismissed it from his mind. He had other problems.

Though he was now low on funds—the funeral expenses had been larger than he had expected—he made no attempt to sell any of Madge's collection; no use in arousing suspicion at this point. He searched the house in a vain hope of finding other valuable articles his wife might have gathered but found none.

He did find things that disturbed him, that left a question-mark in his thoughts. On three occasions, he found the power of the stereo had been left on all night,

with the volume control turned way down. He didn't remember switching it on.

Again, after he had emptied Madge's closet and made a bundle of its contents, preparatory to selling them to the rag man, he saw that he had left behind his wife's coat and favorite dress. Bainter shook his head in puzzlement.

"Must be getting absent-minded," he muttered.

A week later on Jennifer Street before the entrance of the Standard Building, he met Dan Rollard, the antique book man. Bainter said, "I've decided to sell the music collection. I'll bring it in tomorrow if you're still interested."

Follard lit a cigar and looked at him queerly. "You're joking," he said.

"Why should I joke?" asked Bainter, surprised.

Rollard laughed. "Always kidding. Well, if you've forgotten selling me those manuscripts, I haven't. My bank account is thinner by ten thousand since I bought them from you."

Bainter walked away in a daze. So his alter ego still existed, was consummating transactions without his knowledge! In the shadow of this staggering revelation, the loss of his anticipated windfall was dwarfed and cold perspiration broke out upon him.

He arrived back home, switched on the lights and went into the parlor. He opened the cabinet and took out a record at random. He placed it on the turntable of the stereo which was unharmed by the action of the casola. He did these things mechanically, eyes unseeing, as a man under a spell. Then he sat back in his chair and listened.

The record played to the end. He started it again. Gradually as he sat there an odd feeling stole over him, an awareness of another presence in the room—a presence in reality, not a phantom image. For a long time he forced his eyes to remain focused on the stereo, refused to look to either side.

But then, even before Bainter slowly turned his head, he knew that it was Madge who lounged there in the opposite chair, grinning at him.

Hamadryad

THE *MORINDA* WAS three days out of Soerabaya, under charter to the Pon Moy Trading Company, Singapore, bound for Bandjermasin and the East Borneo ports. The skipper was Captain Ehred Queen. The First Officer was Hiram Dorrance, an alert, aggressive man of forty-odd who saw everything within range of his gimlet eyes.

Dorrance was on the bridge that September morning, finishing out the last hour of the morning watch, and he was aiding his vision with a pair of Zeiss glasses, when he sighted the grey spot rising and falling in the swells off the starboard bow.

The grey spot resolved itself into a dory with a jury mast and a ragged scrap of sail. There were two occupants in it, but at that distance Dorrance could not tell if they were alive or dead.

The First Officer called the quartermaster to signal to stop engines and ordered the number one boat lowered.

When the boat returned with the dory in tow, the two occupants were lifted in a sling over the rail. Only then was it discovered that one was a woman, a Malaysian with coal black-hair, clad in a mara jacket and sarong. She was alive, but her companion, a leather-faced lascar, was dead.

The one and only article in the dory was a small chest, fifteen inches square, fashioned of teak and split bamboo.

Captain Queen was drunk as usual, so, as usual, Dorrance found himself taking charge. He ordered the lascar weighted and heaved overboard, since nothing more could be done for him. The woman was taken to a spare cabin under the bridge wing, where she was given a pannikin of whiskey. An hour later she had sufficiently revived to sit up in the bunk and ask in English what had happened.

"You were pretty much a goner," Dorrance told her. "The blighter who was with you is dead. Where you from?"

"Macassar," she said shortly.

"I mean what ship," Dorrance said.

"Macassar," she repeated, and then suddenly rose up in agitation. "The reliquary!" she cried. "My reliquary! I must have my reliquary. Where is it?"

She repeated her words, and Dorrance stared at her, puzzled. Then he nodded. "Oh, your box. It's there on the table."

The following morning the woman was much improved. But after that single question as to the whereabouts of the teakwood chest, she either would not, or could not, speak.

"I don't get it," Dorrance said to Captain Queen who had become moderately sober. "There was no water or food in her boat. As for that chest she was so concerned about, I've seen a hundred like it in Chinese shops in Singapore. There must be something valuable in it all right."

At six bells, the woman came on deck. She stood by the rail, her long black hair waving in the westerly wind. Her face was inscrutable, her svelte figure little concealed by the tight sarong.

It occurred to the First Officer that now was as good a time as any to satisfy his curiosity about the contents of the chest. Accordingly, he went down the companion and headed for her cabin.

Ten minutes later he had successfully worked his knife into the lock of the chest and thrown back its cover.

The sunlight slanting through the port revealed two objects, each resting on a layer of plush. One of these was the largest and most perfect emerald Dorrance had ever seen. The other was something he recognized instantly, a Malay Sipurtan, carved out of wood in the shape of a miniature hamadryad and colored a deep red. An Evil Eye, obviously intended as a guardian of the emerald next to which it was mounted.

The First Officer knew Sipurtans were credited with all sorts of magical powers and supposedly carried all the malignance known to mankind. In the jungles north of Penang, it was said that natives dropped dead when exposed to their sight or that a limb withered and died when it came into contact with one. Dorrance had never seen one in the shape of a hamadryad before. The scarlet likeness of a King Cobra was singularly repelling, the carving intricate and skillfully done.

But it was the emerald that held his gaze. He ran his finger over the jewel caressingly, stared down at it a long time. At length, deliberately, he cut the stone from its plush mounting and, without compunction, dropped it into his pocket. After all, the woman owed her life to him. If he hadn't sighted the dory when he did, her chances for survival would have been nil. Besides, the presence of the Sipurtan showed she intended only to keep the stone as the object of some mumbo jumbo veneration.

He closed the chest, relocked it and left the cabin.

Meanwhile, the ugly weather which had been brewing all day finally closed in. Within hours the *Morinda* was pitching and rolling, fighting heavy seas. In his cabin bunk, Dorrance lay awake, thinking.

In knocking about the archipelago, he had heard and seen many strange things that embodied all the superstition of the East, but the First Officer was a confirmed skeptic. Those impossible events which he had witnessed, he told himself, were all the result of trickery of one kind or another.

He dozed off but shortly after midnight was awakened by a loud grinding sound. A moment later, Captain Queen burst into the cabin.

"There's hell to pay," Queen said. "That's what comes of picking up that woman. Everyone knows a female aboard is the devil's luck."

"What's wrong?"

"We've sprung a rudder pindan and it's played hob with the steering gear. I knew something like this would happen."

In the charthouse a few moments later, Queen pointed to a dot on the chart. "The nearest place where we can lay up for repairs," he said, "is here. Dellington's Reef. There's a lagoon. But we'll have to go in at quarter speed. Yours is the third watch. Call me if there's any trouble. That damned woman . . . !"

Dorrance returned to his cabin. He lay awake, acutely aware of the reduced speed, the occasional grinding of the steering gear and the high seas that buffeted the *Morinda.* Yet in spite of this, it was pleasant to think about what would happen when he disposed of the emerald. Even by today's standard a stone of this size and apparent perfection should make him independent for years.

Once more he dozed off, only to be awakened again just before dawn. He didn't know what had brought him out of his sleep this time. But he had an inner impression that something was wrong in the passageway outside his cabin.

He got out of his bunk slowly, opened the door and looked out. Four cabins, including the skipper's, fronted the passageway. It was deserted, dimly lit by a single light. He began to move toward the companionway. Suddenly he froze.

There was a narrow water pipe running along the starboard wall a few inches down from the ceiling and descending from that pipe was a ten-foot length of coil. The thing dropped to the floor and began to glide toward him.

A hamadryad! A King Cobra!

But an unreal hamadryad, colored an impossible red and with all the grotesque details of the Sipurtan carving.

He turned to lunge backward. The serpent moved across his path, cutting him off. In the dim light of the passageway, he could see the inflated hood and the fangs lancing outward as the red body came on. Then a mist seemed to gather about it. The mist grew dimmer and faded away. The serpent was no longer there.

For many moments the First Officer stood in his tracks, sweat cold on his body. Was he still dreaming? On trembling legs he made his way back to his cabin, shut the door, bolted it, and fell weakly into his bunk. It was a long time before sleep finally came to him again.

Morning, and the storm had passed on. Long oily swells now surrounded the *Morinda*, and the sky remained dark and lowering. They were still moving under quarter speed, but the grinding of the steering gear had lessened.

Dorrance said nothing of his experience in the passageway. Already the horror of it was dimming in his thoughts. It must have been a dream, he told himself. If it wasn't a dream, he didn't want to be accused of seeing things. He met the Captain at the break of the bridge by the canvas weather cloth.

"How long do you figure it will take us to reach Dellington?" he asked, lighting a cigar.

Queen shrugged. "Another twelve hours mebbe. I only hope that pindan hangs on 'til we do."

"I've been there before," Dorrance said. "If you're expecting help there, you can forget it. It's a jumping off spot. One trading post, and that's all."

"I know," Queen replied. "I read the *Pilot*. But that's not going to stop me from dumping that woman ashore there."

The *Morinda* limped into Dellington lagoon and dropped anchor. Dorrance went ashore, looking forward to the refreshment available at the trading post. He found it strangely crowded.

Crewmen from the *Luella Blair*, a three-thousand tonner out of Penang, were there. They had sailed an open boat across five hundred miles of open sea after their ship had foundered in what may well might have been the outer reaches of the same storm which had crippled the *Morinda*. Now they were living it up, celebrating their near escape from death. Dorrance bought a round of drinks and joined in their revelry. They were mostly British like himself and he had a bond of interest.

One of them sat down at his table and began to talk.

"How long you been in the island trade?" he asked, tilting his glass.

"Twenty years," Dorrance said shortly.

"Expect you've had your share of troubles then?"

"Hasn't everybody?"

The man put down his glass and traced wet rings with it on the table. "I mean strange troubles," he said. "Queer troubles . . . You know what I mean."

"No," Dorrance said. "I'm not sure I do."

"Well, Dyak charms, Malay curses, and the like."

"Oh that. I guess if you're looking to believe those things you'll find 'em in every part of the world."

The man shook his head. "Like our ship. One minute we were sailing along on a fairly even keel, and then quicker than you could say Jack Robinson, we were in trouble. The storm was bad, but it wasn't that bad. The way the *Luella Blair* went down, you'd think half her plates were ripped out. Now I'm not much for believin' in ghosts or devils, but I still think that woman was the cause of it all."

Dorrance paused midway in the act of lighting a cigar. "Woman?" he repeated.

The man nodded. "A Malay Dapala. That's the female version of a tribal witchdoctor, peculiar to some inland tribes, not restricted to one village. She was headed for Timor to take over a kampong there. As a matter of fact, I don't know why she took a ship at all, for according to the story that went along with her, she had the power to move her body through space from one place to another. Or some such fofaraw. Anyway, she was a tidy piece of baggage with good looks and a fine figure, and

our Second figured she was easy pickings and made a play for her."

"And how did she take that?" Dorrance asked.

"She didn't take it at all." The man took another swallow of his drink and leaned back. "A little while later," he continued, "the storm hit us and a little while after that, we began to go down and there was a rush for the boats. We had a place for the woman, of course, but I guess she figured that after the Second's move, none of us was to be trusted. Suddenly she held up a red carving. I've seen 'em before, and I knew what it was. A Malay charm. 'I'm taking this boat,' she says quiet-like, waving that charm back and forth before her, 'and I want only this man with me.' She pointed to a lascar of the stokehold gang. 'The rest of you stand back!' Well, would you believe it, not a man of us made a move. It was as if that damned charm froze us all in our tracks. She got into the boat, taking only a little teakwood chest she always carried with her. Then she faded away."

Dorrance regarded the man. "What do you mean, 'faded away'?" he said slowly.

"I'm not sure what I mean. One minute she and the lascar were drawin' off in the boat while we stood there like a lot of statues. The next minute she wasn't there. It was open sea."

Dorrance sat there a long time in deep thought. Then without further word, he nodded goodnight, left the post and went outside. He began to walk aimlessly along the waterfront, smoking his cigar. Apart from the trading post and a few native huts, there was nothing at all to Dellington. Nevertheless he was glad the skipper had decided to put the woman ashore here. After what he had been told by the *Luella Blair* seaman, the *Morinda* would be well rid of her. Besides, it was only a matter of time before she would unlock the teakwood chest and discover her emerald was missing. Dorrance didn't fancy being questioned on that score by the captain.

Driven clouds passed over the moon, shuttering the beach with a curtain of darkness. He turned and headed back for his ship.

Repairs on the *Morinda's* steering gear took less time than Captain Queen had anticipated. Two men in diving scaphanders went down and successfully straightened the rudder pindan. Dorrance personally saw the Malay woman to the beach. He left her on the little spit of sand and unemotionally watched her move with uncertain steps toward the uninviting collection of huts, carrying the teakwood chest under her arm. With a sigh of relief, he returned to the *Morinda* and gave orders to up anchor.

It was two nights later that the First Officer's dreams began. At first they gave him little concern. But as they continued, he found himself beset with terror that left him weak and trembling. Once he dreamed he was moving along a jungle trail with the surrounding trees pressing close. Gradually came the impression that unseen eyes were upon him. And then he saw the hooded forms of dozens of hamadryads, clinging to the arboreal network above him. Red cobras they were, with all the grotesquerie of the carving in the Sipurtan. Again he saw himself sleeping in a tent, only to feel something glide upward over his body toward his throat. As the horror of these dreams grew and multiplied, Dorrance sought to avoid them by fighting off sleep. He grew restless and irritable and finally Captain Queen noticed his bloodshot eyes and haggard face.

"You look terrible," he said. "What ails you?"

"I'm all right," Dorrance replied nervously, "Little trouble sleeping, that's all."

But secretly, he was concerned. Could it be possible that a native gimcrack would effect his mental state?

The *Morinda* did not put in at Bandjermasin. For reasons which he did not explain, Queen ordered the ship to continue up the Borneo coast to Samarinda, a third-rate coastal town where Dorrance knew he would

find no buyer for his emerald. The First Officer stifled his impatience with difficulty.

In the late afternoon of one day, Dorrance had occasion to enter the passage under the bridge wing and found himself passing the cabin which had been occupied by the Malay woman when she had been aboard. The door to the cabin was ajar, and he thought he heard a rustling sound inside.

Puzzled, he pushed open the door and entered. All ports were curtained as they should be and the cabin was in semi-darkness, lit only by the light that filtered in the doorway. And then a little shock swept through him from head to foot.

Impossible though it was, the Malay woman was there, seated in a fanback chair. Her long black hair was cascaded down her shoulders, and her tight sarong liberally exposed her figure. One arm was cradled in her lap; the other was upraised, pointing directly at him. Her face was blazing with hatred.

"You!" Dorrance exclaimed. "How did you get here?"

She made no reply. A light mist enveloped her but did not hide her features. She sat motionless; her right hand continued to point accusingly at him.

"What do you want?" Dorrance faltered. "How . . . ?"

But as he moved forward into the cabin, the mist encircling her grew thicker and she seemed to blend with the background. Her outlines blurred and the next instant she vanished.

Dorrance crossed to the now empty chair, then backed out into the corridor like a man in a stupor. Stumbling, he made his way back to his quarters where he slumped into a chair before the table and sought to clear his tumbling thoughts. It didn't make sense. He had seen the woman ashore at Dellington. Was he going mad? First the hamadryad and now the woman!

But still another surprise awaited him as he sat there. Mechanically, as he had done a hundred times in the last few days, he reached for the tobacco humidor and dug his fingers into its shag contents. His fingers failed to touch what he expected. He upturned it and dumped the tobacco on the table. His hands pawed through the

tobacco, wildly spread it out. The emerald was gone from its hiding place.

For a moment he sat there, unbelieving. Then with an oath, he kicked his chair and lurched to his feet. He ran out, climbed the ladder to the bridge and confronted the skipper who was just heading below.

"All right," Dorrance raged, "where is it? Who took it?"

Captain Queen regarded him curiously. "Took what?"

"My emerald!" shouted Dorrance.

"Where would you get money to buy an emerald?"

"I tell you somebody stole it from my cabin."

Queen grinned sarcastically. "You might ask the Malay woman's ghost. Benson came around with a wild story that he saw her enter her cabin. First time I ever heard of a person who is still alive being a ghost. Benson never could hold his liquor. But why don't you find the ghost and ask her where your emerald is. There's as good a chance of her having it as you ever owning one."

Fuming with rage, Dorrance swung about and headed back below. Benson! Since the day he had come aboard, Dorrance had never liked him. Those little squinty eyes and his shifty way of turning them got under his hide. He went down the passageway to the Second's cabin and burst in the door. He walked deliberately across to a chair, sat down, resting his arms on the back and confronted Benson who was lying in the bunk. The Second looked up sleepily.

"You took my emerald," Dorrance said.

"I did what?"

"Don't try to lie. You're the only one who could have known about the Malay woman. You even told the skipper you saw her go into her cabin.

"I thought I did," assented Benson. "I must be going crazy, but I thought I saw her. Only when I looked, she wasn't there. But I don't know anything about any damned emerald."

Dorrance stood up and advanced toward the bunk threateningly. "And I don't suppose you know anything about my tobacco jar either."

Benson shook his head. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Maybe I should improve your memory a little."

The Second was a smallish man with a babylike face. He rose up on one elbow, reached under his pillow and drew out an ugly snub-nosed revolver. Calmly, he leveled it before him.

"Mister Dorrance," he said very quietly, "I don't know what your game is, but you're not going to bulldoze me. If you've got any complaints about stolen property, see the skipper. Now get out of here. You're interruptin' my sleep."

Outside in the passage again, Dorrance's frustration and anger almost overwhelmed him. Blindly he made his way to the forecastle, where he made a haphazard search of the seamen's quarters. But it was futile. He returned to his cabin, pawed through the humidor's contents again and then searched every conceivable place in the room in the vain hope that he might have had a lapse of memory. But this, too, he knew could not be.

A man possessed, he went out and began to wander aimlessly about the ship. He went up on the bridge; he went into the charthouse; he even went down the gratings into the stokehold. Finally . . . magnetically his steps led him once again to the Malay woman's former cabin.

Before the door he paused, then with a long intake of breath, he entered. This time he strode to the nearest port and thrust the curtain aside, allowing the daylight to come in. The fanback chair where he could have sworn the Malay woman had sat just a short time before was empty, as was the rest of the cabin.

No, not quite empty. Something occupied the surface of the table, something that hadn't been there before. The Malay woman's teakwood chest. Dorrance stared at it, then moved slowly across to the table and sat down. He waited a long moment then lifted the chest's cover.

An electric thrill went through him. A bead of perspiration oozed out on his forehead. On the same plush mounting was the emerald. His emerald! And next to it was that same evil looking Sipurtan with its red hamadryad carving.

Dorrance sat back comfortably and allowed a smile of satisfaction to cross his lips. He didn't know how this had happened. And he didn't give a damn. All that concerned him was that he had his treasure back and the door to his future had opened once again.

He drew out his knife. With firm and steady hands, for the second time, he began to cut the jewel from its mounting. The plush cloth was tough and resisted his efforts. But suddenly it yielded. His wrist, unchecked, drove on and slammed hard against the carven fangs of the adjoining Sipurtan. And then he felt a stinging pain shoot upward along his arm. . . .

Dr. Cornelius Van Tromp, staff physician at the Bandjermasin Mercy Hospital, had plied his profession twenty years in Borneo and during that time had familiarized himself with most of the maladies of the East. Which is perhaps why, when the *Morinda* made an emergency landing at that port, the British consulate turned over to him for official examination the body of the ship's First Officer.

In his hospital office, Dr. Van Tromp looked across at Captain Ehred Queen and tapped a pencil reflectively on the desk top.

"You know, of course, Captain," he said, "that the death of this man is bound to raise questions which I cannot answer. I could find no external cause for death except several small incisions on the forearm just above the wrist."

"Then . . ."

"I'm not a toxicologist, but I can tell you this." The physician removed his pince nez and put them in a case in his pocket. "There are two kinds of snake bite venom. Hemotonic venom effects the blood vessels and would be easily traceable. But some serpents inject an untraceable venom known as Neurotonic which effects the nervous system." He paused and leaned forward. "Tell me, Captain Queen, is it possible that this man, Hiram Dorrance, could have been exposed to the bite of a cobra?"

The Elcar Special

I HAD BEEN looking for a job for more than a year and not until last week did I find anything I really liked. I wasn't much for working at all, not full time anyway, but Ma said she wouldn't buy me any more cigarettes or beer. She said I was old enough to shift for myself. I'm 32.

I tried a car wash, but that's a lousy job. You work your tail off for a few hours and then you sit around with nothing to do. I drove a delivery truck, but I ran into a big semi, and the boss said I was irresponsible and fired me. And I did other things, like fry cook, clean up man in a shoe factory. But not until last week did I find something I liked.

I don't know what my job title is, but I suppose you could call me a general maintenance man. I work for a one man business, Vintage Cars, down on South Brotura. The place is a converted warehouse, with all the partitions taken out, and all that's in it are cars.

The damnedest cars you ever saw. Some of them are forty or fifty years old and have names I never even heard of, like: Jordon, Moon, Case, Jewett, Graham Paige, Durant, and Rickenbacker. The place is owned by a Mr. Harry Dumont. He's a nice old guy, with white hair and thick glasses. I don't know what his nationality is, but he speaks with an accent.

He collects these cars. He says he rents them to movie studios and other places, but since I've been there, he hasn't rented any. My job is easy. All I have to do is make the rounds each day, wash and polish the cars, even if they're not dirty, change the oil—sometimes the oil is practically new, but he insists I change it anyway—keep the tires inflated and drive some of those old heaps a few miles every now and then, just so, as Mr. Dumont says, they won't get stiff. The way he watches over those cars, you'd think they were made of gold.

"This is an Elcar Special," he said to me the other day. "It was originally custom built for Lillian Boyer, a female daredevil of the twenties. At seventy miles an hour, in a white suit and white helmet, she would stand on the hood and grab a rope ladder dangling from a plane as it swooped down over the car and then climb up. I saw her do it. It was a thriller. And that car was something to see as it roared down the track.

"I got the car from the estate of a Dr. Stephen Lenier, a New York neurosurgeon who got it from the Boyer woman when she finally gave up her stunt exhibitions. Lenier brought it back to the States from Martinique where he lived many years. Incidentally, he was married to a native woman he met in Martinique, and there were a lot of ugly stories circulated about her. It was said she had never discarded her native ways but practiced *obeah* in their island home. Lenier may have been a neurosurgeon, but in some respects—temper for one thing—he was almost as psychotic as his patients. His wife's obsession with what he regarded as a lot of West Indian mumbo jumbo finally set him off, and one day, completely fed up with her outré ways, he simply did away with her—ran her against a stone wall with this very car, in fact. Anyway, that's the story that made the rounds. No one was able to prove it. But you can see why it makes the car even more valuable to me."

I didn't see anything about that car. It was even shabbier than some of the others, with dents, rusted out spots and worn upholstery. But, as Mr. Dumont said, it was his favorite and he kept it in a separate bay of the warehouse.

Of course I know now that collecting and renovating old cars is a hobby with a lot of people. I know the fad has clubs all across the country, and some of the members are pretty sharp about fixing them and getting them to run again. Every now and then you see two or three of these old jalopies on the street, and every parade and convention brings out more. There are pictures and diagrams of engine replacements and chassis structures in newspapers and magazines. What got me in the beginning, I suppose, was the sight of so many under one roof.

Most of those in the Dumont warehouse dated to the late twenties and middle thirties. A few were older, built shortly after the turn of the century. One thing was certain, however. The Elcar Special was in a class by itself.

The moment I first got the opportunity to drive that car I sensed a strange quality about it. It wasn't the way the shift moved or the motor responded. Those are things I would understand. No, it was something not quite describable. At first, I was driving a fifty-year-old car that belonged to a period before I was born. But then slowly, gradually, as the ancient engine banged away in front of me and the wind sang its aeolian song over the windshield, the impression came that I was not alone in the car. It seemed that another person, invisible, sat there beside me, and that he was passing on to me all the power and strength of a second personality. Does that sound crazy? I suppose it does. But the sensation was overpowering. I felt like a king. When I got back to the warehouse, I was suddenly depressed as if something had gone out of my life.

Every few days Mr. Dumont would get another car. Where he got the money to pay for them was a mystery. Most of the time he went around dressed as if he were poverty stricken in an old blue sweat shirt and ragged trousers.

In the warehouse he had Franklins, Dusenbergs, Hupmobiles, Auburns, Reos, Dorts, and a Stanley Steamer. He had a Pierce Arrow and a 1923 Chevy, air cooled, which had been judged a failure but which

somehow had slipped by the factory recall. And he had a giant Bugatti-Royal, made on a baronial estate in Alsace Lorraine, which supposedly had been hidden in a French sewer during World War II, to keep it from the German invaders.

It was on a warm Sunday in July that Mr. Dumont came to the warehouse early, as he frequently did weekends, to do something that probably gave him more pleasure than anything else—a drive into the country. By this time, our employer-employee relationship had become less formal and when he had complained of not feeling up to par the evening before, I had warned him about eating oysters during a month without an "R" in it. But he said he was feeling better that morning. He took the Elcar Special and headed for the highway.

An hour later I got that telephone call. He had been taken violently sick way out in Estramordo and had just managed to drive as far as the hospital. Over the phone, the doctor said that his condition was not serious but he would have to remain overnight for observation. Mr. Dumont had requested that I come and pick up the car. Sick as he was, he didn't want it to stay unattended in a parking lot.

So I caught a bus and got to the hospital where I tried to cheer him up a little. I think he appreciated this. He had no living relatives and his friends were few and far between.

Then I went down, got into the Elcar and headed back for the warehouse.

It was a beautiful day. A few fleecy clouds drifted in an azure sky and a balmy breeze blew in from the south. I drove down Altamura to where the Rapitan freeway merged with Linares. It wasn't the shortest way back, but I didn't think of that. The car ran like a charm. There had been a rain the night before, and, as is the case with many of these vintage cars, the dampness affected the motor. It seemed to propel the car without effort.

As I drove, the strange feeling I had experienced before in this car returned. The impression that another person was sitting there beside me was even stronger

this time, so much so that I caught myself glancing sideways into the adjoining seat. But this morning that feeling was different. The sense of transmission of power and strength from a second personality came again. But with it was the impression that this influence was one of evil.

The gas gauge pointed to the low mark, so I drove into a filling station. The attendant was busy, and while I waited, I opened the glove compartment. It was filled with a lot of junk of the past: a collapsible drinking cup, a fountain pen that had to be filled with ink, an old watch fob and a linen duster cap. Pushed far in the back was a square package wrapped in oil paper. I debated a moment, then, giving in to curiosity, undid the wrapping.

The package contained a folded cloth map with protective metal corners, and two photographs. The map bore no state or area heading. Names on it—Macouba, Lavigne, Mount Pelée, Paquemar—were totally unfamiliar to me. A line in red ink had been drawn up the middle of the map; it followed no marked road. Near the center the line stopped, and here, also in red ink, were the letters C L. The two photographs were mounted on wooden frames, to keep them from being crushed, I supposed, but the precaution hadn't been very successful, for they were in bad condition and in places almost impossible to make out.

One picture showed a man and a woman against a background of palm trees. The man was tall and slender with a moustache and heavy metal framed glasses and the woman, in a batik dress of bold design, was dark skinned and handsome in a wild sort of way. The oddity about the pair was their expressions. The man's features were twisted with hate and the woman's face was contorted with fear.

At the bottom was written: *Dr. Stephen Lenier and wife, 1931.*

The other photograph showed only a stretch of road with flanking trees and underbrush. It might have been a picture of any road anywhere.

When I returned these things to the glove compartment, I saw slots along the sides of the compartment, apparently made to accommodate the framed photographs. A square pocket with little corner depressions was there too, into which the map fitted perfectly.

I drove on. Though I thought I knew this part of the city by heart, somewhere I must have made a wrong turn, for a completely unfamiliar street now confronted me. When I reached another corner, the steering wheel, with little pressure from me, seemed to turn almost of its own accord, and I swung into an even narrower roadway.

Down this lane I continued while unease at the strangeness of my surroundings began to mount within me. The last building dropped behind. Open country lay ahead, though it was incredible that I could have passed from the metropolitan area so quickly.

The land on either side became wilder and more undeveloped. Underbrush thick and luxuriant crowded the road, trees pressed close and giant ferns and clumps of bamboo appeared. The air, humid and hot, carried the smell of growth.

Though I was loathe to admit it, the conviction grew upon me that I was lost. It's queer how one turns to the marked trails of a professional traveler when one's sense of direction is gone, even though those trails have nothing to do with his own passage. I took the map out of the glove compartment again. But, as before, there was nothing on it to help me. Then I found myself looking at those photographs again, and this time I made an odd discovery.

The lonely road in one of the pictures was the road I was now on!

Two things I had failed to notice in the picture before: an almost hidden yellow sign, bearing the words, CHATEAU LENIER 10 KILOMETERS, and the red roof of a large villa showing above the trees. Both of these landmarks were now visible from where I sat in the idling car.

There was something else! The ruts in the road, the position of the pebbles, the way the grass was bent by

the wind and the rain—all these details were identical to the scene in the photograph. It was as if Time had suddenly reversed itself.

For a long while I sat there, mulling over this strange duplication. Cicadas hummed in the trees and a blue Flamento rose screaming into the sky. I looked at the second photograph, the picture of Dr. Lenier and his wife—he with the metal-framed glasses and she with the batik dress. Here too was an enigma. Had Lenier murdered his wife with this car, as Mr. Dumont had said? Was *obeah*, that West Indian sorcery, with all its primitive evil overtones, the source behind the odd feeling I had experienced when I drove the car? Did a residue of the deadly hatred that existed between this man and this woman still remain in the car?

I could answer none of these questions.

The road here was too narrow to turn around, and I had no choice but to go on. The countryside changed again; jungle gave way to open spaces, almost savannahs. A high crenellated wall appeared, extending in a general direction toward where I judged the distant villa to be. The wall was limestone and old; in places the stonework had crumbled from years of erosion.

Suddenly, as I looked up the winding road, I saw a man standing on the narrow shoulder. He was tall and erect and one arm was partially upraised as if he were waiting for someone. I slowed, came abreast of him and stopped.

Before I could speak, he pulled the car door open and with a kind of fluid motion, slid into the seat next to me.

"South Brotura", I said, slightly taken back. "Can you tell me how far it is from here?"

He made no reply. He was a big man, dressed in a hip-length black coat. A black crusher hat, pulled low, hid his face.

Both hat and coat were badly stained as if they had recently come into contact with rain and mud.

"I've never been here before," I said. "This road isn't familiar."

Still he made no answer. I started the car again.

And now once more the foliage thickened. The wall, which had been running parallel with the road, began to converge upon it. Yet mile after mile went by with no sign of the villa.

Again I tried conversation. "Chateau Lenier. The sign back there said 10 kilometers. Shouldn't we be coming to it soon?"

His lips remained clamped shut. More miles dragged by and the road became worse. In places it was scarcely more than two ruts with brush growing rampant between.

Then abruptly I saw a darker shadow in the wall far ahead. The stonework had completely fallen away there, leaving a wide ragged opening. In this opening, the figure of a woman suddenly appeared, a woman tall and dark. The intermittent sunlight, dappled by the trees, made vision difficult, but she seemed unaware of our approach. Head down, body bent slightly forward, she passed through the opening and began to move slowly along the side of the wall. Her long black hair swirled about her shoulders in the wind. Her steps were so light she seemed to float through the lank grass.

At my side, the stranger drew in his breath sharply.

The intervening distance lessened. The woman saw the car and drew up uncertainly.

Suddenly the man in black uttered an exclamation.

"It is she!" he cried.

His left foot moved forward to clamp down hard on mine on the gas pedal. He reached out, twisted the wheel from my grasp and turned it hard to the right. With a lurch, the car careened off the road and lunged toward the wall and the woman before it.

I had the instant realization that all this had happened before and that I was powerless to prevent its happening again. I had a momentary glimpse of the woman's face contorted in fear and horror. And in that fleeting second, I heard the cry of hate and satisfaction from the man at my side.

Then the car struck.

Sixteen days later I left the hospital. The medical report issued almost three weeks after that was confusing. It said I had been found lying next to the wrecked car two miles off the Rapitan freeway in the Linares suburb. No traces of alcohol were found in my bloodstream and why I should have driven off an unobstructed section of road and run up against a stone retaining wall was not understood.

Two other things were not explained: the torn bloodstained piece of a woman's batik dress impinged on the car bumper; and the metal bow from a man's glasses found in the seat next to mine. I have told the authorities that I do not wear glasses.

Oddly enough, my name was not mentioned in the medical report. It was headed simply, "Facts concerning the driver of the Elcar Special."

Eternity When?

AT 3:10 P.M., I swung into the valley highway and coasted down the long slope into Gale's Corners. It was just a settlement on the pavement: a gas station, a beer parlor, and a garage. There was a school bus surrounded by kids in the gravel driveway before the garage and a man in greasy overalls and a paper visorless cap was bent over the open hood, fixing something.

When I stopped the car in front of the gas pumps, the heat came in the open window like a cloud. You could smell the hot metal of the radiator, and even the laughing and talking of the impatient kids by the bus seemed subdued as though the air through which their voices passed were thick and spongy.

While I waited, I got out my card catalog and began to go though it. Presently my fingers stopped at a card:

Series 2663-A
East side Highway 56
5.2 miles south of Gale's Corners

This was the district from which the bad reports had come. From hereon, all the way to the state line, according to muddled information we had received, someone had played hob with the company's signs. The company had a maintenance crew, of course, but in a case like

this, the old man liked personal attention, and I was always the guy he sent out. After all, it costs plenty to keep those signs before the public. You know the ones I mean: RISE AND SHINE WITH ALBERTINE'S . . . MAKE MINE ALBERTINE'S . . . or ALBERTINE'S, THE ALL-PURPOSE FURNITURE POLISH.

The garage man was still working on the bus when I pulled out. I passed the sour, yeasty smell of the beer parlor, then pushed the speedometer up to fifty and let it hang there while the shimmering black-top rolled past. Five miles, the card had said. The dial tape was just passing the fifth mile when the first of the signs loomed up.

RISE AND SHINE WITH ALBERTINE'S . . . The five triangular blue placecards, a single word on each, paraded their message in brilliant pigment from the road shoulder. And then I stepped on the brake.

ETERNITY WHEN?

Beside it stood a hatless old man holding a brush and a can of paint.

I got out of the car and walked across the roadway.

"You!" I said. "What are you doing there?"

He turned slowly: a gaunt-faced man with a growth of grey white beard and long unkempt hair. Grey eyes that were alert and bright surveyed me.

"Good afternoon, my friend," he said.

"Did you put up that sign?"

"Yes," he said. "It isn't as nice as those others, but the letters are clear, don't you think?"

I got out a cigarette and began to roll it back and forth between my fingers. "Don't you realize that these signs are erected on leased land—that it costs the company money to maintain them?"

"But I too have leased the land. I paid the gentleman who owns this property a dollar."

"A dollar!" I said. "Look, brother, you can't get away with that. Those Albertine signs are known from coast to coast. They carry a message. They . . ."

"My sign carries a message too," the old man said quietly.

"But hang it all"—I knew how useless it was to argue with these religious fanatics, yet this guy seemed mild enough—"there are plenty of other places along the highway. Why don't you pick out some nice open spot near a crossroads where you won't be bothering anyone? Come now, be a good fellow. Pull it up."

He sighed and looked out across the hot brown fields. "My friend, you have no idea how difficult it is to spread the Word. The world today thinks so little of the spiritual future. I used to pass out tracts, but few people would read them. Even these signs, some say, are worded wrong. They say they should read, 'Eternity Where?' But to me that has always seemed of less importance on a highway."

He turned, seized the sign post in two gnarled hands and began to move it back and forth, loosening it in the dirt. When the sign was free, he placed it over his shoulder, gathered up his brush and paint can, and nodded. "Good afternoon, my friend," he said. An old '29 Ford, minus one fender, was parked farther along the highway shoulder. The old man walked slowly down to it and put the sign in the rear trunk. Then he climbed in and drove off.

I had a surprise waiting for me when I returned to my car. The left front tire had finally played out. It was what I got for neglecting to change the spare after that blowout a week ago. I went around in back and began taking out the tools.

The better part of an hour later, the change was made. A horn blared and the school bus rumbled by me as I swung out onto the highway. I stayed behind it. Twice I attempted to pass, but the traffic was getting heavier and the two lane road was narrow. In the rear window of the bus a couple of ten-year-olds peered out and divided their attention between some well melted ice cream cones and me. One of the kids laughed and waved, and I grinned and waved back.

The highway climbed steadily. Reaching the crown of a hill, it began to descend into a narrow cut, with steep

banks of grey-brown sand on either side. Far ahead now, like an ungainly black beetle, sped the school bus.

There was a side road leading into the highway, a sharp incline wedged like a creased paper between the steep sand banks. A heavy farm truck was weaving down that incline, a cloud of dust billowing after it. Even at that distance, I could see the driver fighting with the wheel, vainly trying to stop.

The view was hidden from the driver of the bus. He kept going down the long curving grade, gaining momentum rapidly. The farm truck was behind the sand bank now, but I could still see the dust cloud in its wake, and I could estimate its speed and the speed of the bus. . . .

Sudden sickness entered the pit of my stomach. . . .

And then the bus did an incredible thing. The brakes went on, the bulky vehicle slowed and came to a full stop. Forty yards beyond, like a clumsy juggernaut, the farm truck erupted onto the highway, caromed to the opposite bank, wavered and toppled over on its side.

"Yes sir," the bus driver said to me as we walked back across the highway, "if I hadn't stopped when I did, those kids . . ." He shrugged and flipped his cigarette eloquently before him. Back of us the farmer sat disconsolately on the road shoulder, waiting for the tow truck. He was unhurt save for a bruise on his cheek.

The driver put one foot on the running board of the bus and turned to squint down the highway.

"To tell the truth," he said. "I remembered that side road all right, but well, something funny happened. I don't think I would have stopped if it hadn't been for that sign. When I saw that, something seemed to . . . oh, hell, I've got to get these kids home."

As the bus drove off, I looked over to the side of the highway. There was a rough triangle there, fashioned out of a packing-case board, and in crude lettering, it bore two words.

The old man had been here too.

The Tunnel

THE MOMENT I landed in Puerto Vargas a feeling of depression fell over me. The town, with its broad Avenida des Palmas, was attractive enough for a second-rate Central American port. But there was something strange about it that not even the glaring sunlight could dispell and which made me restless and ill at ease.

That was before I met Consuela Madera. She was sitting in one of the slightly worn chairs of the San Carlo hotel lobby, a black-haired woman with dark lustrous eyes and a very brief skirt.

The *Botones* spotted me and led me to her side. "The Señora Madera,"she said, "has been expecting you."

"Not Señorita?" I said. "It's a disappointing world. Any relation to Pedro Madera, the Los Temblores foreman?"

"I'm his wife. Pedro is tied up with labor trouble. He sent me to conduct you to the camp."

The camp, I knew, was two hundred kilometers from the coast and pretty much at the lost end of nowhere. I had been expecting someone to take me incountry. But such an attractive escort was more than I had hoped for. "Do we fly or walk?" I said.

She smiled. "We go upriver. There's no place for a plane to land. It's a three-day trip, and the *Bolivar* is a

roach-infested tub. But at least we'll have each other's company."

The woman was an outrageous flirt. Which may be a 1940 way of putting it, but then I'm pretty much 1940 vintage myself. If I weren't, I doubt if I would have been considered for the job of engineer for the Los Temblores tunnel project. The San Carlo government had seen one attempt at this construction, made by a twenty-five-year-old native son, end in failure. They weren't about to make an error in judgment a second time, especially with a foreigner.

I had been hired blind, so to speak, on the basis of the success of my recently completed job at Caracas, but I had received little or no briefing as to what this San Carlo job entailed.

The *Bolivar* was all Consuela had warned me it would be, a disreputable stern-wheeled scow with only rudimentary quarters for passengers. As the boat churned its way slowly up the silt-heavy river, the woman filled me in on the missing details.

"Our greatest trouble," she said, "aside from the heat, the loneliness, and the bush fever, is labor trouble. You see the tunnel is to penetrate what is known on the chart as Escarpment One, and a double tragedy took place there. Did you ever hear of Tohalgo?"

"Some sort of bandit, wasn't he?"

She nodded. "He was the San Carlo version of your Norte Americano 'Quantrelle,' only a hundred times more bloodthirsty. He had the nice habit of riding into a town with his band of renegades and killing all the women if a ransom were not paid. There's a village there that either couldn't or wouldn't pay. So Tohalgo went ahead and murdered the entire female population.

"But that isn't all. There were the ruins of an Aztec temple there too, a temple to the snake goddess, Coatlicue. The men of the village restored that temple, both as part of their daily worship and also as a shrine for their women dead. Then two years after the initial tragedy took place, an earthquake buried that shrine. Now the peons look upon the scheduled tunnel as a sacrilege.

That's one of the reasons why the work has not been successful. There are, of course, other reasons."

The river wound through desolate country, scrub jungle alternating with dismal savannah. In spite of Consuela's company, I felt, with the passing miles, a return of that depression which had beset me in Puerto Vargas.

On the third day, we reached the camp. Consuela introduced me to her husband and to Dr. Jonathan Hardesty and his daughter, Valerie. Although he was the company medic, Hardesty's real interest was in treating the backward peons spiritually rather than medicinally. He was a frail, light-complexioned, handsome man, and his daughter had inherited his good looks.

Foreman Pedro Madera conducted me to the hut which was to be my quarters. Big, loudspoken, he was cordial but the sadistic glint in his eyes made it easy to believe the stories I had heard of his cruelty to the Indio workers.

"We're pretty much isolated here," he said to me. "Right now, the river is our only means of contact with the coast."

"When is the railroad coming through?"

He smiled. "I see you don't know San Carlo politics. The government made an appropriation for the tunnel almost two years ago. The fact that the railroad is two hundred miles away and apparently not about to go farther has nothing to do with the case."

"But," I expostulated, "it's sheer idiocy to dig . . ."

He shook his head. "It's all a matter of time, and time in San Carlo means nothing. Eventually the railroad will be built. When it is, the tunnel will be ready. That is if we can persuade these ignorant Indios to let us go through. So far, they've tried everything short of physical action to prevent us."

"I heard about that," I said. "Something about defilement of a sacred temple and shrine. Why don't we alter our head-in angle to avoid it?"

He shook his head again. "When you look at the print, you'll see that isn't possible. We've got a two-percent-

approach gradient as it is. A variation of a few hundred yards in either direction would make the roadbed inoperable."

"I'd like to inspect as far as you've gone."

He lifted his eyebrows. "Now? During siesta?"

"Now."

Five minutes later I left the hut, headed across the compound and up a rise, denuded of all brush and littered with tools and machinery: shovels, barrows, a steam compressor, and a line of dump trucks on a narrow-gauge track. Ahead, the tunnel mouth loomed black against the escarpment.

Even as I came up to the opening, steps sounded behind me and Dr. Hardesty crossed to my side.

"Mr. Martin," he said, "if you're going into the tunnel alone, may I suggest you stay away from the breakthrough."

"What breakthrough?"

He shrugged. "A day ago one of the drillers set off a charge too close to the side wall. It broke through into the pilot tunnel. The pilot, you know, is the ventilation shaft here. Without it, the fumes would be deadly."

I hadn't realized such antiquated methods were being used. "Okay," I said. "But why?"

Hardesty fumbled with his pipe. "I'm a medical man, Mr. Martin. But I'm also a religious man. In either capacity I've found there are things that are best . . . shall I say avoided?"

With that, he turned on his heel and strode back toward the compound. I watched him go, swinging along with the gait of a much younger man. Then I shrugged and entered the tunnel.

For the first hundred yards I was favorably impressed. That far Pedro Madera apparently had done his work well. But as I went on, I could see the difficulties he had been under had taken their toll. In this part, the mucking had been done carelessly and the blasting indiscriminately placed. When I came to the breakthrough, glaringly revealed by the carbide lamps, a cold breath of air fanned my face. There was something ghastly about the stark white brilliance of the carbides.

But there was nothing unusual there, nothing that would warrant Hardesty's vague warning. I stood there several minutes, then continued on to the end of the tunnel where the eight-foot circular working-shield stood. Here the floor was littered with muck which had not yet been cleared away.

I turned back toward the entrance with a few mental notes of things I would suggest to Madera. Halfway, something caused me to stop again. A sound, hollow and far off, had reached my ears. It was a slow and steady pulsation like the beating of a distant drum, and I could not determine its source: whether it came from the pilot tunnel, the tunnel behind me, or from the outside.

I put my ear to the rock wall but there was no tell-tale vibration. The sound—and I was not even sure it was sound—died away, then returned, more perceptible than before. And then there stole into my nostrils a horribly fetid odor.

With a feeling of revulsion, I hurried to the entrance. And not until the freshness of daylight was about me did I breathe a sigh of relief.

"So far," Pedro Madera said that night over coffee and cigars, "our rate of progress has been only a few feet a day. But, when the compressor is working, we should be able to increase that substantially."

Dr. Hardesty sipped his coffee. "I trust," he said, "that does not mean you will find it necessary to drive these poor Indios more than you already have."

Madera shook his head. "Only if they persist in their superstitious activities."

Valerie, Hardesty's daughter, and Consuela entered the hut which was the "operations" center and the largest and most permanent structure in the camp. Madera signalled the Indian boy to serve them coffee.

"Did you find the tunnel up to your expectations, Señor Martin?" Consuela asked.

I was noncommittal as I had been when Madera asked me the same question. Time enough to discuss my plans for improvements later. "There is one thing I

might mention," I said after a moment. "Is there some sort of celebration or ceremony in the village?"

Hardesty and Madera exchanged glances. "What do you mean?" Madera asked.

"I thought I heard the beating of a drum when I was in the tunnel. It seemed to come . . ."

Both men shook their heads and Madera quickly changed the subject. We talked of casual things, the weather, the labor trouble. Half an hour later, conversation began to lag and the gathering broke up. I left "operations" and crossed to my hut.

As always, in a strange bed I found sleep elusive. For hours I lay there under several blankets, the heat of the day having given way to the night chill. About three A.M., still wide awake, I got up, dressed, went outside and lit a cigar. A million stars spangled the heavens. I stood there smoking. The starlight dimly lit the compound, but even in the vague radiance, the black mouth of the tunnel dominated the scene.

In my lifetime, I have never experienced anything but cold rational events. With this background, therefore, I was unprepared for the magnetic attraction that suddenly swept over me. For a lure as real as anything I had ever known suddenly began to draw me toward the tunnel. With self-effacing logic, I tried to disregard the feeling, attributing it to a mental aberration brought on by my fatigue. But the compulsion was not to be denied and against my will, I found myself moving across the darkness of the compound toward that black opening.

The carbide lamps would be extinguished at this hour but I remembered there was a service tray near the entrance containing, among other things, a supply of flashlights. I switched one on and entered.

The utter lunacy of my action was fully in my awareness. Here I was, an on-location engineer with three similar projects under my belt, to say nothing of several hydro-electric jobs . . . here I was prowling in the dead of night in a two-bit digging in a three-bit country as if . . .

The batteries in the flash were not fresh and the yellow radiance spanning out before me flickered and dimmed. The waning light gave the impression that the

tunnel ceiling was pressing downward. Again I came to the breakthrough and a cold draft of damp air touched my face like moist gauze. I stood there listening. All was silent save for that curious ringing one hears when there is no sound and which is the illusory sensation caused by passage of blood near the inner ear.

The flash grew steadily weaker. Suddenly it gave out entirely and I was alone in utter darkness.

There is something about the complete absence of all light that is enervating. The eye seeks in vain for the faintest glimmer. When there is none, the inner eye takes over and makes creations of its own.

And then, as I stood there, something warm, pulsing with life and covered with fur or feathers, draped itself about my head and shoulders. I fell back and threw up my hands to ward off the entity—for no other word can describe it—but it enfolded itself about me like a great cloak. A wave of horror swept over me. My breathing was cut off as I sought frantically to free myself. I staggered back, fell to the tunnel floor, and the thing followed my fall and covered my supine body. Again that horrible fetid odor assailed my nostrils. Then abruptly the pressure subsided, the weight lifted, and I was left with only my pounding heart and a deep inner sickness.

I got to my feet and lunged for the tunnel entrance. When I burst, panting, into the starlight, a familiar figure detached itself from the shadows of a rail car and crossed to my side. Consuela! The woman's bare throat and shoulders stood forth in the dimness.

"I, too, could not sleep," she said. "I saw you come here. Are you mad, Señor, to go into the tunnel alone at night?"

I had regained my breath and my pulse, though still throbbing, was quieting. What was the thing which had attacked me in the tunnel? Some animal which had followed me from outside? Already the attack was beginning to be cloaked in unreality as if I had just awakened from a dream. I decided to say nothing about it.

"Let us go back," I said.

We made our way down the slope in silence and crossed the compound. I left Consuela at her hut and

returned to my quarters. But I knew I would sleep little the rest of the night.

Next day, I took over charge of operations, overseeing the installation of the compressor and the dynamo which would change the lighting from carbide to electric. I also calculated the expense of the long-term operation, my estimate being some twenty percent less than that of my predecessor. I was careful, however, not to infringe on Pedro Madera's authority over the workers.

Primitive religions have always fascinated me, and I now asked Dr. Hardesty what he could tell me about the San Carlos type. The medic-missionary led me to his hut where he took down several books from a shelf over his cabinet of medicines.

"I regard these Aztec beliefs as the beliefs of heathens, of course," he said. "But I try to understand them. It is only by erasing the black shadow of superstition that we can make their followers see the light. The Aztec pantheon, you know, is many-sided. Here they worship Coatlicue, the snake goddess."

"It's odd," I said, "how the human mind works. As if there aren't enough horrors in the finite world, man must create new ones out of his fancy."

It was a week later that the workers threw down their shovels and refused to enter the tunnel. Their spokesman, an Indio with hair so black it looked as if it had been cut from blotting paper, voiced their decision:

"Coatlicue is in there," he said. "She will destroy all who violate the place."

Madera threw up his shoulders in defeat. "This time they mean it," he said. "I shall have to go to Esposito and conscript other workers. It will cost us time, but it cannot be helped."

He prepared to leave at once by pack mule since Esposito was away from the river. When Dr. Hardesty learned of the trip, he announced he would go along.

"It will give me an opportunity to spread the gospel," he said.

After they had gone, the camp, with all activity stopped, became a place of strange brooding silence. Sullen thunder, presaging the regular night storm, growled in the distance and heat-lightning flared across a low-hanging sky. *Cherip* flies and *leizi* mites droned about the windows. I tried to read but the electric tenseness in the air made me restless and ill at ease. I went outside and walked the length of the compound several times. I went into "operations" and looked over the daily reports which had been haphazardly kept by my predecessor. And from the top of the rise, I peered idly through field glasses at the waving *danag* grass of the empty savannah which stretched away to the east. West, the wall of the jungle closed off the camp like a great green door. A thousand birds chattered there, but in my present mood they sounded like a multiple obligato of despair.

Back in my hut, it was going on toward sundown when Consuela suddenly burst in my door.

"She is gone!" she cried. "I cannot find her anywhere."

"Who?"

"Señorita Valerie. I have searched everywhere."

"She probably went for a walk. Along the river shore."

"No, Señor. She would never leave the camp of her own will. And I have looked by the river."

I followed her out into the compound uncertainly. Together we searched the two storage sheds, the river godown, the workers' huts. As we emerged from one of the latter, I turned to a group squatting there in the shade, dozing by their discarded shovels. One of them shook his head in answer to my question.

"We have not seen her, Señor. Perhaps Coatlicue called her into the tunnel."

The words spelled out the fear I had been trying to wrest from my thoughts. I lurched into a run, heading toward the tunnel entrance.

Five minutes later, deep in the passage, I stopped short, staring down at the mutilated figure lying there in the glare of the unshaded electric light. For a mo-

ment, the horror held me in a kind of stupor. Then I was suddenly sick.

Informing Dr. Hardesty of the death of his daughter when he and Pedro Madera returned was perhaps the hardest job of my life. It was a tribute to the man's faith that he accepted the tragedy with courage and stoicism. But Madera was not so composed.

"I shall make them pay!" he said. "These stupid Indios! Human sacrifice! It is too much. . . ."

"It may not have been sacrifice. . . ." I said slowly.

"*Madre de Dios*," he cried. "Was not her heart torn from. . . ."

"It may have been something that followed her into the tunnel," I said. "We don't know, of course, why she was there. But the marks on her body appear to have been made by claws and. . . ."

"Are you saying, Señor, that you believe those wild stories of a snake goddess?"

"I'm not saying anything. But, the convulutions in the dust of the tunnel floor look to be those of a serpent and, as I said, the marks on the girl's body were those of claws."

Once more a pall of gloom settled over the camp. Both Madera and I urged Dr. Hardesty to return to the coast. He would only do himself physical harm, we argued, to stay on here, and the government would send another medic when they learned what had happened.

He refused to go. Instead, he moved about the compound as in a dream, saying nothing, pausing now and then to read his Bible. Consuela, too, was very much depressed. She had developed a strong liking for Valerie Hardesty in the short time she had known her and the girl's death touched her deeply. Only Madera, though shocked by the tragedy, seemed unaffected by the growing atmosphere of doom.

I sought to guide the doctor's mind into other channels. I queried him again about the religious background of San Carlo.

"My books are at your disposal," he said absently. "Why don't you consult them yourself?"

The night I chose to follow his suggestion, the usual electrical storm had come up and the pouring rain made a steady rattling roar on the corrugated iron roof of Hardesty's hut. Hardesty was off somewhere, treating a worker who had suffered a scorpion bite.

The first book I drew from the shelf was Schelding's *Aztec and Mayan Discoveries.* It contained nothing I did not already know. The second had nothing at all to do with western hemispheric thought and I didn't expect Hardesty to possess it. It was a copy of Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* which had been banned in the seventeenth century. I took down the *Central American Profundity* which was an anthology of several writers. A passage caught my eye as I flipped the pages:

> There are many temples to Huitzilopochtli, the war god, in Mexico and as far south as San Carlo. Not so common is the deification of the snake goddess, Coatlicue, in whose name fearful rites and sacrifices have been performed.
>
> In 1926 the explorer, Castillo, reported that while searching the ruins of a temple of Coatlicue, he was attacked by a hideous female entity and severely clawed about the head and throat. Investigators could find no substantiation for his claim.

I returned the book to the shelf and left the hut. As I sloshed through the slanting rain toward my own quarters, I saw a shadowy figure moving up the rise in the direction of the tunnel. For a moment, I thought it was Dr. Hardesty but then I saw it was a woman weaving her way around the scattered rail trucks. At the tunnel entrance, the figure paused and turned to look back. It was Consuela.

Concern for her safety drove all other thoughts from my mind. I headed up the rise, following her. Halfway, a second figure, Pedro Madera, still attired in pajamas,

materialized in the wet gloom. We reached the ledge before the tunnel entrance simultaneously.

"She is under a spell," he said, panting from his exertion. "I tried to stop her, but she came like a thing possessed. We must stop her, Señor."

"Have you a gun?" I said.

He shook his head. "There are machetes in the service tray."

I moved into the tunnel and threw the switches. There was no ghastly radiance of the carbide lamps, yet even under the electric light, the passage seemed no less lacking in reality.

Madera led the way forward, moving rapidly but cautiously. Ahead there was no sound of footsteps. We passed the spot where the breakthrough into the pilot ventilation tunnel had been repaired and continued on deeper into the passage. Still there was no sign of Consuela.

Madera slowed perceptibly as ahead of him a strange new passageway seemed to lead off from the tunnel proper. Or did I only imagine a turnoff here? I followed him silently, dogging his footsteps.

And then suddenly, incredibly, the tunnel widened before us. The side walls fell away, and a bone-white object with long waving tendrils met my gaze, occupying the center space like a performer on a stage. The object resolved itself into a female head, the features outlined in diabolic beauty, with long tresses of black hair partially covering the face.

The head retreated to the background and its place was taken by the supine figure of Consuela, stretched full length there on the tunnel floor. Her eyes were wide with terror.

On the instant the head returned, but it was attached to a body now, three times the normal size. The figure was tall, nude to the waist and wore a skirt of serpents. I could see those serpents writhing and gliding back and forth, and I could see her feet which were long misshapen talons. She moved slowly toward the foreman's helpless wife.

But the full horror did not reach me until that female figure underwent a change, slowly transformed itself into a huge greenish snake that began to wrap itself about Consuela's body. Its coils began to tighten, to exert constrictive pressure, and Consuela's eyes bulged in their sockets. The veins on her face extended and her tongue was forced from her mouth.

These things I saw, but I cannot be sure. The light in this part of the tunnel was only partial and it may be that my eyes substituted reality for fancy. I do know that Pedro Madera also stood frozen to the spot and that he, too, seemed overcome by the horror.

Then the spell which held him was broken. "Consuela!" he cried.

I seized his arm. "Wait! You haven't the power. . . ."

Like a madman, he flung me off. When I continued my grip, he unseeingly flailed his fist, and the undirected blow caught my jaw in full career. I went down in a heap, my head bludgeoning against the rock wall. The impact sent a wave of vertigo through me and blackness rose up like a curtain.

How long I lay there unconscious I don't know. Twice I half rose, only to fall back helpless. Twice my vision swirled and faded. I thought I saw Madera locked in mortal combat with the snake thing, struggling against the gliding coils as they wound about him. But when at last I stumbled to my feet and my vision cleared, I saw only the prone bodies of the foreman and his wife lying there motionless on the tunnel floor.

What followed is a fantastic dream in my memory. I lifted the body of Consuela and staggered back the long yardage to the tunnel entrance. Again, I somehow managed to repeat the ordeal, carrying the body of Pedro Madera.

When I staggered into the open with my burden the second time, Dr. Hardesty was there, Bible in his hands, muttering a prayer. He had his electric torch, and as the white beam fell upon the two inert figures, I stood there motionless, cold sweat covering me from head to foot.

"What could have done this frightful thing?" Hardesty said, looking up. His fists clenched. "For the

first time in my life I find myself wanting retribution for evil."

I said nothing. But, as my horror gave way to an inner iciness and cold implacable rage, I turned and moved across the ledge to the service tray.

Hardesty got to his feet and strode forward to join me. "This is something," he said hoarsely, "that should not be done by one who is alone."

Together we began to move slowly back into the tunnel.

Five days later, Hardesty and I arrived in Puerto Vargas. News of what had happened at Camp Los Temblores, in the manner of jungle communication, had preceded us to the coast, and charges of industrial sabotage were immediately made. Hardesty insisted that he claim equal responsibility, and I had the utmost difficulty in persuading him to embark on a ship for Rio where he had another opportunity in his profession. What with governmental red tape and delay, those charges against me were not formerly filed until a few hours after I had boarded a Venezuelan Airways plane and left San Carlo for good. Had I waited, I would have had serious trouble explaining why I had set those dynamite charges, completely sealing off the tunnel. But I make no excuses for my action. After the horror, I would have done it a thousand times over.

The Monument

BLENINGTON, WHICH IS in Cheshire and quite far removed from London, lies midway between the hill-locked tarn of Whitewater and the little river, Hoxton. It is a drowsy village of a scant hundred souls, depressed by the frowning embrace of the encompassing moor, moving sullenly through the eternal routine of an unimportant existence.

Since the Tudor period Blenington's history has been strangely passive and uneventful. Intrigue, plague, bloodshed find no place in the chroniclings of its drab past, and even those homely legends which so often entwine themselves about the life of a community through the passing generations appear here singularly wan and colorless.

It is for this reason perhaps, if for no other, that the event of April 1923 stands forth so markedly prominent among the yellowing archives. Yet in all probability even the disturbance of that cheerless spring would have aroused no emotion among the townsfolk, so inbred was their apathy, had it not been for the unexplainable epilogue that followed, an affair which concerned one Cesare Turani and the two sisters Marlowe.

The year 1923, it will be remembered, brought a season of unusually heavy rains to that part of England, and this fact, together with the long and careless disre-

pair of the limestone ridge, known as the King's Dike, on the south shore of Whitewater, climaxed a danger that had been slowly forming for years—inundation. On April 12th, following a particularly heavy storm, the water broke through the lake wall that had imprisoned it for so long and raced in a raging torrent toward the town. It occurred at night when Blenington was dark in slumber, and there were therefore no cries of alarm. But in the morning the citizens saw how near they had come to tragedy.

At the western end of the town where the church huddled beneath its blackened and crumbling spire the earth dipped downward and moved in a sharp decline to a last hillock before it merged with the nearby moor. And here the water had turned, avoided the houses as if guided by an unseen hand.

Such a miraculous escape from disaster would have been received by the devout residents as a supreme manifestation of their faith, had it not been for a most irritating circumstance that accompanied the flooding. It so happened that the sloping expanse of ground bordering the old church had been selected years before, quite conventionally, as the site of the town's burial place. And on that morning the villagers found themselves gazing at a graveyard lake with a partly submerged line of tombstones and white crosses fringing its newly formed shore.

Cesare Turani had come to Blenington in the early months of 1922. He came on foot, on the road from the south, a small man with sable hair and wistful dreamy eyes, and had the year been several centuries earlier, he might have passed as a wandering Italian bard. But Turani was no minstrel; his occupation was of a much grimmer and more permanent nature, and he had chosen this district for his location only because the hills surrounding Whitewater were rich with the geologic material necessary for his work.

Over the door of the little cottage in which he established himself near the outskirts of the town he hung a

sign bearing the inscription: C. TURANI SCULPTOR FINE CARVINGS IN STONE.

In spite of his Latin ancestry the man proved to be a most ambitious workman. He spoke little, associated with no one, and spent the hours from dawn to darkness in ceaseless toil. Soon the yard before the cottage presented an admirable collection of carven imagery. There were ornate fountains, tessellated bird baths, sundial mountings and statuettes as exquisite as any Tanagra figurine. Twice a year, in the spring and once again in the fall, he loaded his objects of stone into a small cart and drove off to market them in larger municipalities.

Strangely enough, however, not until the death of Sylvia, the eldest of the two Marlowe sisters, did it occur to anyone in Blenington to purchase anything of Turani manufacture. Then the little sculptor was given an order which stunned him with its importance. He was to attend the funeral of the dead woman, gaze at her features as she lay in the coffin, and fashion a life-size replica monument to be placed at the head of her grave. Such was the request of Josephine Marlowe, the living sister, who promised to pay handsomely for the service.

Turani started his work systematically. He stood in the dim light of the Marlowe drawing room, carefully sketching on a sheet of paper a pencil-likeness of the coffin's occupant while the hushed mourners looked on. And after the body had been laid to rest in the little churchyard cemetery, he requested permission to look upon a recent photograph of the woman, so that there would be no inaccuracy in the stone resemblance.

Turani did not spare time or labor in outlining his plans. The monument was to be a cylindrical shaft gradually widening into a likeness of the woman's body at the waist and mounted on a base made to resemble an arbor of roses. By Josephine's instructions the inscription at the bottom was to read simply: SYLVIA MARLOWE—1892–1923.

Meanwhile Blenington in its impassive way felt sorry for the sisters Marlowe, for the living, and for the memory of the deceased. Living alone with an aged mother, Sylvia and Josephine were without question the richest

citizens in town. But Sylvia had been an invalid since childhood, with the shadow of death constantly before her. There had been no romance in either of the two young women's lives, despite the fact that each in her distinct way was an example of classic beauty, Sylvia fair and golden of hair, and Josephine, dark as any Romany gypsy.

Sylvia had died on February 22nd, and it was not until the last of March that Turani had his monument in a near state of completion. At intervals during the sculptor's days of tedious labor, Josephine, heavy with sorrow, came to inspect the work. In the beginning Turani merely nodded a greeting and worked in silence as she stood beside him. But gradually as her visits became more and more frequent, his inherent reticence gave way, and he began to look forward with a thrill of pleasure to the hour of her coming.

"You are an artist, Sculptor Turani," Josephine said. "I am sure the monument will be a worthy memorial to my sister."

And Turani, his eyes glowing with pride, noticed then, as he had noticed before, the somber beauty of the young woman, the black eyes and the olive skin soft as velvet.

When the monument had taken a definite shape but was still lacking in the more intricate details of the face and head, the sculptor acted upon a strange impulse. With much exertion he set the stone image upon a wooden sledge and moved it to its permanent site at the head of Sylvia's grave in the churchyard. And here, bringing his tools every day, he proceeded to add the finishing touches.

Just why Turani should prefer the quiet melancholy of the little cemetery to the more cheerful surroundings of his jumbled workyard was regarded as more or less of an enigma by the townsfolk. And when questioned, the sculptor merely shrugged his shoulders and replied that he wanted to instill the proper atmosphere into the carving.

This change of location did not affect the regular inspection visits of Josephine Marlowe, however. She

came oftener, at an earlier hour and stayed until the short twilight of spring blurred into darkness.

The coming of April brought the first of that series of violent storms that swept Cheshire during the spring of '23. Cold, chilling rain pounded down upon Blenington, and the winding street turned to a river of mud. Contracted no doubt by her long hours in the damp cemetery, a severe cold forced Josephine Marlowe to take to her bed, and during her four-day illness, Turani, by means of the most strenuous labor, succeeded in working the monument to its completion. Then he busied himself polishing into smoothness a few rough edges while he waited for his employer to come and view the finished product.

It was raining when Josephine Marlowe, clad in a heavy cloak and shawl, passed through the churchyard gate and made her way to the grave of her sister, Sylvia. She nodded a greeting to Turani, stopped short, and stood there under the iron sky staring at the life-size monument. In silence, broken only by the dripping rain, she walked forward, circled the image from back to front. Then she halted a few paces before it, continuing her scrutiny. Turani, standing stiffly to the side, watched her without expression.

But suddenly the woman's face underwent a change. The look of admiration gave way to one of bewilderment, and her eyes narrowed to slits of anger. With a quick motion she whipped back her shawl, stood there tense from head to foot.

"Turani, you fool!" she cried. "That is no likeness of my sister, Sylvia, you have carved in stone. Turani, what have you done?"

The startled sculptor turned ashen as he heard the words. "But Signorina," he began . . . "What is wrong? . . . I have worked so hard . . ."

The woman had advanced nearer and brought her eyes close to the graven features of the statute.

"Turani," she said, turning slowly. "It is I whom you have carved, not Sylvia. You have worked your miserable monument into an effigy of me."

For six days after that Turani locked himself in his cottage. The monument upon which he had labored so long stood alone in the cemetery, and Josephine Marlowe, suffering a relapse from the additional exposure, was forced to her bed a second time. The rain continued.

But on April 12th, stamping one of the few unusual marks on the prosaic history of Blenington, nature exhibited the height of her irony. The inundation occurred at night, and there were no witnesses. Turani, returning in the morning from the graveyard lake and from the depressing sight of his partly submerged monument a few yards from the shore, walked with the slow precise steps of one in a dream. His face was haggard and pale, his eyes staring before him vacantly into space.

On past his cottage and into the hills he walked. When he retraced his steps it was late night, and a gleaming orange moon was climbing into the sky. He carried a small, high-prowed canoe, a canoe made of birch and occasionally used for pleasure paddling on the silver surface of Whitewater.

Straight to the newly formed shore of the graveyard lake the little sculptor made his way, and reaching it, carefully shoved the boat into the water. A moment he hesitated, glancing back at the ebon trees and the somber willows, dark against the white picket fence. Then he took his place in the little craft and began to paddle slowly into the lapping waves.

There was no sound save the gurgling of the water as it slipped past the boat's sides. Off to the right the wall of the old church looked out from the gloom of foliage like an eyeless face swathed in a cowl. The lake was narrow here, the banks close, and the white tombstones and tilting crosses rose above the surface along either shore in uneven rows. Looking over the boat's sides, Turani could see more gravestones far below, gleaming white in the dark depths like scattered mounds of bleached bones.

For perhaps an hour Turani paddled about aimlessly, moving the canoe in wide circles in and out amid the crumbling masonry. But then abruptly he was floating abreast of his monument, staring at the carven features, at the profile sharp as a Glycon cameo, at the chiseled cascade of flowing hair. The water here was at its deepest point, and only the head and throat of the image protruded above the surface.

How long he sat there motionless, drinking in the stone woman's classic beauty, Turani did not know. He seemed held by an inner hypnosis, receptive to his curious surroundings with a sad but dreaming tranquillity. The moon dipping lower in the western sky appeared bloated and strangely out of proportion. The boat cast a curious ellipse of shadow down the lane of orange reflection, not black, but thickly purple.

Suddenly, however, a shock swept through Turani from head to foot. He half rose in the boat, then bending forward, paddled closer until his outstretched fingers touched the head of the image. He ran his hand feverishly over the stone throat and brought it back, a dry rasp issuing from his lips.

For a moment he clenched the paddle, breathing hard. Then once again he looked to be sure. No, he had made no mistake. *The water was rising!*

Rising! Only a fraction of an inch at a time. But now that he stopped to remember it, it had crept from the shoulders of the image to a point high up on the neck since morning. And it must be coming faster now, for even in the little while he had been there in the boat, there was a noticeable lessening of the amount of stonework above the surface.

Slowly the sculptor slumped back to a sitting position. Water. Cold, death-dealing water, mounting higher and higher, moved by a relentless pressure that nothing could withhold. He buried his head in his hands, moaning.

"No, no, it isn't true. Oh, my Josephine, my Josephine!"

But when he looked again, he saw that the lake had reached a new level, had risen close to the statute's

mouth. And from the north now, hollow and muffled, there came to his ears the distant roar of a rushing torrent.

Sobbing, Turani flung his arms about the head of the monument, pressed his cheek close to the stone countenance in a feverish embrace. The image gazed down upon him with an unchanging look of sadness. And as the minutes lengthened into hours, the moon sank lower and lower toward the hills, softening its orange glare to a circle of silver.

Up on the southern shore of Whitewater, the limestone ridge was slowly wearing away, opening a larger aperture to a river of creaming ink that swept down the hillside.

Turani did not move. He clung there like some strange parasitic marine growth, holding himself close to the cold body of the stone image. The surface of the lake mirrored him in long, disproportionate reflections, and the darksome spire of the rotting church looked upward in mocking benediction.

Higher and higher rose the water, slowly, steadily . . . to the lips of the monument . . . to the nostrils . . . to the eyes . . .

There is among the yellowing files of Blenington the record of the death of Josephine Marlowe, April 13th, 1923. Signed by the town's aged practitioner, Dr. Allan Clement, a puzzling notation at the bottom reads:

> The patient's lungs for some unaccountable reason appeared to be filled with water, and had I not been in constant attendance during her illness, I should have been inclined to attribute her death to drowning.

The Street That Wasn't There

with Clifford D. Simak

MR. JONATHON CHAMBERS left his house on Maple Street at exactly seven o'clock in the evening and set out on the daily walk he had taken, at the same time, come rain or snow, for twenty solid years.

The walk never varied. He paced two blocks down Maple Street, stopped at the Red Star confectionery to buy a Rosa Trofero perfecto, then walked to the end of the fourth block on Maple. There he turned right on Lexington, followed Lexington to Oak, down Oak and so by way of Lincoln back to Maple again and to his home.

He didn't walk fast. He took his time. He always returned to his front door at exactly seven-forty-five. No one ever stopped to talk with him. Even the man at the Red Star confectionery, where he bought his cigar, remained silent while the purchase was being made. Mr. Chambers merely tapped on the glass top of the counter with a coin, the man reached in and brought forth the box, and Mr. Chambers took his cigar. That was all.

For people long ago had gathered that Mr. Chambers desired to be left alone. The newer generation of townsfolk called it eccentricity. Certain uncouth persons had a different word for it. The oldsters remembered that this queer-looking individual with his black silk muffler, rosewood cane, and bowler hat once had been a professor at State University.

A professor of metaphysics, they seemed to recall, or some such outlandish subject. At any rate, a furor of some sort was connected with his name . . . at the time an academic scandal. He had written a book, and he had taught the subject matter of that volume to his classes. What that subject matter was had been long forgotten, but whatever it was had been considered sufficiently revolutionary to cost Mr. Chambers his post at the university.

A silver moon shone over the chimney tops and a chill, impish October wind was rustling the dead leaves when Mr. Chambers started out at seven o'clock.

It was a good night, he told himself, smelling the clean, crisp air of autumn and the faint pungence of distant wood smoke.

He walked unhurriedly, swinging his cane a bit less jauntily than twenty years ago. He tucked the muffler more securely under the rusty old topcoat and pulled his bowler hat more firmly on his head.

He noticed that the street light at the corner of Maple and Jefferson was out and he grumbled a little to himself when he was forced to step off the walk to circle a boarded-off section of newly laid concrete work before the driveway of 816.

It seemed that he reached the corner of Lexington and Maple just a bit too quickly, but he told himself that this couldn't be. For he never did that. For twenty years, since the year following his expulsion from the university, he had lived by the clock.

The same thing, at the same time, day after day. He had not deliberately set upon such a life of routine. A bachelor, living alone with sufficient money to supply his humble needs, the timed existence had grown on him gradually.

So he turned on Lexington and back on Oak. The dog at the corner of Oak and Jefferson was waiting for him once again and came out snarling and growling, snapping at his heels. But Mr. Chambers pretended not to notice and the beast gave up the chase.

A radio was blaring down the street and faint wisps of what it was blurting floated to Mr. Chambers.

". . . still taking place . . . Empire State building disappeared . . . thin air . . . famed scientist, Dr. Edmund Harcourt . . ."

The wind whipped the muted words away and Mr. Chambers grumbled to himself. Another one of those fantastic radio dramas, probably. He remembered one from many years before, something about the Martians. And Harcourt! What did Harcourt have to do with it? He was one of the men who had ridiculed the book Mr. Chambers had written.

But he pushed speculation away, sniffed the clean, crisp air again, looked at the familiar things that materialized out of the late autumn darkness as he walked along. For there was nothing . . . absolutely nothing in the world . . . that he would let upset him. That was a tenet he had laid down twenty years ago.

There was a crowd of men in front of the drugstore at the corner of Oak and Lincoln and they were talking excitedly. Mr. Chambers caught some excited words: "It's happening everywhere . . . What do you think it is . . . The scientists can't explain . . ."

But as Mr. Chambers neared them, they fell into what seemed an abashed silence and watched him pass. He, on his part, gave them no sign of recognition. That was the way it had been for many years, ever since the people had become convinced that he did not wish to talk.

One of the men half started forward as if to speak to him, but then stepped back and Mr. Chambers continued on his walk.

Back at his own front door, he stopped and as he had done a thousand times before drew forth the heavy gold watch from his pocket.

He started violently. It was only seven-thirty!

For long minutes he stood there staring at the watch in accusation. The timepiece hadn't stopped, for it still ticked audibly.

But fifteen minutes too soon! For twenty years, day in, day out, he had started out at seven and returned at a quarter of eight. Now . . .

It wasn't until then that he realized something else was wrong. He had no cigar. For the first time he had neglected to purchase his evening smoke.

Shaken, muttering to himself, Mr. Chambers let himself in his house and locked the door behind him.

He hung his hat and coat on the rack in the hall and walked slowly into the living room. Dropping into his favorite chair, he shook his head in bewilderment.

Silence filled the room. A silence that was measured by the ticking of the old-fashioned pendulum clock on the mantlepiece.

But silence was no strange thing to Mr. Chambers. Once he had loved music . . . the kind of music he could get by tuning in symphonic orchestras on the radio. But the radio stood silent in the corner, the cord out of its socket. Mr. Chambers had pulled it out many years before. To be precise, upon the night when the symphonic broadcast had been interrupted to give a news flash.

He had stopped reading newspapers and magazines, too, had exiled himself to a few city blocks. And as the years flowed by that self-exile had become a prison, an intangible, impassable wall bounded by four city blocks by three. Beyond them lay utter, unexplainable terror. Beyond them he never went.

But recluse though he was, he could not on occasion escape from hearing things. Things the newsboy shouted on the streets, things the men talked about on the drugstore corner when they didn't see him coming.

And so he knew that this was the year 1960 and that the wars in Europe and Asia had flamed to an end to be followed by a terrible plague, a plague that even now was sweeping through country after country like wild fire, decimating populations. A plague undoubtedly induced by hunger and privation and the miseries of war.

But those things he put away as items far removed from his own small world. He disregarded them. He pretended he had never heard of them. Others might

discuss and worry over them if they wished. To him they simply did not matter.

But there were two things tonight that did matter. Two curious, incredible events. He had arrived home fifteen minutes early. He had forgotten his cigar.

Huddled in the chair, he frowned slowly. It was disquieting to have something like that happen. There must be something wrong. Had his long exile finally turned his mind . . . perhaps just a very little . . . enough to make him queer? Had he lost his sense of proportion, of perspective?

No, he hadn't. Take this room, for example. After twenty years, it had come to be as much a part of him as the clothes he wore. Every detail of the room was engraved in his mind with . . . clarity; the old center leg table with its green covering and stained-glass lamp; the mantelpiece with the dusty bric-a-brac; the pendulum clock that told the time of day as well as the day of the week and month; the elephant ash tray on the taboret and, most important of all, the marine print.

Mr. Chambers loved that picture. It had depth, he always said. It showed an old sailing ship in the foreground on a placid sea. Far in the distance, almost on the horizon line, was the vague outline of a larger vessel.

There were other pictures, too. The forest scene above the fireplace, the old English prints in the corner where he sat, the Currier and Ives above the radio. But the ship print was directly in his line of vision. He could see it without turning his head. He had put it there because he liked it best.

Further reverie became an effort as Mr. Chambers felt himself succumbing to weariness. He undressed and went to bed. For an hour he lay awake, assailed by vague fears he could neither define nor understand.

When finally he dozed off, it was to lose himself in a series of horrific dreams. He dreamed first that he was a castaway on a tiny islet in mid-ocean, that the waters around the island teemed with huge poisonous sea snakes . . . hydrophinnae . . . and that steadily those serpents were devouring the island.

In another dream, he was pursued by a horror which he could neither see nor hear, but only could imagine. And as he sought to flee, he stayed in the one place. His legs worked frantically, pumping like pistons, but he could make no progress. It was as if he ran upon a treadway.

Then again the terror descended on him, a black, unimagined thing and he tried to scream and couldn't. He opened his mouth and strained his vocal cords and filled his lungs to bursting with the urge to shriek . . . but not a sound came from his lips.

All next day, he was uneasy and as he left the house that evening, at precisely seven o'clock, he kept saying to himself: "You must not forget tonight! You must remember to stop and get your cigar!"

The street light at the corner of Jefferson was still out and in front of 816, the cemented driveway was still boarded off. Everything was the same as the night before.

And now, he told himself, the Red Star confectionery is in the next block. I must not forget tonight. To forget twice in a row would be just too much.

He grasped that thought firmly in his mind, strode just a bit more rapidly down the street.

But at the corner, he stopped in consternation. Bewildered, he stared down the next block. There was no neon sign, no splash of friendly light upon the sidewalk to mark the little store tucked away in this residential section.

He stared at the street marker and read the word slowly: GRANT. He read it again, unbelieving, for this shouldn't be Grant Street, but Marshall. He had walked two blocks and the confectionery was between Marshall and Grant. He hadn't come to Marshall yet . . . and here was Grant.

Or had he, absent-mindedly, come one block farther than he thought, passed the store as on the night before?

For the first time in twenty years, Mr. Chambers retraced his steps. He walked back to Jefferson, then

turned around and went back to Grant again and on to Lexington. Then back to Grant again, where he stood astounded while a single, incredible fact grew slowly in his brain:

There wasn't any confectionery! The block from Marshall to Grant had disappeared!

Now he understood why he had missed the store the night before, why he had arrived home fifteen minutes early.

On legs that were dead things, he stumbled back to his home. He slammed and locked the door behind him and made his way unsteadily to his chair in the corner.

What was this? What did it mean? By what inconceivable necromancy could a paved street with houses, trees, and buildings be spirited away and the space it had occupied be closed up?

Was something happening in the world which he, in his secluded life, knew nothing about?

Mr. Chambers shivered, reached to turn up the collar of his coat, then stopped as he realized the room must be warm. A fire blazed merrily in the grate. The cold he felt came from something . . . somewhere else. The cold of fear and horror, the chill of a half-whispered thought.

A deathly silence had fallen, a silence still measured by the pendulum clock. And yet a silence that held a different tenor than he had ever sensed before. Not a homey, comfortable silence . . . but a silence that hinted at emptiness and nothingness.

There was something back of this, Mr. Chambers told himself. Something that reached far back into one corner of his brain and demanded recognition. Something tied up with the fragments of talk he had heard on the drugstore corner, bits of news broadcasts he had heard as he walked along the street, the shrieking of the newsboy calling his papers. Something to do with the happenings in the world from which he had excluded himself.

He brought them back to mind now and lingered over the one central theme of the talk he overheard: the

wars and plagues. Hints of a Europe and Asia swept almost clean of human life, of the plague ravaging Africa, of its appearance in South America, of the frantic efforts of the United States to prevent its spread into that nation's boundaries.

Millions of people were dead in Europe and Asia, Africa and South America. Billions, perhaps.

And somehow those gruesome statistics seemed tied up with his own experience. Something, somewhere, some part of his earlier life, seemed to hold an explanation. But try as he would, his befuddled brain failed to find the answer.

The pendulum clock struck slowly, its every other chime as usual setting up a sympathetic vibration in the pewter vase that stood upon the mantel.

Mr. Chambers got to his feet, strode to the door, opened it and looked out.

Moonlight tessellated the street in black and silver, etching the chimneys and trees against a silvered sky.

But the house directly across the street was not the same. It was strangely lop-sided, its dimensions out of proportion, like a house that suddenly had gone mad.

He stared at it in amazement, trying to determine what was wrong with it. He recalled how it had always stood, four-square, a solid piece of mid-Victorian architecture.

Then, before his eyes, the house righted itself again. Slowly it drew together, ironed out its queer angles, readjusted its dimensions, became once again the stodgy house he knew it had to be.

With a sigh of relief, Mr. Chambers turned back into the hall.

But before he closed the door, he looked again. The house was lop-sided . . . as bad, perhaps worse than before!

Gulping in fright, Mr. Chambers slammed the door shut, locked it and double-bolted it. Then he went to his bedroom and took two sleeping powders.

His dreams that night were the same as on the night before. Again there was the islet in mid-ocean. Again he

was alone upon it. Again the squirming hydrophinnae were eating his foothold piece by piece.

He awoke, body drenched with perspiration. Vague light of early dawn filtered through the window. The clock on the bedside table showed seven-thirty. For a long time he lay there motionless.

Again the fantastic happenings of the night before came back to haunt him and as he lay there, staring at the windows, he remembered them, one by one. But his mind, still fogged by sleep and astonishment, took the happenings in its stride, mulled over them, lost the keen edge of fantastic terror that lurked around them.

The light through the windows slowly grew brighter. Mr. Chambers slid out of bed, slowly crossed to the window, the cold of the floor biting into his bare feet. He forced himself to look out.

There was nothing outside the window. No shadows. As if there might be a fog. But no fog, however thick, could hide the apple tree that grew close against the window.

But the tree *was* there . . . shadowy, indistinct in the gray, with a few withered apples still clinging to its boughs, a few shriveled leaves reluctant to leave the parent branch.

The tree was there now. But it hadn't been when he first had looked. Mr. Chambers was sure of that.

And now he saw the faint outlines of his neighbor's house . . . but those outlines were all wrong. They didn't jibe and fit together . . . they were out of plumb. As if some giant hand had grasped the house and wrenched it out of true. Like the house he had seen across the street the night before, the house that had painfully righted itself when he thought of how it should look.

Perhaps if he thought of how his neighbor's house should look, it too might right itself. But Mr. Chambers was very weary. Too weary to think about the house.

He turned from the window and dressed slowly. In the living room, he slumped into his chair, put his feet on the old cracked ottoman. For a long time he sat, trying to think.

And then, abruptly, something like an electric shock ran through him. Rigid, he sat there, limp inside at the thought. Minutes later he arose and almost ran across the room to the old mahogany bookcase that stood against the wall.

There were many volumes in the case: his beloved classics on the first shelf, his many scientific works on the lower shelves. The second shelf contained but one book. And it was around this book that Mr. Chambers' entire life was centered.

Twenty years ago he had written it and foolishly attempted to teach its philosophy to a class of undergraduates. The newspapers, he remembered, had made a great deal of it at the time. Tongues had been set to wagging. Narrow-minded townsfolk, failing to understand either his philosophy or his aim, but seeing in him another exponent of some anti-rational cult, had forced his expulsion from the school.

It was a simple book, really, dismissed by most authorities as merely the vagaries of an over-zealous mind.

Mr. Chambers took it down now, opened its cover and began thumbing slowly through the pages. For a moment the memory of happier days swept over him.

Then his eyes focused on the paragraph, a paragraph written so long ago the very words seemed strange and unreal:

> Man himself, by the power of mass suggestion, holds the physical fate of this earth . . . yes, even the universe. Billions of minds seeing trees as trees, houses as houses, streets as streets . . . and not as something else. Minds that see things as they are and have kept things as they were . . . Destroy those minds and the entire foundation of matter, robbed of its regenerative power, will crumple and slip away like a column of sand. . . .

His eyes followed down the page:

> Yet this would have nothing to do with matter itself . . . but only with matter's form. For while the mind of man through long ages may have moulded an imagery of that space in which he lives, mind would have little conceivable influence upon the existence of that matter. What exists in our known universe shall exist always and can never be destroyed, only altered or transformed.
>
> But in modern astrophysics and mathematics we gain an insight into the possibility . . . yes probability . . . that there are other dimensions, other brackets of time and space impinging on the one we occupy.
>
> If a pin is thrust into a shadow, would that shadow have any knowledge of the pin? It would not, for in this case, the shadow is two dimensional, the pin three dimensional. Yet both occupy the same space.
>
> Granting then that the power of men's minds alone holds this universe, or at least this world in its present form, may we not go farther and envision other minds in some other plane watching us, waiting, waiting craftily for the time they can take over the domination of matter? Such a concept is not impossible. It is a natural conclusion if we accept the double hypothesis: that mind does control the formation of all matter; and that other worlds lie in juxtaposition with ours.
>
> Perhaps we shall come upon a day, far distant, when our plane, our world will dissolve beneath our feet and before our eyes as some stronger intelligence reaches out from the dimensional shadows of the very space we live in and wrests from us the matter which we know to be our own.

He stood astounded beside the bookcase, his eyes staring unseeing into the fire upon the hearth.

He had written that. And because of those words he had been called a heretic, had been compelled to resign his position at the university, had been forced into this hermit life.

A tumultuous idea hammered at him. Men had died by the millions all over the world. Where there had

been thousands of minds there were now one or two. A feeble force to hold the form of matter intact.

The plague had swept Europe and Asia almost clean of life, had blighted Africa, had reached South America . . . might even have come to the United States. He remembered the whispers he had heard, the words of the men at the drugstore corner, the buildings disappearing. Something scientists could not explain. But those were merely scraps of information. He did not know the whole story . . . he could not know. He never listened to the radio, never read a newspaper.

But abruptly the whole thing fitted together in his brain like the missing piece of a puzzle into its slot. The significance of it all gripped him with damning clarity.

There were not sufficient minds in existence to retain the material world in its mundane form. Some other power from another dimension was fighting to supersede man's control *and take his universe into its own plane!*

Abruptly Mr. Chambers closed the book, shoved it back in the case and picked up his hat and coat.

He had to know more. He had to find someone who could tell him.

He moved through the hall to the door, emerged into the street. On the walk he looked skyward, trying to make out the sun . . . only an all-pervading grayness that shrouded everything . . . not a gray fog, but a gray emptiness that seemed devoid of life, of any movement.

The walk led to his gate and there it ended, but as he moved forward the sidewalk came into view and the house ahead loomed out of the gray, but a house with differences.

He moved forward rapidly. Visibility extended only a few feet and as he approached them the houses materialized like two-dimensional pictures without perspective, like twisted cardboard soldiers lining up for review on a misty morning.

Once he stopped and looked back and saw that the grayness had closed in behind him. The houses were wiped out, the sidewalk faded into nothing.

He shouted, hoping to attract attention. But his voice frightened him. It seemed to ricochet up and into the higher levels of the sky, as if a giant door had been opened to a mighty room high above him.

He went on until he came to the corner of Lexington. There, on the curb, he stopped and stared. The gray wall was thicker there but he did not realize how close it was until he glanced down at his feet and saw there was nothing, nothing at all beyond the curbstone. No dull gleam of wet asphalt, no sign of a street. It was as if all eternity ended here at the corner of Maple and Lexington.

With a wild cry, Mr. Chambers turned and ran. Back down the street he raced, coat streaming after him in the wind, bowler hat bouncing on his head.

On the stoop he stood for a moment, breathing hard. He glanced back over his shoulder and a queer feeling of inner numbness seemed to well over him. At that moment, the gray nothingness appeared to thin . . . the enveloping curtain fell away, and he saw . . .

Vague and indistinct, yet cast in stereoscopic outline, a gigantic city was limned against the darkling sky. It was a city fantastic with cubed domes, spires, and aerial bridges and flying buttresses. Tunnel-like streets, flanked on either side by shining metallic ramps and runways, stretched endlessly to the vanishing point. Great shafts of multicolored light probed huge streamers and ellipses above the higher levels.

And beyond, like a final backdrop, rose a titanic wall. It was from that wall . . . from its crenelated parapets and battlements that Mr. Chambers felt the eyes peering at him.

Thousands of eyes glaring down with but a single purpose.

And as he continued to look, something else seemed to take form above that wall. A design this time, that swirled and writhed in the ribbons of radiance and rapidly coalesced into strange geometric features, with-

out definite line or detail. A colossal face, a face of indescribable power and evil, it was, staring down with malevolent composure.

Then the city and the face slid out of focus; the vision faded like a darkened magic-lantern, and the grayness moved in again.

Mr. Chambers pushed open the door of his house. But he did not lock it. There was no need of locks . . . not any more.

A few coals of fire still smouldered in the grate and going there, he stirred them up, raked away the ash, piled on more wood. The flames leaped merrily, dancing in the chimney's throat.

Without removing his hat and coat, he sank exhausted in his favorite chair, closed his eyes then opened them again.

He sighed with relief as he saw the room was unchanged. Everything in its accustomed place, the clock, the lamp, the elephant ash tray, the marine print on the wall.

Everything was as it should be. The clock measured the silence with its measured ticking; it chimed abruptly and the vase sent up its usual sympathetic vibration.

This was his room, he thought. Rooms acquire the personality of the person who lives in them, become a part of them. This was his world, his own private world, and as such it would be the last to go.

But how long could he . . . his brain . . . maintain its existence?

Mr. Chambers stared at the marine print and for a moment a little breath of reassurance returned to him. *They* couldn't take this away. The rest of the world might dissolve because there was insufficient power of thought to retain its outward form.

But this room was his. He alone had furnished it. He alone, since he had first planned the house's building, had lived here.

This room would stay. It must stay on . . . it must . . .

He rose from his chair and walked across the room to the bookcase, stood staring at the second shelf with its single volume. His eyes shifted to the top shelf and swift terror gripped him.

For all the books weren't there. A lot of books weren't there! Only the most beloved, the most familiar ones.

So the change already had started here! The unfamiliar books were gone and that fitted in the pattern . . . for it would be the least familiar things that would go first.

Wheeling, he stared across the room. Was it his imagination, or did the lamp on the table blur and begin to fade away?

But as he stared at it, it became clear again, a solid, substantial thing.

For a moment real fear reached out and touched him with chilly fingers. For he knew that this room no longer was proof against the thing that had happened out there on the street.

Or had it really happened? Might not all this exist within his own mind? Might not the street be as it always was, with laughing children and barking dogs? Might not the Red Star confectionery still exist, splashing the street with the red of its neon sign?

Could it be that he was going mad? He had heard whispers when he had passed, whispers the gossiping housewives had not intended him to hear. And he had heard the shouting of boys when he walked by. They thought him mad. Could he be really mad?

But he knew he wasn't mad. He knew that he perhaps was the sanest of all men who walked the earth. For he, and he alone, had foreseen this very thing. And the others had scoffed at him for it.

Somewhere else the children might be playing on a street. But it would be a different street. And the children undoubtedly would be different too.

For the matter of which the street and everything upon it had been formed would now be cast in a different mold, stolen by different minds in a different dimension.

> Perhaps we shall come upon a day, far distant, when our plane, our world will dissolve beneath our feet and before our eyes as some stronger intelligence reaches out from the dimensional shadows of the very space we live in and wrests from us the matter which we know to be our own.

But there had been no need to wait for that distant day. Scant years after he had written those prophetic words, the thing was happening. Man had played unwittingly into the hands of those other minds in the other dimension. Man had waged a war and war had bred a pestilence. And the whole vast cycle of events was but a detail of a cyclopean plan.

He could see it all now. By an insidious mass hypnosis minions from that other dimension . . . or was it one supreme intelligence . . . had deliberately sown the seeds of dissension. The reduction of the world's mental power had been carefully planned with diabolic premeditation.

On impulse he suddenly turned, crossed the room and opened the connecting door to the bedroom. He stopped on the threshold and a sob forced its way to his lips.

There was no bedroom. Where his stolid four poster and dresser had been there was grayish nothingness.

Like an automaton, he turned again and paced to the hall door. Here, too, he found what he had expected. There was no hall, no familiar hat rack and umbrella stand.

Nothing . . .

Weakly, Mr. Chambers moved back to his chair in the corner.

"So here I am," he said, half aloud.

So there he was. Embattled in the last corner of the world that was left to him.

Perhaps there were other men like him, he thought. Men who stood at bay against the emptiness that marked the transition from one dimension to another. Men who had lived close to the things they loved, who had endowed those things with such substantial form

by power of mind alone that they now stood out alone against the power of some greater mind.

The street was gone. The rest of his house was gone. This room still retained its form.

This room, he knew, would stay the longest. And when the rest of the room was gone, this corner with his favorite chair would remain. For this was the spot where he had lived for twenty years. The bedroom was for sleeping, the kitchen for eating. This room was for living. This was his last stand.

These were the walls and floors and prints and lamps that had soaked up his will to make them walls and prints and lamps.

He looked out the window into a blank world. His neighbors' houses already were gone. They had not lived with them as he had lived with this room. Their interests had been divided, thinly spread; their thoughts had not been concentrated as his upon an area four blocks by three, or a room fourteen by twelve.

Staring through the window, he saw it again. The same vision he had looked upon before and yet different in an indescribable way. There was the city illumined in the sky. There were the elliptical towers and turrets, the cube-shaped domes and the battlements. He could see with stereoscopic clarity the "aerial bridges," the gleaming avenues sweeping on into infinitude. The vision was nearer this time, but the depth and proportion had changed . . . as if he were viewing it from two concentric angles at the same time.

And the face . . . the face of magnitude . . . of power of cosmic craft and evil . . .

Mr. Chambers turned his eyes back into the room. The clock was ticking slowly, steadily. The grayness was stealing into the room.

The table and radio were the first to go. They simply faded away and with them went one corner of the room.

And then the elephant ash tray.

"Oh, well," said Mr. Chambers. "I never did like that very well."

Now as he sat there, it didn't seem queer to be without the table or the radio. It was as if it were something quite normal. Something one could expect to happen.

Perhaps, if he thought hard enough, he could bring them back.

But, after all, what was the use? One man, alone, could not stand off the irresistible march of nothingness. One man, alone, simply couldn't do it.

He wondered what the elephant ash tray looked like in that other dimension. It certainly wouldn't be an elephant ash tray nor would the radio be a radio, for perhaps they didn't have ash trays or radios or elephants in the invading dimension.

He wondered, as a matter of fact, what he himself would look like when he finally slipped into the unknown. For he was matter, too, just as the ash tray and the radio were matter.

He wondered if he would retain his individuality . . . if he still would be a person. Or would he merely be a thing?

There was one answer to all of that. He simply didn't know.

Nothingness advanced upon him, ate its way across the room, stalking him as he sat in the chair underneath the lamp. And he waited for it.

The room, or what was left of it, plunged into dreadful silence.

Mr. Chambers started. The clock had stopped. Funny . . . the first time in twenty years.

He leaped from his chair and then sat down again.

It wasn't there.

There was a tingling sensation in his feet.

Smoke of the Snake

HERRICK ARRIVED IN Samarinda at night when it was late enough for him to slip unnoticed by the strict and watchful Dutch immigration authorities and sufficiently dark to remove all chances of detection by the native police.

He groped his way cautiously across the worm-eaten wharves, moved slowly with a familiar step through the evil-smelling blackness of the water front, and headed toward a line of distant street lights that glimmered like yellow eyes in the fog.

Borneo again—no different than it had been three years before. Kuching, Bandjermasin, Samarinda—they were all the same. Brooding, mysterious, rat-infested coastal towns, fever holes cut from the dark clutches of the jungle, populated by a few white men and the dregs of the Eastern circle.

Herrick drew up at the outskirts of the illuminated area, stepped into the doorway shadow of a steel-walled copra warehouse, lit a cigarette and swore in disgust.

He was ship-tired, hungry, and thirsty. More than that, his nerves at the present moment were near the breaking point. Six months' intermittent enjoyment with the powers of the poppy were not to be disregarded, and he hadn't had a single pipe of opium since the day he left Makassar.

His need was desperate.

He waited until the street before him was deserted, then shuffled slowly forward, heading not toward the European quarter—too dangerous there—but deep into the winding, crooked alleys of the native sector.

As he walked, he peered carefully at each darker building shadow, hung his right hand, unswinging, close to the pocket of his duck coat. The slight bulge there marked the presence of an easily accessible automatic, loaded with a full clip and ready for instant action. A man—even a man on the right side of the law—needed a gun in this sinister spiderweb, and Herrick, with a "wanted" sign hung out for him by both the British and Dutch governments and a price on his head in every port south of Sandakan, was not unaware of his perilous position.

A line of sordid shops, all identically the same, with drooling, half-darkened windows, slipped by him into the gloom. Herrick smiled grimly.

Old stamping grounds, these. He remembered it all. But he had sunk pretty low since he had walked by here in a fresh suit of whites and Pollyanna ideas about the East. He had gone down into the very gutter and he had changed a lot, mentally as well as physically. He felt the heavy stubble on his face, ran his fingers across the ragged scar that marred his left cheek, and looked down at his torn and filthy clothes. No, there was no danger of his being recognized. Even Liang Po wouldn't know him and Liang Po's was his destination.

He found the place presently, sunk in that forbidding bystreet with its mongrel half-English, half-Chinese sign.

It was the Liang Po's of old. No change. The same tobacco-filled air, the same rough tables, the same confusion of black, brown, and bleary white faces. A reed flute wailed above the rhythmic cadence of a pounded drum and in a farther corner a Dyak dancing girl, clad only in breast plates and skirt of beads, whirled and swayed in wild abandon.

Herrick chose a table away from the others, pushed back his sun helmet, and relaxed in the chair.

Half an hour later, he was still sitting there, a bottle of whiskey and a dish of sour-smelling rice mixture half consumed. He swept the bottle and dish aside presently, took out a deck of greasy cards and began to lay them on the table.

"The white stranger would be interested, perhaps, in buying a bit of opium?"

Herrick started, jerked his hand toward his revolver pocket and looked up. Before him, round face smiling, almond eyes half closed like some drowsing Buddha, sat a small, ancient Chinese. His face was crossed and criss-crossed with a thousand wrinkles, and his hand, as he laid it delicately on the table, looked like a withered claw.

For a moment, Herrick stared in silence. He knew that to one familiar with the signs the ravages of the drug which he had resorted to with increasing frequency were plainly written in his jaundiced complexion and the sunken hollows behind his ears. He knew, too, that he looked different, a lot different. Three years was a long time. Yet the slit eyes of the Oriental seemed to see beyond all physical changes, to probe his very soul.

"You are——" Herrick asked, nervously lighting a cigarette.

"Liang Po. I sell what others buy. You want opium?"

Herrick did not lower his guard. He shuffled the deck of cards slowly, cut them, and shuffled again. He laid his cigarette on the edge of the table, exhaled a last streamer of smoke, and deliberately studied the withered face before him.

"Make it strong," he said at length. "I've been without the stuff so long I can't see straight."

Without another word, Liang Po rose, motioned Herrick to follow, and led the way through a mat-covered doorway into a dark sickly-sweet-smelling corridor. Lighted by a flaring rag in a dish of oil, the corridor extended deep into the shadows and there were many closed doors along each side wall.

Before one of these the Chinese stopped, drew from his robes a key, and inserted it in the lock.

"Enter, " he said shortly. Herrick, stepping across the threshold, found himself in a small low-ceilinged room. There was a couch covered with silken drapes, a table of teakwood, and a curious triangular cabinet fashioned of colored bamboo which rested on a base of ivory.

"White man, " said the Oriental softly, seating himself on the couch, "it is true, is it not, that you have wished many times you had never succumbed to the habit of the opium pipe?"

"Wished?" Herrick dug his fingers into his palms convulsively. Lord, how much truth there was in the words! A thousand times he had cursed the folly of that day when he had first introduced himself to the drug. He hated the stuff, hated to think it was slowly strengthening its grip on him, gradually writing his death sentence. He paced forward a few steps, head down, then whirled, gritting his teeth.

"I can pay, " he snapped. "Don't sit there like a gaping idiot. What the hell are you waiting for?"

Liang Po's face was inscrutable as he reached sideways into the little bamboo cabinet next to the couch, opened a panel at its top and drew two articles from its interior. A long tubelike something, curved like a serpent, and a small lacquer box.

"Suppose, " he said, "I were to offer you a drug of a different nature, one which, chemically speaking, contains neither morphine, thebaine, nor papaverine; a substance which——"

Herrick shook his head. "Hashish? Charas?" he said. "Nothing doing. Opium is bad enough for me."

"But no, my friend. I speak of something entirely different, something which as a white man you have never heard of before."

Liang Po opened the lacquer box and shook into his palm five green pellets. They were oblong, Herrick noted, the size of quinine capsules, five grain, and they seemed to glow and glisten like oil on water when the light from the flickering lantern struck their surfaces.

"Two of these pellets smoked in this curved pipe, and you will drowse in beautiful dreams. Dreams which put the opium stupor to shame. Three pellets and the joys of heaven will fly down to you. You will be an emperor in the realm of sleep with the world whirling strangely in a circle of happiness. And when you awaken, all desire, all urge, for the taste of opium will have gone into the rising smoke."

Herrick started as though prodded with a knife.

"You mean," he gasped, "you mean—that that stuff is an antidote, a cure for——"

Liang Po's wrinkled face moved closer under the lantern light like a grinning gargoyle.

"I mean that after breathing its fumes, the drug of the poppy will have no more effect upon you than a bowl of rice. The pipe comes from Soerabaya, from the limb of a Upas tree. It is said two men lost their lives removing the *antjar* juice from its core and fashioning it into its present form. But the pellets—you have been far enough into the interior jungles to have seen that most evil of snakes, the hamadryad? And to know the deadly poison it carries in its fangs?"

Herrick nodded slowly.

"These pellets contain that poison. They were made in a native kampong, far up the Mahakam River. Made by Kajan Dyaks, compounded under the direction of Lukut, and Lukut is a witch doctor, an all-seeing man of many secrets.

"On a night when the moon is at the full and the tabu of the rice feast forgotten, a live hamadryad is thrown into a kettle of boiling blood, blood which is drained from the body of a young Dyak girl. Into the mixture are thrown the teeth of nine crocodiles and the skull of a female orangutan. The potion is stirred with a golden parang—slowly, and the scum spooned off and allowed to dry. It is ground to a powder then and blended with the thorn of the *Klubi*, the swamp plant which——"

"You, a Chinese, believe in these native superstitions?" broke in Herrick.

Liang Po shrugged. "I follow the religion of my ancestors," he said. "But, I was born here in Samarinda and I also believe what I have seen to be true."

Herrick was thinking fast. It would be the height of absurdity to insert in his system a mixture the nature of which he didn't know. Made from the virus of a hamadryad—smoked through a pipe of poisonous Upas wood! And yet harmless because of the sorcery of a jungle witch doctor.

Well, he had wandered through the East long enough to know that things happened here which never found a place in the pages of a medical journal. If the stuff were a cure for the opium habit—Good God, if it really were!

He glanced down at the Oriental's lacquer box and then at his own trembling hands. A cure would wipe away that itching desire that was driving him mad. A cure would——

He stood there, gnawing his lips, staring blankly into space.

And softly, silkily Liang Po's droning voice continued;

"The curious thing about these pellets, white man, is that, when smoked in this pipe, no two will superinduce the same type of dreams. One time you will be living again some happy hours of the past. Again, the mysteries of the future will be revealed to you. Or perhaps——

"Never mind that," snapped Herrick. "Are you sure the drug will take away all desire for opium? If you are lying to me——"

"I am not lying, white man. I speak the truth. My pellets come from the deep jungle country, brought downriver once a year. No one else in Samarinda has them."

Herrick shut his teeth decisively. He reached in his pocket and threw several coins to the table.

"Fill the pipe and get out," he said. "I'll try anything once."

Without hast, Liang Po rose to his feet, pushed two of the pellets into the bowl of the pipe, and laid the re-

maining three on the table. The lacquer box he returned to the bamboo cabinet.

"Taken correctly," he said to Herrick, "there is no danger in the drug. Two pellets the first time. After that, any number up to four. But on your life do not use the fifth. It will cause a constriction of the heart and you will die in torture."

He went out, closing the door behind him. Herrick stood there in silence, gazing down at the pipe on the table, brow twisted in a frown. The thing was a lot different from any *yensheegow* he had ever smoked, that was for certain. It was carved and colored into a perfect likeness of a brown snake. Even the mouthpiece, long and slender, was fashioned like a protruding fang.

With an involuntary shudder, Herrick picked the pipe up and brought it closer to examine the crushed remnants of the two pellets in the bowl. For a moment, then, he imagined the greenish powder was swirling round and round, coiled and wriggling as though alive. Then he jerked his eyes away and reached in his pocket for a match. It was getting him already, that opium desire, eating into his vitals in a way that smothered all reluctance. In a few months, that urge would be greater, a hundred times greater. And it would increase quickly until life would be a torture. He had seen addicts in the last stages many times. They shuffled with their palms turned to the rear and their coats draped over their shoulders like capes. And they knew the use of the *sueypow*, the knife with which the degraded scrapes the bowl of the pipe, and then eats those scrapings.

Slowly Herrick applied the match, stretched full length on the couch, and let the smoke pass down the stem into his mouth. For a while there was no reaction, only a strange half-sweet, half-bitter taste that tingled like a hundred needles far back in his throat. He expelled the smoke and watched it rise in thin, greenish coils toward the darkness of the ceiling. It seemed to gather there in a compact cloud, that smoke, hanging motionless like a roll of transparent cloth. And then

drowsiness and a feeling of quiet stole over the white man and he closed his eyes while the silence of the room drew in about him.

If he were asleep, it was sleep such as he had never experienced. Vaguely, he was aware of the steady pulsation of his heart and the pipe through which he continued to inhale the fumes from the burning pellets. The effect of the smoke was delightful now. It coursed through his veins in a subdued electric glow and it produced a sense of warmth that penetrated his brain like old wine.

Body relaxed, muscles untensed, Herrick lay there, gradually drawing deeper and deeper on the pipe. Under the lids of his closed eyes, he could see the smoke cloud directly above him grow from a small, translucent billow the size of a palm frond to a thick blanket that reached from wall to wall. It continued to increase in size as the exhalations from the man's mouth and the pungent incense from the bowl of the pipe rose upward.

How much time elapsed after that Herrick did not know. But when he suddenly found himself staring, eyes wide open, at the farther wall, a curious thing had happened.

The wall, once so solid and material, had passed away, and in its place was a scene that stretched far beyond, a gallery with carven balustrades continuing and perspectively diminishing almost to the vanishing point. The floor and the ceiling were vague and indistinct with the kaleidoscopic unreality of a Goya drawing, but the brown balusters, illumined from above by a curious, indefinable glow, existed with a sharpness and a clarity as though seen through a magnifying glass. And extending from the very corner of Herrick's eye to the remoteness before him was that strange greenish smoke, diffused now, wafting slowly from side to side like an entity restless and alive.

An instant later, confused and bewildered, Herrick was advancing forward into the length of the gallery. He had no remembrance of leaving the couch or of passing from the mundane reality of the little room. He only

knew that in some inexplicable manner, he was being drawn toward the mystery of what lay ahead, urged on by a magnetic force. His feet moved with the unhurried, precise steps of a follower of a funeral cortege, and his hands hung rigid at his side.

Keeping well to the center of the geometric plane, Herrick continued his mechanical pace, his brain seeking frantically for something which it could understand. On and on he went, never altering his step. His nostrils were dry and glazed from the continuous inhalation of smoke, and his lungs felt hard and swollen, as though some bulbous substance had crawled down his wind pipe and increased in size.

He came in this manner to the end of the gallery. Here the way before him merged into a grand staircase that swept down to a level far below. One moment Herrick hesitated, fighting the attraction that was drawing him so relentlessly; then, slowly he began to descend.

Below him was a circular platform, large as an arena, seeming to hang suspended on the dark billows like a floating island. The floor was white, a dazzling white, made all the more intense by the heavy blackness that surrounded it on three sides. He reached the last step and emerged upon it. Not until then did Herrick have an undistorted vision of his surroundings, and he gazed before him with eyes full of utter amazement.

Directly ahead the smoke had gathered and then divided itself into three distinct segments, three towering, separate mist columns. They were but thicker coagulations of the greenish fumes, wavering and translucent, yet in a dim, uncertain way, they possessed human form and appearance. And suddenly, as though molded by an invisible sculptor, details developed, features grew, and three nebulous, lifelike images stood motionless and erect before him.

One instant Herrick surveyed them, examined their heads and bodies. Then he recoiled while a slow chill crawled its way along his spine.

On the left, feet braced far apart, seaman's cap pulled well back from his brow, was the likeness of a ship

captain, heavily bearded, with little pig eyes and huge jowls.

The second figure of the tenuous triad was a Chinese girl, delicate and beautiful in spite of its size, as any Tanagra figurine.

And the third——

Herrick stared at the third image. The vapor statue was a perfect effigy of himself; not himself as he looked at the present time, wasted by narcotics, roughened by a life spent in every hole of the East, but himself with the clean suit of whites, the spotless pith helmet and the clear eyes he had had when he first set foot in Samarinda three years before.

For many moments, the triple figurepiece mirage remained there, unreal yet stereoscopically distinct. Then, like a darkened reflection, it disintegrated again, and there were only the heavy greenish fumes swirling languidly from side to side.

Herrick, watching it, had felt like a man alone in outer space watching a dimensional drama through the lanes of time. Now, however, with the vision gone before him, he suddenly turned his eyes toward the murky background that hung like a curtain beyond the platform. And what he saw brought a scream of terror bursting from his throat.

That background, that misty darkness which surrounded the illumined area, was an undulating blanket of horror. Out there, wriggling, crawling, crossed and interwoven like the design of some colossal tapestry, was a compact mass of snakes—small snakes, large snakes, flat-headed and alive. They were watching him, Herrick saw, watching him with a thousand pairs of eyes, and they were advancing slowly nearer.

With a choking cry, Herrick turned and lunged for the staircase, the only way he knew of escape. But his limbs seemed held back by some unseen weight, some power which permitted him to advance only at a measured, deliberate pace. A cold numbness seized him,

penetrated to his very brain, and he worked at the stairs like a madman.

Behind him, he could hear a mighty hissing and rustling as the horde of slime-surrounded serpents twisted and writhed and sought to free themselves from their own entangling folds, sought to reach the prey in their path. It was a jellylike wall, wavering and gelatinous and the snakes existed within it as though cast from some giant mold. They were cobras, all of them, brown, squirming lengths of horror, hooded with bluish-white under portions. Like flowing lava they moved across the floor of the platform.

Then it happened. Before he could flail his arms forward, before he could throw his weight to the side, Herrick's legs buckled under him and he fell to the floor. He screamed, shot a frantic glance over his shoulder, strained every effort to rise from the psychic encumbrance that was overwhelming him.

But, like a man in a hypnotic trance, he found himself powerless to move. And with a slow and inexorable movement, the snake mass crossed the intervening distance, and, cold and clinging, began to slide its coils over his body.

Exactly what happened after that, Herrick could not be sure. The scene faded—abruptly and completely. The staircase, the gallery above, and the overpowering horror all diffused into nothingness, and once more he was lying on the silken couch flanked by the material walls of the little room.

Drunkenly, he rose to his feet, flung the strange Upas pipe to a far corner.

"What vile stuff!" he gasped. Then, coughing and retching, he stumbled to the door and went out.

It was the night of the following day and Liang Po sat at one of the corner tables of his drink shop surveying through half-closed eyes the confusion that surged around him. He sat with a smile on his wrinkled face, contemplating the future, and he did not move until,

many moments later, there came the interruption he had been waiting for.

The door leading to the street was ripped open and a haggard figure lurched into the room. Herrick, clothes wet and soggy from the rain that was pounding Samarinda's streets without, staggered into the chair opposite the Chinese and spread his hands flat on the table.

For a moment he sat there, silent, lips quivering, face a deadly white. Then he caught his breath and leaned forward.

"You lied!" he cried. "You miserable, double-crossing rat! You told me that drug was a cure for the opium habit! You told me that, didn't you? Answer, or I'll——"

Hands folded, eyes gleaming like two pinpoints of flame, Liang Po studied the man before him.

"I spoke the truth," he said softly. "My pellets will release all who smoke them from the powers of the poppy."

"Release him, yes!" Herrick's voice was choked with bitterness. "Release him, but bind him stronger than ever to your own devilish concoction! Liang Po, you knew the effect those fumes would have on me once they had entered my system. You knew that they caused insane dreams, more horrible than the wildest imagination. You knew it was more powerful, more habit-forming than the strongest brand of opium. All day I've felt myself wanting it. All day I've tried to fight it off. It's driving me mad, I tell you! I've got to have another dose!

The Oriental listened, adjusted the sleeve of his crimson robe and shook his head in a slow negative.

"No," he said quietly; "no more pellets are for sale. The ingredients which compose them are not grown in a field like so much rice. They are difficult to obtain and therefore most costly. I do not sell them at random."

"But I tell you I've got to have it!"

Without emotion, Liang Po gave no heed to the frantic words. He stared across the room at the lithe form of the Dyak dancing girl, watched her as she whirled and entertained his money-paying guests.

For a moment Herrick hesitated, hands clamped hard against the table edge. He moistened his lips,

coughed deep in his throat, twisted in his chair. Then, as he looked into the other's face, he saw something that made him clutch like a drowning man at a last straw.

"There is a price other than money?"

Over on the far side of the room, the reed flute continued its wailing sound, and the drums throbbed sullenly. The murmur of the surrounding voices seemed to grow momentarily softer as Liang Po roused himself, moved a few inches closer, and curled his lips in a slow smile.

"There might very well be a price other than money, if you are the kind of man I think you are. But I am not sure."

"Meaning——"

"A brave man, white stranger. A man who has learned, perhaps, not to value too highly the lives of other men when their removal could be of profit to him."

Herrick squirmed uneasily. "Spill it," he said. "If I don't have more of that dope soon, I'll go crazy."

Face gleaming in the wavering glare of the bracket lamps like an old Chinese mask, Liang Po was silent while he studied Herrick for a long moment. When he spoke, his lips barely moved and his voice, passing over the table, was a subdued whisper.

"White man," he said, "there is now at the water front of Samarinda a trading ship, a schooner out of Java, called the *Kuala Han.* Her captain is a white man—Sledge Carper—and was once well known in this port."

Herrick froze. His teeth went together with a sudden click.

"Carper?" he repeated. "What about him?"

"There is a lot about him, white man, Three years ago, this Carper stole my most treasured possession, took it from me as if I were a rat. He kidnaped my only daughter, my little flower girl, Wu. With the aid of another man, whom I have never known, he took her aboard his ship and then sailed away before I learned what had happened."

"Not until many months did I know the truth. Then it was too late. Wu was young and delicate, and Carper a

fiend with the body of a gorilla. She died somewhere out there in the Java sea. Carper threw her body overboard and laughed while he did it."

Herrick was gnawing his fingertips. "Well?" he asked.

"White man, you have asked for more snake pellets and my pipe. As I have said, both were difficult to obtain and therefore most costly. But the cure will be complete the second time, I am sure. The urge for more will disappear completely.

"My price is not difficult. I want no money. Something far easier. You will steal your way across the wharves, board the *Kuala Han* if necessary, find this Captain Carper—*and kill him!*"

Like a tightened wire, Herrick slowly grew rigid in his chair. "You want me to murder the man?" he said.

The Chinese nodded coldly. "Sledge Carper has defiled my race and the sacred ashes of my ancestors," he said. "He has brought sorrow to my house and for that he must die."

"But——"

Liang Po rose to his feet abruptly. "I have spoken," he said. "If you wish more pellets, that is my answer."

An hour later, Herrick made his way through the stench-filled alleys of Samarinda's native quarter toward the heavier darkness of the water front. A slow, penetrating drizzle was falling from a black sky, and the streets were deserted. He reached the docks, skirted bales and boxes and piles of stinking copra, and moved deliberately over the rotten planking toward the farthest extent of the wharves.

A length of darker shadow of familiar size rose up out of the gloom and the white man muttered in satisfaction. Like an overnourished sea bat, the bulging hulk of a weather-scarred tramp packet lay sprawled there. On her bow in almost illegible lettering was the name *Kuala Han.*

Herrick looked carefully about him; then, satisfied that he hadn't been followed, he dropped behind an

empty hogshead, drew from his pocket a long, curved creese, and proceeded to wait.

The *Kuala Han.* He hadn't forgotten her. Chinese-owned, manned by a cutthroat crew, the scum of every port from Penang to Batavia, and captained by "Sledge" Carper, who, not without reason, had the reputation of being the cruelest skipper in these seas, a six-foot-four carcass of animal lust and brutality.

Now Herrick was going to kill him. Queer, the turns of fate. Three years before, when he had seen less of the black side of life, Herrick would have blanched at the thought of it. He had feared Carper then, had obeyed the man's orders like a whining puppy. It was still clear in his memory, the night the two of them had returned from an hour's carousal at Liang Po's, and Carper had talked drunkenly, obscenely, of the girl he had seen there.

"Her name's Wu, and she's the lousy old Chink's daughter. Prettiest little trick I've ever seen, even if she is yellow. I want her, Herrick. The *Kuala Han* ain't had a woman on board for a long time. Go back there and get her. I don't care how. Bring her aboard. If you don't I'll tell the Dutch officials a few things I know."

Herrick had obeyed, but he had also been careful. And for that, now, three years later, he thanked his lucky stars. Liang Po knew Carper was responsible for the kidnaping and the subsequent death of his daughter, and he wanted revenge. But he hadn't recognized Herrick in his changed appearance or connected him with the distant crime.

It meant that everything was working nicely for the white man crouching there in the blackness of the docks. It meant that in a few moments Sledge Carper, a man whom he had come to hate with his very life and soul, would be dead and unable to hold over him any longer that little affair of rifle smuggling to upriver natives which had worried Herrick for so long. Kill two birds with one stone, they said. Well, he was killing three. He was getting his own personal revenge, he was destroying a source of possible criminal evidence against him, and in return for all that, he was to receive

payment from Liang Po in the form of more pellets and another trial at his Upas pipe. A good bargain!

And even if his body ached now as it had ached all the hours since he had quitted the strange, greenish fumes, with a wild desire for more of the snake powder, he felt sure a second smoke would alleviate that feeling entirely. The Chinese had said the pellets were a cure for the opium habit. He had also said desire for the pellets themselves would disappear after the second application. In the first case, he had been right. Why should he choose to lie about the latter?

The rain was coming down harder as he crouched there, and Herrick impatiently shifted his position. Below him, hollow and muffled, he could hear the water slapping monotonously against the piles of the dock. Off to the right, far out on the bay, a red dot, the riding light of a junk, glimmered dimly through the murk.

Only one thing worried Herrick—his eyes. They had been acting queerly all day. On three separate occasions, he had caught himself staring at objects which apparently floated before him, but which could not by any law of nature actually exist.

Even now, as his eyes looked into it, the darkness seemed porous around him, alive and swirling with tiny pinpoints of light. Ahead in the intervening distance between the protecting hogshead and the silent bulk of the schooner, a lighter glow hung suspended like an optic scar in his vision. He opened and closed his eyes, then swore when the thing did not pass.

It was that face again, the face of Liang Po with its wizened skin and twisted smile. And above it he saw, like a writhing halo, the brown form of a coiled snake.

Imagination, nothing more. It was all an impossibility, a creation of his own mind. A man's nerves always played tricks on him when he had been under a strain for any length of time. He shifted his gaze, but the floating face and the snake persisted.

Then abruptly Herrick grasped the handle of the creese harder and tensed like a cat. He had heard approaching footsteps and the sound of heavy breathing.

A moment later a bulking figure lurched out of the gloom.

One instant Herrick waited while he made sure the drunken form was that of Sledge Carper. One instant he fastened his eyes on the bearded face on the towering, apelike body. Then, as the man reeled heavily past, he leaped forward, raised the creese high over his head and brought it down straight in the back of his victim's neck.

The figure stopped short and stiffened. A single hoarse scream gurgled from his lips. Then the heavy thump of a falling body and Herrick was racing from the scene, running wildly toward the spiderweb protection of the native sector.

Back in the little room in the rear of the drink shop, Liang Po smiled as he listened.

"You have done well," he said, "very well, and the payment I promised shall be yours. The pipe lies on the couch. It is ready for use, and you may smoke it undisturbed. Here on the table are five pellets."

The Chinese moved toward the door leaving Herrick standing in the middle of the room, fingers trembling with anticipation.

"I ask you to remember only one thing, white man," he added. "Use only four pellets. No more. Four may be taken without danger, but the fifth means——"

Herrick was not listening. Arms extended before him, he was advancing unsteadily toward the pipe. He would smoke the thing once more, get rid of that damnable urge, and then he would clear out of here, leave Borneo for good. There was Papua. No one would know him there, and he could always make his way by hook or crook. He would forget this sordid past and start anew.

There was no hesitation in his actions now. Feverishly he pushed two of the pellets into the pipe bowl and left the remaining three on the table. Feverishly he dug in his pockets for a match, lit it, stretched full length on the couch and inserted the fanglike mouthpiece between his lips.

And over on the far side of the room, Liang Po smiled as he stepped across the threshold.

"Only four pellets," he said softly, closing the door behind him. "No more."

A moment later, as the fumes began to creep slowly down his lungs, Herrick closed his eyes in satisfaction. It was happening the same as before. The same feeling of internal warmth and pleasure, the same electric glow reaching deep into the core of his brain.

But his dreams that night were different. They were a succession of realistic scenes, a chronological panorama of his immediate past.

He saw himself as an upstanding official taking his tiffin in a clean, white-roomed house in the European quarter. He saw the first step of his downfall, a sampan moored at the river jetty, loaded with rifles for upriver natives and for which he was to receive much money. He saw his meeting with Sledge Carper and his part in the kidnaping of Wu, Liang Po's daughter. Events of the subsequent three years hurried by then in a swiftly moving state of confusion. Events that in most cases were not pleasant: stealings, swindlings, murder over a game of fan tan in Kuching, and endless pursuit by the British and Dutch police.

Hours seemed to have passed when Herrick opened his eyes and stared once more at the walls around him. The pipe had gone out, the pellets in the bowl were consumed, but the greenish smoke still hung like an emerald pall a few inches below the ceiling. Throughout his entire body there was growing a mighty urge, a wild desire to taste more of the strange drug. He could not resist it.

Dazedly, Herrick struggled to his feet, lurched across to the teak table, and stared at the remaining pellets on the surface. A moment he stood there, while the lantern in the far corner flickered and flared and trembled his shadow before him. Then he filled the pipe again, returned to the couch, and began to suck wildly at the sweetish fumes that he craved.

Above him, he could see through the blur of his half-closed lashes the smoke cloud grow thicker and thicker

and begin to swirl gently from side to side. And then once more the opposite wall faded like a darkened picture, and in its place there appeared that vast endless gallery extending straight as a geometric line to the vanishing point.

Herrick was watching it with a curious sense of familiarity. The scene was the same, the brown, carven balustrades, the indistinct floor and ceiling, and the strange glow that illumined the expanse with the vagueness of light through water.

But suddenly the white man became rigid on the couch. He blinked his eyes, stared, looked again, studied the scene before him while a cold chill edged its way up his spine. Slowly, slowly advancing down the center of the gallery, moving upon the billows of greenish vapor, was an object that filled his very soul with horror.

It was a hamadryad—a King Cobra!

Wriggling, sliding, with its hooded head outthrust before it, it was approaching the confines of the little room. Herrick tensed his muscles and sought frantically to rise from the couch; but, as before, that psychic heaviness seemed to have overwhelmed him, and he found himself powerless to move.

Inch by inch the serpent came on, at times seeming to merge with the swirling fumes, at times sharp and clear as an engraved design. There was a relentlessness in its advance, a slow, nightmare persistence that struck at the very sockets of the white man's eyes. And presently it had emerged from the gallery, entered the room, and was hanging directly over the couch, suspended in the vapor cloud.

Herrick lay there motionless as though bound in chains. He saw the snake as through a telescope, brown on top, bluish-white underneath, with black, gleaming eyes. He watched the fangs stab the heavy air, whip back and forth hungrily.

And suddenly he saw that the green vapor was slowly diffusing and the snake was settling toward him.

Frantically the white man sucked on the pipe and began to expel huge clouds of smoke toward the descending horror. For it was those fumes alone that

seemed to buoy it in mid-air above him. He smoked until his mouth was on fire, until his lungs ached deep in his chest and the room was thick with the dense miasma.

Only an instant the hamadryad hesitated. Then it gathered its coils under it—poised—and dropped swiftly downward.

A long time later Liang Po opened the door and silently entered the room. He moved across to the couch and stared down upon the silent figure that lay upon it. Smiling, he released the pipe from the stiffened fingers and returned it to its bamboo cabinet. And he was still smiling when he stepped again to the door and cast a last look behind him.

For the dull surface of the teak table was empty now. The fifth pellet was no longer there.

The Black Garden

THE WOMAN IN black got off the Mankato bus in Cologne in southwestern Carver County on Tuesday, the twelfth, at 2 P.M. Judge Warren Harker, sitting on his veranda, watched over his cigar as the bus driver deposited her suitcase in the dusty street and drove off, leaving her there, hesitant and alone.

Harker got to his feet and strode down the steps and through the gate.

"I'm sorry to bother," the woman said with a pronounced accent, seeing him approach. "Could you direct me to the hotel?"

A smile touched Harker's lips. The thought of a hotel in a village the size of Cologne was amusing. Almost as amusing as the woman's dress which dated back a good forty years and was an unrelieved black.

"No hotel, I'm sorry. The widow Benjamin sometimes has rooms to rent. Third house beyond the depot. Can I help you?"

She shook her head, picked up her suitcase and without further word set off down the street.

Not until evening did Harker have occasion to think of the stranger again. After supper, he began his customary stroll through the village and as he came abreast of the store-front building where Jeff Taylor had his land

office, his steps were halted by a tapping on the glass. Inside, Taylor beckoned him to enter.

"Might as well witness some papers," he said as the judge pushed through the doors. "Fraulein Tessler is buying the Hogarth place."

The woman in black sat before Taylor's desk. She had removed her hat which had hidden much of her face that afternoon, and Harker caught his breath now as he looked at her. She was young and beautiful, her eyes dark and lustrous, her complexion that of a tinted cameo.

"Hogarth," repeated Harker. "You don't mean that old ruin back beyond Number 5?"

"Fraulein Tessler understands that it needs repairs."

"Repairs!" said the judge scornfully. "Why there's practically nothing there but walls and a foundation."

The woman raised her hands. "I'm interested only in the acres near the house. I believe they've been cleared . . . ?"

Harker shrugged. "Y—es. Old man Hogarth nearly broke his back, trundling rocks out of there." A puzzled look entered his eyes. "May I ask what you're going to do with the property?"

Fraulein Tessler reached for the papers requiring her signature. "I'm going to plant a garden."

That was the last the judge or anyone in Cologne saw of the stranger until August. The summer was a hot and sultry one and few persons in Carver County had the inclination to wander off into the furnace-like back-roads. In fact, it wasn't until Mark Davis who worked in the arboretum told of the remodeling of the Hogarth house that Fraulein Tessler was remembered at all.

"I only saw it from the road," he said, "but the house has been fixed up in a queer way with a bell tower in the center. There's a strange garden too with colors so bright it looks like a picture postcard."

And Charlie Yarboro, returning late from Watertown, took the Hogarth road because it led through higher ground and he was having trouble with his allergy.

"What's a woman doin' prowlin' in her garden at 3 A.M.? The place gives me the creeps."

Other reports reached the judge. Crows were gathering in great flocks on the property. The bell in the tower could be heard at intervals booming out over the countryside. An opalescent light like fox fire was seen to hover at times over the house. And a few passersby told of hearing strange chanting within those stone walls.

Harker would have dismissed these tales as idle talk that didn't concern him had it not been for a chance action by Mrs. Dayton, his housekeeper for many years. With an eagle eye for dirt or debris of any kind, she spotted a stack of old magazines which the judge had brought down from the attic and stashed behind his desk for future reference.

"Some of these are thirty years old!" she exclaimed. "They're going out!"

"No," Harker protested. "Let me look through them first."

The following evening, he was leafing through a 1946 news magazine when an illustrated article caught his eye. He read it and then he read it again. The article told of the heir of a wealthy Austrian perfume manufacturer who had mysteriously vanished following the seizure of her father's plant by a member of a renegade branch of the family.

But it was not the name of the perfume magnate—Tessler—that held him there transfixed. It was the incredible fact that the accompanying 1946 photograph was a picture of the woman in black exactly as she looked today.

The judge wrinkled his brow in puzzlement. Time had played an important part in his own life. He had seen birthdays come and go, and he had watched his hair whiten and crows' feet appear about his eyes. Age had finally forced his retirement. How could a woman—assuming she was one and the same—escape the ravages of more than a quarter century without revealing them?

The judge had had little to occupy him during the six months since his retirement, and after a life of activity,

he was bored. It needed little self argument therefore to convince him that it would not be amiss to drive out to the Hogarth place and satisfy his curiosity about the woman in black.

That evening when he drove into her driveway, she came to meet him almost before he was out of the car.

"Judge Harker, isn't it? I'm glad you've come. I don't get many visitors, and it's lonely here."

"You must have known what to expect when you chose this site? Why did you?"

"It seemed ideal for my garden. Come, let me show it to you."

She led the way down a newly laid flagstone walk into the evening dusk. Abruptly Harker found himself surrounded by a multitude of blossoms, the luxuriance of which astounded him. As Mark Davis had said, the riot of color was breathtaking. The judge was no botanist, but he saw at least twenty different varieties and twenty more that were unknown to him. Azaleas, heliotrope, jasmine, roses, lilies of the valley, scarlet gentians, moonflowers. The outer reaches of the garden were lost in the gathering darkness, but there were open spaces where stone benches and statuary gave a classic look to the area. In the center stood a large stone fountain fashioned of a single block of granite but apparently with no water connection as yet. Over the expanse drifted a cloying aroma, a strange spicy scent that entered Harker's nostrils and constricted his throat. As they went on, the smell grew stronger, became almost overpowering.

"It's the *heliotrope falcius,*" Fraulein Tessler said. "The false heliotrope. It plays an important part in my work.

"My work," she continued. "The making of perfume."

Harker raised his eyes.

"My father and his father before him devoted their lives to the distilling of exotic scents. I left my father's plant near Salzburg when it was taken over by my uncle."

"But that was thirty years ago," the judge said, remembering the magazine article. "You couldn't have been born then."

She remained silent.

"Your uncle? His name was Tessler?"

She shook her head. "His name was Balsamo. But I know you're not interested in my family affairs. Here, let me pick you a boutonniere." She drew scissors from her dress pocket and, reaching down, clipped a pale blue flower.

Harker lingered an hour longer. He marveled at the care that had been given the garden. Not a weed, not a spare tuft of grass was visible in the orderly rows, and though there had been little rain in recent weeks, there was no indication here of insufficient moisture. The small statuary was mostly Grecian in subject and style but there were several pieces that puzzled him.

It was not until he was halfway back to Cologne that he recalled some of the words of Fraulein Tessler. She had said the name of her uncle was Balsamo. The name was familiar to Harker but for the moment he could not place it.

A week passed. On the 12th of August, a dual event occurred in Carver County that thrust all further thought of the woman completely out of the judge's mind. Like all county residents, Harker was appalled by what facts indicated was a crime and tragedy of the first water.

During the first few hours, the disappearance of teenagers Sharon Bentley and Lillian Brooks was not taken seriously. It was not until a blood-stained fragment of one of the girls' dresses was found that the significance was fully realized. Sheriff Tom Blunt called in the state police and despite an arthritic foot, Judge Harker joined in an intensive search. A second blood stained article of clothing—this time a knee-length stocking—was found, but that was all. Later Blunt accosted Harker on Cologne's main street.

"You've tried a lot of cases in your time," he said. "Ever had one that involved kidnapping?"

"Kidnapping! What made you think of that?"

The sheriff was a big florid-faced man, addicted to large hats. He had small watery eyes and those eyes were now dark with concern.

"I don't know. Except that both of the girls' families are well fixed. There's been no ransom note, of course, but I've got this funny feeling. How about the character out beyond Number 5. The one that took over the Hogarth place?"

"Fraulein Tessler?" Harker raised his eyebrows. "What made you think of her?"

"She's the only stranger in the county. And Postmaster Freddie Ganz says she's been gettin' mail from Chicago. It may be a thin lead but Chicago is where things like that are hatched."

"Did Freddie notice the return address on those letters?"

"They came from a cosmetic company. But that doesn't mean . . ."

Harker smiled. "There goes your suspect. Fraulein Tessler raises flowers to make perfume. Naturally she would have dealings with a cosmetic wholesaler."

Blunt shrugged. "Well, we should get a break before long." He lit a cigar with a kitchen match, said good night and headed back down the street.

Noon of the following day a foreign car seldom seen in the U.S., a Melchior Sant, came into Cologne from the south and drew up before the post office. With its oversized headlights, open tonneau, and queer-shaped hood, it attracted considerable attention. From it stepped Fraulein Tessler, carrying a large carton.

Inside she met Judge Harker who was picking up his mail. "How are you?" he said cordially. "Sending out a shipment of your perfume?"

Fraulein Tessler nodded. "Yes. My work has been going nicely. Will you wait while I have this package weighed?"

Moments later, she joined him again. "Can I give you a lift somewhere? My car is a bit different from your

American machines, different even from the continental ones."

Harker was going to Chaska to pay his taxes, and his own car was parked just outside.

"I think you'd enjoy it," Fraulein Tessler said as the judge hesitated.

Harker nodded and followed her out to the street. They drove out of town slowly. Once the village was behind them, the woman sent the Melchior Sant leaping forward like a frightened gazelle. She laughed gayly as the wind whipped her tawny hair back over her shoulders. Almost, Harker thought, as if she were under the effects of a narcotic.

He spoke over the whine of the motor and the rush of wind. "Fraulein, have there been any strangers near your place?"

"Strangers? You mean like tramps or burglars?"

"I mean like young girls. Teenagers. One blonde. One brunette."

"The only strangers—intruders rather—have been those infernal crows. Nothing seems to frighten them away, not even the bell. The two girls—are they missing?"

Harker nodded. "And we know they met with foul play."

"We?"

"Well, Sheriff Blunt. But the whole town's united."

She tooled the car expertly around a curve and lapsed into silence. The miles flowed by.

It happened as they were approaching the outskirts of Chaska, and it was such a complete removal of the veneer of nicety with which Fraulein Tessler cloaked herself that Harker was sickened to the point of disgust. A small Collie dog bounded out of the bushes that flanked the road and began to bark furiously. The woman at the wheel gave no sign that she had heard or seen. She made no move to turn or slacken speed but continued straight on.

There was a sickening thump, a short bark cut off in mid-career. Harker's gorge rose. He turned, eyes blazing. "Why?" he demanded. "You could have avoided . . ."

She laughed. "Come, Judge, you're not going to get sentimental over a dog. It should have got out of the way."

For the next mile until they reached the business district of Chaska, Harker sat in silence. When they drew up before the courthouse, he said,

"You needn't wait. I'll catch a bus back."

He spent only a short time in the county treasurer's office. With his tax receipt in his pocket, he sauntered down the hot August street and on a sudden impulse, entered the library. It was pleasantly cool inside. A few moments later, he was turning the pages of a volume whose condition showed that it had been read infrequently. Then he found what he was looking for:

> BALSAMO (Giusseppe) Joseph . . . Count Cagliostro. Hypnotist and charlatan at the court of Louis XVI. Also assumed the names of Pelligrini and the Count de Fenix. He practiced the art of precognition and is said to have predicted the manner of Marie Antoinette's death. But he is best known for his *Elixir of Life*, a secret of eternal youth. He died in prison, charged with various crimes . . .

Harker left the library and was fortunate to catch a bus back to Cologne. In Cologne, he went into the Arboretum and found Mark Davis transplanting some black spruce seedlings.

"Mark," he said without preamble, "do you know a flower called Heliotrope Falcius?"

"Sure," Davis replied. "Another name for it is Heliotrope Simulado. But it doesn't grow here."

"Oh? Where does it grow?"

"South America. It's a tropical plant."

"Anything unusual about it?"

Davis shrugged. "Well, the natives along the Amazon claim it halts the aging process, if taken in the right dosage. But the right dosage is the problem because it's a poison akin to the Nightshade plant. I've never seen it myself. Going in for gardening, Judge?"

Back home, Harker went into his study, picked up an unfinished novel and tried to read. But the print faded before his eyes and he found his thoughts returning to Fraulein Tessler. He told himself that he was no longer interested in the woman, yet an image of her kept returning to his mind's eye. The incident of the dog had soured any regard he had for her; but more than that a vague aura, a disturbing sense of malevolence, hung about her which he felt when he was in her presence.

Harker sat there for some time before he became aware that there was no familiar rattle of dishes and pans in the kitchen. Silence filled the house. And then he saw the note propped up on his desk. He opened it.

The note was annoying. Mrs. Dayton had been called out of town to attend a sick sister. Meanwhile, his meals would be taken care of by her daughter, who, the note assured him, was a capable cook. He found the truth in that statement when he came downstairs in the morning. Anne Dayton, a somewhat corpulent fifteen-year-old, was busily cooking his bacon and eggs. Never had the coffee smelled or tasted better.

"Will you be alone in your house while your mother's away?" he asked her.

Anne nodded. "I don't mind. I'm in school most of the day. And Mr. Blunt has said he would have one of his deputies drive by every hour or so."

Breakfast over, Harker went into his study. He had discarded the novel for *The Dark Elements of Survival,* a curious work concerned with the postponement of death by occult means. But although it coincided to a certain extent with his train of thought, again his attention wandered until finally he flung the book aside and went out to the veranda and his hammock.

He spent the morning and the long afternoon there. With dusk came a restlessness and a desire for action. He backed his car out of the garage and headed south down Number 5. He was just driving aimlessly, he told himself. But he knew that wasn't so. He was heading for the house of Fraulein Tessler and he realized that in some unexplained way she was drawing him like a magnet.

An army of crows rose up screaming as he turned into the driveway. There was no answer to his rattle of the brass door knocker, so he descended the steps and walked uncertainly down the flagstone walk into the garden. He moved slowly through the rows of flowers, marveling as before at their fecundity and brilliant coloring. The pungent musk of Heliotrope Falcius enveloped him like invisible smoke. He came to the area of small statues and stone benches and finally stood before the granite fountain. It struck him that the big stone block did not look much like a fountain. There were figures on its sides and some of those figures were almost obscene in appearance, animal heads on human bodies.

With a sudden loud flapping of wings a crow swooped to the ground a few yards away. It preened its black plumage and began to move toward him in a brazen strut. There was something glittery in its beak and as Harker made a movement, the bird gave a raucous cry of alarm and took off, letting the glittery object drop.

The judge bent to retrieve it. Even as he straightened, a voice behind him spoke.

"Judge Harker! How nice of you to come again."

Fraulein Tessler's corn-colored hair was beautifully coiffured in a coronet. Did she never wear anything but black, he wondered.

"May I ask to what do I owe the pleasure of this visit. In Chaska, you didn't seem . . ."

Harker shrugged. "I'm helping Sheriff Blunt," he said, not untruthfully. "We're still looking for Sharon Bentley and Lillian Brooks."

"Ah, yes. The two teenagers. Well, I doubt if they wandered this far from town. At any rate, I haven't seen them. But I probably wouldn't have anyway. My garden and my house occupy all my time. You've seen my garden, Judge. Now wouldn't you like to see my house?"

Without waiting for an answer, she turned and moved down the walk, heading not for the front of the house, but veering off to the side where a narrow door, reached by a short flight of steps, opened on the south

wall. She opened this door and led the way down a short corridor into a large room, all white with walls of gleaming tile. There were bins along one side filled with freshly cut blossoms. There was a long central table littered with vials and retorts and a large copper extractor which was rotating slowly and from which issued a strong odor.

"This is where I make my perfume," she said. "Steam distillation in a petroleum-ether solution. Or in some cases, enfleurage or maceration. It depends upon the flower.

"Perfume, you know, Judge, goes far back in history and even mythology. Circe was said to have held Odysseus in her power by means of it and Helen of Troy was made more attractive by a gift of scent from Aphrodite."

"The Heliotrope Falcius. Isn't that usually considered a tropical flower?"

A shadow crossed her face. "Yes," she said. "But I have been successful in cross-breeding a strain that is indigenous to this climate."

"I understand some persons attribute age-stopping powers to it," Harker said.

She glanced at him sharply. "I've heard that, yes."

"You mentioned a relative of yours named Balsamo. There was a Balsamo in eighteenth-century France who claimed he could prolong youth with what he called his *Elixir of Life.*"

There was a ghost of a smile on her lips. "The fight against senility is as old as time," she said. She moved across to a wall cabinet, opened one of its drawers and began rummaging inside. Then she turned.

It was then that Harker became suddenly confused. He was aware that Fraulein Tessler continued talking to him and that he was answering her. But his replies seemed automatic while his thoughts ran ahead or lagged behind those replies. Then there followed a space of time during which he lost his orientation and the walls of the room appeared to stagger in his vision. When next reality had returned to him, he had somehow left the house and was back in his car, driving. Or rather the road, like an endless treadmill, unrolled be-

fore him. He was vaguely aware of passing landmarks and intersections. And then he was home, climbing the stairs to his room, undressing and finally falling into a deep sleep.

At ten o'clock next morning, he entered the office of Dr. Rufus Fenley, the physician Cologne shared with the two neighboring towns of Norwood and Young America.

"You look terrible," the doctor said unprofessionally but with the frankness of an old friend. "What's wrong?"

"Doc," Harker said. "Is it possible for a person to have temporary amnesia?"

"What do you mean, temporary?"

"I mean I have utterly no recollection of last night. I remember I called on Fraulein Tessler—out on Number 5—and I was in her house. Then this blackness struck me. I don't remember driving home."

"I wouldn't worry about the driving," soothed Dr. Fenley. "It might be a case of the mind being occupied and the surroundings so familiar that your reactions became mechanical."

Harker shook his head. "It was more than that," he insisted. "It was a complete mental blackout."

"I don't suppose you know where you got this puncture on the back of the neck."

The judge shook his head.

"You say you were visiting a woman. You don't recall talking to her or any details of her house?"

"No. I was in her garden and I smelled the flowers there and from then on it's all a blank."

"Well the rest will come back to you presently," Fenley said. He was no psychologist but he was a shrewd G.P. "Meanwhile, don't fret over it and take two of these at bedtime." He handed Harker a prescription. "Come and see me tomorrow."

Harker returned home, lit a cigar and stretched out on the sofa. He was still very much disturbed, but as the tobacco smoke drifted ceilingward and he relaxed, little by little the events of the previous evening began to

come back to him. As if he were going backward in time, he recalled driving down the highway from Fraulein Tessler's house. Then he saw himself walking through the garden and the solitary crow that had swooped down before him. And then the white tile room in the Tessler home came back to him. But what he had said in that house or what the woman in black had said to him were part of a gulf he could not cross.

When evening came, Anne Dayton not having appeared, Harker went into the kitchen and prepared a frugal supper. An hour later a knock sounded on the door. It was Sheriff Blunt. He looked concerned.

"Any news of the girls?" the judge asked, ushering him into the study.

"No," Blunt said. "And that's what I came to talk to you about. Wasn't Mrs. Dayton's Anne supposed to fix your meals while her mother is out of town?"

Harker nodded. "She didn't show up."

Worry lanced into the sheriff's eyes. "She wasn't in school, either. And her house is open. . . ."

Harker frowned. "You don't think . . ."

"Yes, I do." Blunt nervously ground his cigar in an ash tray. "I've had my deputy drive by her place regularly. Maybe I should have taken more precautions. If anything has happened to her, I'll never forgive myself."

"And you have no clues of the Bentley or Brooks girl except for that piece of dress Lew Gadsen found?"

"No. Nothing. Nothing except this, and we don't even know for sure if it belonged to either of the girls." He showed Harker a large copper button.

Harker glanced at the button absently. And then suddenly something clicked in his memory. He thrust his hand in his pocket and drew forth the thing the crow had dropped in Fraulein Tessler's garden. It had remained forgotten in his pocket. Revealed now, it was a duplicate of the button in the sheriff's hand.

"Where did you get that?" demanded Blunt.

In a few words Harker told him.

The sheriff swung around. "So I was right after all." He headed for the door. "I knew that woman was no good."

"Hold on!" Harker said. "We don't know how far that crow may have flown before I saw it in the garden."

But Blunt was already hurrying out to his car. Harker hesitated, then followed.

The sheriff kept the Plymouth wide open until they reached the side road that led to the Tessler property. Moonlight turned that side road into a lane of silver, but heavy clouds were rolling in, and when they reached her driveway, the place was smothered in darkness.

"Try the garden first," Harker advised. "That seems to be where she spends most of her time."

Though it was possible to see only a few yards before them, they traversed the garden from one end to another but saw no sign of Fraulein Tessler. They turned and headed back for the house. Blunt banged the brass knocker but there was no response. Without compunction, he reached in his pocket, produced a set of keys, tried several until one clicked in the lock, then shoved the door open.

"No warrant," he said under his breath. "I'll think of an excuse later."

Inside he found a light switch, and the two men stood a moment looking with an appreciative eye at the interior. There was a large room, two stories in height with a staircase leading up to a gallery. There was a door leading off the main floor. The furniture, draperies and oil paintings were those of a French chateau rather than a house in a rural farming area. The north wall from ceiling to floor was composed entirely of book shelves. Harker strode across to these shelves, while Blunt went on through the connecting door in search of Fraulein Tessler. When he returned unsuccessfully, he found the judge had moved to the central table and was examining several books there.

"Look at this," the judge said. He held a leatherbound book whose crumbling covers were protected by a plastic shield. The pages were brittle and yellow with age.

"Richard Verstegan's *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence.* Do you know what this is?"

"Looks pretty old."

"Not only old but a curiosity. Why, it's a legend. It was banned and all copies supposedly destroyed in the 1700s."

"Witchcraft?" Blunt said.

"Witchcraft, sorcery, the occult. It supposedly contains secrets straight out of the Dark Ages, things it was judged no man should read."

Blunt stirred impatiently.

"And look at these symbols and this writing!"

The book was printed in Latin. One of the two open pages was covered with symbols, of which circles, stars lesangres, and pentacles predominated. On the opposite page, a passage was underlined and an English translation written in red ink on the margin:

> Know ye all of sorted interests, all elixirs brewed to surcease the forwarding of age, all drafts for the restoration of youth must come to naught without the presence of the Lesangre symbols, the Borthorian chant and that vital integrant, the blood of young virgins.

"Nobody believes that balderdash," Blunt said. He thrust his hands into his pockets and strode meditatively across the room. Before one of the ceiling-high windows, he stopped and stood staring out into the dark night. "Where do you suppose that Tessler woman is," he said half to himself. "Her car is here. I saw it beside the house when we came in." He chewed his lip reflectively. "Blood of young virgins. What rot!"

Suddenly he stiffened and took a step nearer the window. He peered out. Turning, he called sharply, "Judge!" He headed for the door, motioning Harker to follow.

Outside, after the lights of the interior, the blackness was intense, the moon still covered by opaque clouds. But ahead of them, some distance beyond a short rise, a flickering light was visible in the garden. As they went on, the light resolved into the multiple flare of flaming

torches. There were four of them, Harker saw, near the center of the garden, set close together, and he saw a moment later that they were mounted on the granite fountain. Silhouetted against the uncertain radiance was the unmistakable figure of the woman in black. Either she had been in the garden all the while and they had passed her unseeing in the darkness or she had come out the door in the south wall leading from the distillation room. The judge was just about to call out to her but Blunt clamped his hand over Harker's mouth, shaking his head.

They moved closer. Now they were only a few yards away. Suddenly Harker rocked backward as he saw the reason for Blunt's demand for silence. The scene before them was like a motion picture film stopped at one frame. Lying supine on the surface of the granite slab was another familiar figure, arms and legs spreadeagled and bound. Anne Dayton! She lay there motionless, eyes closed. And bent over her, Fraulein Tessler held one hand above her; the torchlight gleamed on the naked steel of a wide-bladed knife. As she poised there, she began to sing a low almost inaudible chant.

For what seemed an eternity to Harker, the tableaux continued. The sing-song voice rose and fell down the octaves. Abruptly the chanting ceased and the woman raised the knife higher above her. Simultaneously, the spell was broken and Blunt hurtled forward. With a single motion, he reached up and deflected the knife even as it began its downward descent so that the blade ground harmlessly into the stone on which the girl lay. Then he seized the woman, spun her around, whipped her arms behind her, and clamped handcuffs about her wrists.

"I reckon that's the end of that," he said.

Harker moved to the sacrifice book—he recognized it for what it was now and unfastened the bonds that held Anne Dayton there. He felt for a pulse.

"She's alive," he said. "Drugged probably, but seems unhurt."

He lifted her in his arms and began to move down the flagstone walk toward the sheriff's car. Blunt followed,

prodding the cuffed Fraulein Tessler before him. The woman walked as in a stupor; her lips trembled with passion and her eyes gleamed malevolently. They reached the car, got in, and the sheriff headed down the driveway.

"She's coming around," Harker said of the girl next to him in the rear seat. He had wrapped her in the car robe.

All the way back to Cologne, the woman in black sat in frozen silence which Blunt made no effort to break. By the light of the dash, Harker could see the sheriff's knuckles white where his hands gripped the wheel.

In Cologne, Blunt drove straight to the house of Dr. Fenley. Anne Dayton was fully conscious now but sobbing deep in her throat and obviously suffering from shock.

Harker carried her up the stairs and into the physician's spare bedroom where Fenley's wife took charge. Then briefly the judge told Fenley what had happened.

"We'll be back and see how she is," Harker said,

Blunt next drove to the Cologne jail which was a small narrow building that doubled as an office for the local electric company. Not until the cell door had closed on the still-silent Fraulein Tessler did the judge utter a sigh of relief.

"Thank heaven, that's over!" he said fervently.

Blunt shook his head. "I'm afraid the worst is yet to come," he said. "We're going back to the garden."

"The Brooks and Bentley girls?"

"Yes."

Once again they headed down the highway. Harker knew the reason now behind his temporary amnesia of the night before, knew why all had been a blank after he had entered the Tessler distillation room. Like Ann Dayton, he had been drugged. At the Tessler driveway, Blunt stopped the car, went around to the trunk and took out a flashlight and a small short-handled spade.

"This may not be very pleasant," he said. "Maybe you'd better wait here."

He turned and headed into the garden. Unmindful of his words, Harker followed.

Twenty yards beyond the granite sacrifice block, the sheriff's flash revealed two oblong mounds of freshly turned earth. Blunt took off his coat and began to wield the spade.

A quarter of an hour later, Harker wished he had taken Blunt's advice and stayed in the car.

The epilogue to the horror came three weeks later.

During that time, crowds of aroused Carver County citizens gathered outside the Chaska jail to which Fraulein Tessler had been transferred shortly after her arrest. As the crowd increased and its mood grew darker, there was talk of moving the woman to Minneapolis for security reasons as well as a possible change of venue. It was strangely ironic that fate stepped in before this could be done.

A public defender was appointed for Fraulein Tessler when she refused to engage an attorney. The defender let it be known that his defense would be total and complete insanity.

"What else," he was quoted as saying, "could induce a woman to commit such hideous crimes, double murder, simply to comply with an eighteenth-century superstition that the necessary ingredient to make a drug operative was the blood of young virgins?"

The woman continued to maintain silence save to ask that a bottle of "medicine" be brought to her from the distillation room of her house. The request was refused. Whereupon she broke into a rage, tearing her hair and screaming curses and maledictions at her jailors.

On September 20th, Judge Warren Harker was awakened by a telephone call from Sheriff Tom Blunt. It was one A.M.

Blunt said quietly, "Fraulein Tessler is dead!"

It took a moment for the significance of those words to filter into Harker's sleep-fogged brain.

"Well," he said at length, "perhaps it's just as well. It may not be the justice the people wanted, but it saves the county the expense of a trial. What took her off?"

Blunt did not reply for a long moment.

"You're not going to believe this," he said slowly. "I have the coroner's report here before me. He gives as the cause of death 'advanced senility'. In other words, old age."

Test Case

THE FOLLOWING EVENTS took place in Waconia, Minnesota, population 2445, on Highway 5 in northwestern Carver County. The two men involved were Edward Edmunds, who farmed 180 acres in the vicinity, and Dr. Joseph Cleary, his nearest neighbor, who didn't do much of anything at all.

Dr. Cleary lived in Carver House, a fourteen-room structure which had come to him as part of an estate. He was a sharp but controversial individual. He had earned his doctorate in parapsychology at Duke University but he had been dismissed from his post at nearby Carleton College because of his questionable activities off campus.

Edmunds, on the other hand, was an inarticulate, uninteresting man who blundered into the affair only because his farm happened to lie athwart the course of events.

On Tuesday, July 9th, a work truck of somewhat unusual design pulled into Edmunds' front yard. There were four men in it and the back was loaded with equipment.

"Do you own the property fronting the highway?" one of the men asked.

Edmunds said that he did.

"We'd like permission to put up a telephone booth there. We're putting up similar booths along the highway for emergency purposes. We'll pay you three hundred dollars yearly rent in advance."

Edmunds regarded the offer as any man in similar circumstances would. He could use the three hundred dollars. He agreed.

The truck turned about and returned to the highway. There the workmen proceeded to erect a booth with a folding door. The construction didn't take long, and when it was completed, Edmunds strolled down to look it over.

"Things are gettin' too damned technical," he said to himself. "What do they need a telephone way out here for?"

But he was not about to look a gift horse in the mouth. What struck him as odd, however, was that the booth appeared unstable. He got the impression that it wavered there in the morning sunlight.

A similar booth was erected on Highway 5 between Waconia and Victoria. When news of them reached the local phone office, the district manager was upset. He hadn't been briefed about any new developments or changes in the lines in the area, and he dispatched a testy letter, asking why, to the Northwestern Bell central office in Minneapolis.

Meanwhile, a work crew of "gandy dancers" began to renovate the old spur of the M.N. and S. railroad two miles north of town. This spur hadn't been used in ten years. It bypassed Waconia, leading trains around to Cologne and Norwood.

At four o'clock that afternoon, all approaches to Waconia on both Number 5 and 4 as well as County Road 10 were torn up by construction crews and detour signs erected. This left only 284 open as passage into town, and work was begun on this road too. A notice was posted on the Waconia bus depot that temporarily all bus activity was suspended.

It had always seemed strange to Edward Edmunds that his neighbor would want to live alone in a house as

large as Carver House. But then, Joseph Cleary was an odd man. When Edmunds drove into the long winding driveway that fronted the estate that afternoon, he found Cleary doing all he ever seemed to do, sitting on his spacious veranda, reading.

Edmunds did not come to the subject at once. As a frequent visitor, he idly discussed weather and crops. Eventually, however, he told of the phone booth which had been erected on his property. Cleary was only politely interested. Likewise, news that the railroad was reconditioning its spur failed to arouse the ex-professor from his lethargy.

But when Edmunds added that the roads into Waconia had been closed and when he casually mentioned trouble with the radio and TV reception in the area, a gleam entered Cleary's eyes.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

Edmunds replied that he had seen and heard of these incidents first hand.

"Well, well . . . " said Cleary.

Anxious for a diversion, Edmunds suggested they drive the three miles back to his farm and see the booth, to which Cleary, after a moment's thought, consented. Arriving at the place off the highway shoulder next to the driveway, the professor approached the booth as a man who had never seen such an object before. He opened the door and picked up the phone.

"You have to put in a dime," Edmunds said unnecessarily.

Cleary made no move to insert a coin. Instead, he examined the walls and even looked at the baseboard near the floor. When he finally placed the phone to his ear, he did something to a small elliptical stud that was all but concealed in a far corner. He stood there a long time, apparently listening. Then he replaced the phone and the gleam in his eyes grew to a perceptible glitter.

"Do me a favor, will you, Edmunds?" he said. "Don't talk about this for a few days."

"Why not?"

"Let's just say that if you do, someone may want to charge you a tax or something and you may be out some of the money they paid you."

"Can they do that?"

"They can do anything," Cleary said. But he wasn't referring to the phone company.

As has been said, Dr. Cleary was a scholarly man. But he also had a background which might be described as "on this side of the law." That is to say, he had, on numerous occasions in the past, engaged in activities which, if not illegal, were very close to being so. He had among his acquaintances a number of persons whose dossiers were familiar to the police. And he was known to have little compunction about lending his intellectual abilities to any enterprise at all where financial returns were assured.

He walked down the road that night to Coleman's Corners where he managed to flag down a Gaylord bus and rode it the thirty-odd miles to Minneapolis. In the city, in the Nicollet-Grand area, he entered a disreputable apartment building and a little while later sat at a table around which were six other men. The one in authority was called Grafton.

For a long time, conversation passed back and forth across the table. But at length, Cleary said, "It is agreed then. You are to be ready in case I call you. But remember my information is vague and indefinite. I shall need time for substantiation."

That was Tuesday. Wednesday afternoon the town of Waconia was considerably annoyed that it could receive no television or radio broadcasts at all, and complaints were made to the Minneapolis stations.

Thursday morning a strange car entered Waconia from the west. How it bypassed the detour was not known. The car looked, as one citizen put it, like a 1995 model. It was apparently constructed of a new kind of metal, for when it turned a corner, the entire vehicle seemed to bend as if made of elastic.

This car went down Main Street and drew up before Selim's Department Store. From it stepped four men, garbed in a kind of blue coveralls, who took from the car a large dolly and set upon it three rectangular boxes-on-stilts. The Selim manager's comment: ". . . like they're setting up television cameras of the year 2000 to relay everything that goes on here."

But let us return to Dr. Cleary. As a student of parapsychology, he had done considerable work in telepathy, or more accurately, the transmission, reception and interpretation of separated thought. He had conducted numerous experiments in which operatives of different linguistic backgrounds had received and understood ratiocination over a wide distance. And he had perfected in his own right the Lewellyn trials of inverted telesthesia.

Back in Waconia, he hired a taxi and had himself driven out again to the phone booth on Edmunds' property. While a puzzled cab driver waited, he entered the booth a second time, found the concealed stud, touched it and "listened."

Immediately he found himself arranging his mental processes to accommodate a series of thoughts that entered his mind—alien thoughts which in some singular way he was able to understand:

> *ON-LOCATION PLATOON FIVE. CONDITIONS AS PREDICTED. ANTICIPATE NO DIFFICULTY. RESULTS FORTHCOMING. THIS IS A REPEAT OF AN EARLIER REPORT.*

The thought stopped. Dr. Cleary remained there a long time, face wreathed in awe. His first guess had been correct then. The enormity of it staggered him.

"Why here?" he found himself saying. "In heaven's name, why here?"

Back in his home, Cleary used his house phone to call Grafton back in Minneapolis. He had some difficulty getting through. When the connection was finally made, his message was short:

"Tomorrow night. Seven o'clock. Don't let the construction on the roads stop you."

Then, not wishing to call a taxi again, he walked the four miles back to Waconia. He went directly to the Farmer's and Merchant's Bank at the corner of Main and Water Streets and pushed through the glass doors. He said to the woman behind the grille, "I'd like to open a savings account, please."

While he waited for his passbook, he placed what looked like a cigarette lighter on the counter next to the grille. It was not a cigarette lighter, however, but a miniature camera with an elatoral lens. He took pictures of the massive vault door which yawned open. It was, he saw, a Simpson, Model XIV double tumbler, 14 or 15 pinion key, semi-time lock, Circa 1950. He also noted the only visible preventative, an electric eye, low down near the floor opposite the teller's cage.

Going out, he took pictures of the space between the counter and the entrance. Outside, he paced the distance to the curb, counting, and looked up the street, measuring the distance to the corner with his eye. He noted with satisfaction that a store directly opposite was vacant and boarded up.

He walked to the opposite corner. The street here led directly to the highway, where it converged on the town. Careful to be unobserved, he stooped and fastened to the curb with a small suction cup a small cone in such a way that its lens angled up over the street. This was a *stroblul* and would effectually cripple the ignition system of any car passing through its field. He set the timer for 9:25.

Still he was not satisfied. He followed the street to where it met with the pavement and placed a second *stroblul* on the trunk of a tree.

An hour later, when he returned to Carver House, he was visibly annoyed to find Edward Edmunds waiting for him on the veranda. The farmer had helped himself to a cigar from the table humidor.

"Did you want something?" Cleary asked.

Edmunds nodded. "There's been something wrong over at my place," he said. "Been noticin' it all day. And this afternoon it's gettin' worse."

"What do you mean, something wrong?"

Edmunds searched for words. "Well, it's hard to describe. There seems to be a shadow going back and forth."

"You mean like something between you and the light?"

"No," Edmunds replied, "it isn't that kind of a shadow. But you can feel it. It's as though something were blocking your thoughts, if you know what I mean."

"I'm not sure I do," Cleary said. "Maybe you should see a psychiatrist."

"I don't need a psychiatrist," Edmunds said. " I tell you, it's a shadow. When I'm in the house, it passes over me, just as if something moved across the roof."

Cleary did not offer any other suggestions, and after helping himself to another cigar, Edmunds left.

At three o'clock that afternoon, the citizens of Waconia came to the dismaying realization that they were as isolated from the rest of the world as if surrounded by a midwestern Gobi. There was no radio, no telephone, no bus or railroad, no incoming or outgoing cars. The town was an island completely cut off.

In previous years, other Minnesota towns, as a result of flood waters, had found themselves similarly detached. Then the forces of relief had been swiftly marshalled. But the isolation of Waconia was different. It had been effected gradually, slowly, with subtle care and the outside world this time was curiously indifferent.

Sheriff Ben Isaacs, visiting Waconia from his office in Chaska, was one of those the road construction had left stranded. He was fuming at the complete lack of foresight.

"The highway department is going to hear about this," he stormed. "I never heard of such idiotic planning in my life."

The sheriff was also concerned about a large 10-by-12-foot screen of polished metal which was being erected at the corner of Main and Oak.

"Who gave you permission to put that thing on a town street?" he demanded. "What the devil is it?"

"It's a magnetic dust screen," one of the blue-coveralled workmen said. "We're going to test the pollution in this area."

Isaacs was all for pollution control. He couldn't help noticing, however, that the workmen had strangely elongated ears.

"Looks like a damned wolf," the sheriff muttered. "This country should enforce its immigration laws. There's too many foreigners here."

That evening Dr. Cleary walked out on County Road 10 to where the construction work had ended and the detour sign was posted. A little before seven a black sedan drove up. From it stepped a woman.

She was a tall, well-stacked blond with wavy hair and a very short skirt. She said:

"My name is Arlotta. Arlotta Dale. Your man, Grafton, won't be able to come. He asked me to take his place."

Cleary looked at her suspiciously. The idea that Grafton had delegated his leadership to a woman was hard to swallow.

"Oh, I can prove my identity," the woman said with a smile. "Here's a letter Graf gave me. He said you'd know his signature." She handed him an envelope.

Even as Cleary read the note, a second car drove up. The five Minneapolis men were in it. Cleary approached the driver's window.

"See if you can pull around that trench. If you can, I'll direct you to my place."

The driver scowled. "Who is this dame? Graf didn't say nothing about no broad."

"She's to take his place. If we need verification, we can get it later."

With much difficulty, the car skirted the trench and maneuvered around parked bulldozers and trucks. At Carver House, Dr. Cleary led the way into his library, motioned the five men to chairs and turned again to the girl.

"What happened to Graf?"

"He had an accident."

"And he told you everything about us?"

"He didn't have much to tell. Only that you had some caper planned, that there weren't any risks, and that we split down the line."

Cleary nodded, satisfied. He turned to the five men.

"Now you may find it hard to believe what I am going to tell you. You may think I'm crazy. But I assure you I am quite sane, and every detail is fact. I want you to listen closely while I explain. . . ."

Cleary talked thirty minutes. He was right. His narrative was not only hard to believe, it was preposterous. Not only preposterous, but it would have strained the credulity of persons science-oriented, or whose thinking was *avant-garde.*

He spoke of a psychological survey now under way by representatives from a planet of a sixth-magnitude star, sixteen light-years away. He said that a very small cross section of Earth had been selected for this survey, and its purpose was to analyze and test how life here would react if isolated from all social mores. He told of the desire of these representatives of this alien planet to verify the tendency of Earth life to panic when faced with the realization that all associations with others and all its background were suddenly severed. He stated that conditions leading to such severance were about to be produced.

When he finished, only Arlotta Dale seemed to have understood his words.

"As for the meaning behind this survey," Cleary continues, "that's too big a concept for me. It may presage alien visitation. It may mean anything. Frankly, I don't give a damn. My only concern is that Waconia has been selected and prepared for it. It is that preparation we are going to take advantage of."

He moved to the table and spread upon it blow-ups of the photographs he had taken that afternoon. He also unrolled a large chart with the towns's streets, clearly marked with relation to the bank. "Now," he said, "we will proceed thus. . . ."

Dr. Cleary had no way of knowing it, of course, but even as he spoke, Edward Edmunds was likewise planning a course of action.

Edmunds was no reader, but as a man who farmed for a living, he was acquainted with Janson's system of sarcastic obliminal clouds. He knew that such clouds, unaffected by air currents, frequently lingered over one area and were considered dangerous to crops and man. He was convinced that his "shadow" was the result of such clouds. And he remembered that, according to Janson, they could be dispersed by an electric charge bombarded through a simple antical matrix. Thirty years before, Edmunds had served a brief hitch as a linesman. The presence of the Northern States Power lines which crossed his property decided him. He went into the house, put on rubber gloves and boots. He made his way to the nearest tower and with the agility of a younger man, climbed up and proceeded to tap the lines. He had no compunction about what he was doing. He had been paying what he regarded as exorbitant rates, and the loss of a little power wasn't going to hurt the electric company.

And so Edmunds, proceeding blindly, stood in his yard and, when he felt that shadow over him, sent his charge into the heavens.

Results were startling. A flash of white light shot through the driven cloud. There was a roar of rending metal. And then a ragged sheet of something black catapulted out of the sky and buried itself with a cloud of dust into Edmunds' back forty.

Now in Waconia, the impact of the town's detachment made itself felt. In the Paradise Tavern on Water Street, in Handel's garage, in stores and homes the rumors began.

Some catastrophe had taken place in nearby Minneapolis. A conspiracy like Watergate was keeping the country from being informed.

Groups gathered on street corners, in front of the First Methodist Church. What was nerve wracking was that the town's isolation was not partial, it was complete. The radio and TV silence interrupted a pattern of

life, the failure of the telephones left a gap impossible to bridge. True, the Duncan brothers rode their motorcycles as far as Excelsior, the blocked roads not stopping their two-wheeled vehicles, and had found everything the same as usual. But they were not believed. Car after car left town but unable to pass the construction barriers, returned with its passengers stunned with frustration.

The rumors grew. An atomic storage dump had blown up near Chicago. The government had closed down all communication to prevent panic.

Townspeople, faced with no available hospitalization, developed sudden symptoms and besieged Doc Bentle's office on Main Street, demanding medical attention. The Widow Lamont packed a haversack and departed with her three children for "somewhere where the wrath of the Lord will not be upon us."

The rumors multiplied. The country had been invaded and the foreign army was already in Illinois and advancing westward.

A delegation of citizens marched on the depot. But station agent Watson could only repeat what he had said before. The 6:37 had bypassed Waconia and gone instead to Norwood via Cologne. All his efforts to get an explanation for this had failed. The train wire to the dispatcher was dead. Only the station wire to Victoria remained open.

The rumors continued. A Tidal wave had struck the East Coast, submerging Washington. Bacteriological warfare plague had been introduced and was sweeping the country.

Darkness closed in on the town in a tense, sleepless night.

But at nine A.M., five men and a girl drove into Waconia and parked their car on Water Street directly in front of the Farmer's and Merchant's Bank. Arlotta Dale got out and moved to the corner where she took up a position by the metallic screen. Dr. James Cleary, who for obvious reasons had entered the town on foot, also

approached the bank but moved unobtrusively into the vacant store front on the opposite side of the street.

The courthouse clock pointed to nine-five when the metallic screen began to glow with a soft radiance. The five men got out of their car and walked leisurely up the bank steps. A cone of white light began to form before the screen.

At twelve minutes past nine, Cleary looked both ways up and down the thoroughfare. The sidewalks were filled with restless, alarmed citizens. But as he had predicted, their concern was for other matters and no one paid attention to him or his companions.

Cleary raised his hand in a signal.

The five men entered the bank.

Exactly what happened after that is not certain. A medley of conflicting reports have come down to us, and since there were apparently no certain observers whose viewpoints can be recorded, we must rely on hearsay. Several facts, however, are known. The men were in the bank approximately twelve minutes. They reappeared in the bank entrance, carrying heavy sacks, and sprinted for their car at the curb.

It is here that the narrative becomes confusing. It is said the men suddenly froze and made no move to enter the car. Instead, they turned slowly and with measured steps, like automatons, began to pace toward the corner and the metallic screen. They entered the cone of light before the screen and vanished from sight.

Arlotta Dale stood there and smiled.

Simultaneously a group of coveralled strangers—there were nineteen of them—separated from other Waconia citizens and came up Water Street, single file, at a fast trot.

They too entered the cone of light about the screen and disappeared.

Dr. Cleary was standing thunderstruck across from the bank. But even as he turned, Arlotta Dale crossed to his side, linked her arm in his and guided him into the light of the screen.

"All accounted for," she said. "Take it away."

For the epilogue of this story, we must turn again to Edward Edmunds, since he is the only one left who had any connection with the preceding events. Edmunds stated that he entered the phone booth on his property, found and pressed the stud which Dr. Joseph Cleary activated and "heard" the following message:

> *DAMAGE TO HOVER CUTTER NECESSITATES DEPARTURE. LIMITED SURVEY INDICATED THIS PLANET UNREADY TO JOIN COALITION. WILL RECOMMEND BYPASSING.*
>
> *SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS OPERATIVE DALE: ARRANGE TRANSFER OF RECALCITRANT ALIENS TO OUR SHIP FOR HOMEWARD VOYAGE AND FURTHER PSYCHIC STUDY.*

Edmunds said that after receiving this message, he left the phone booth, which thereupon simply faded away.

Josephine Gage

THE PRIMARY CHARACTERISTIC of Adam Spotswood, as any examining psychologist would have told you, was one of kindliness. Almost to a fetish, he practiced the golden rule, going out of his way to aid others. It is true he had been known to fly into a rage on one occasion when his efforts to aid an unfortunate had been thwarted, but for the most part he went through life giving the best and receiving the worst of things.

Spotswood lived in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, and liked it. He particularly enjoyed his work as editor of the Port-of-Spain *Journal.* The newspaper kept him in touch with the local gossip of the colony and offered him an accepted place in the Carib Club.

It was in June that Spotswood's wife decided on a trip back to England. She was to be gone three months, but the day after she had left, the editor began to cast about for a suitable gift for her on her return. He thought of a number of things, only to discard each of them as unsatisfactory. The problem was solved for him quite unexpectedly when Mr. Maltig, the land agent, entered the *Journal* office and stated that he wanted to place a "property-for-sale" advertisement.

Spotswood glanced at the paper which Maltig handed him and looked up quickly. "Is the Bailey villa for sale? I hadn't heard about it."

Maltig smiled. He was a gross man with deep-set eyes who looked upon Spotswood's kindliness as a simple lack of sound business acumen. "No one knew about it until today," he said. "Judge Bailey has been transferred to the Jamaica court in Kingston. He leaves next week."

"It's a grand house," Spotswood said slowly.

Maltig agreed. "At five thousand pounds it'll sell too. A couple of years ago, of course, I couldn't have given it away. That was when the Gage story was going the rounds."

Spotswood nodded, vaguely remembering the Gage story. Ellen Gage had been the wife of one of the richest planters on Trinidad. Accused of an indiscretion by scandal-mongers, she had taken her own life by hanging herself in her boudoir. The act had affected the mind of her husband who had constantly told stories of her ghostly reappearance, some of which had been believed by the superstitious Negro house servants. But since the Baileys had had the house, its unpleasant background had become only a memory.

Spotswood spent a moment considering the place: a large, rambling white-plaster villa with a red tile roof set in a grove of cabbage palms and breadfruit trees just off the fashionable St. Clair district. It would be the ideal gift for his wife. On impulse he turned to Maltig.

"If you will arrange the papers," he said, in a voice that trembled slightly, "I will have a check for you this afternoon."

Next morning Spotswood drove out to survey his new possession. He had not realized the structure was as large or as imposing, and he faced with some dismay the prospect of maintaining so splendid an estate. However, the thing was done; he had spent the greater part of his savings, and there was no turning back now. He thanked Judge Bailey for showing him the house and went out alone to inspect the garden.

The garden was divided by a winding gravel walk. In the center of that portion on the right was a large Spanish-style fountain with six terra cotta nymphs poised on

the brim. Erosion had disfigured the faces of the images, and to the editor they seemed slightly satanic against the heavy green background. On the left side of the walk was a flat stone platform whose use puzzled him somewhat. Five feet in length by three feet wide, it stood some six inches above the ground, which for a distance of several yards was void of anything save close-cropped sward. Spotswood eyed it for several moments, then continued his walk.

But at the extreme end of the garden he halted again. Before him, lying on one end in a tangle of shrubbery, was a large block of rough-hewn granite. Carved upon its surface were the words:

ELLEN J. GAGE
1907–1942

Understanding and anger struck Spotswood simultaneously. The monument apparently had been removed from its platform back in the center of the garden. And Ellen Gage's grave must be there beside that platform.

"What a rotten lack of respect," Spotswood muttered. He turned and strode back to his car.

He moved into the villa two weeks later, and after a day or so of adjusting himself to his new surroundings, one of his first acts was to have workmen move the discarded monument back to its original resting place. Mr. Maltig, who had stopped by to deliver the abstract, viewed this move with some misgivings.

"I can't understand why you want that gravestone in the middle of everything," Maltig said. "Seeing that thing every day would give me the willies."

Spotswood puffed his pipe quietly. "That woman's grave is out there. Who are we to defile her last resting place?"

But Maltig was not impressed. "I remember her. She was a vixen, a beautiful but savage hellcat. By the by," he added, "you haven't seen her apparition or anything like that, have you?"

Spotswood smiled and admitted that he had not. Mr. Maltig smiled too, made some remark about the queer tosh the Trinidad blacks spread about and left a short time later.

That was the thirtieth of June. Spotswood had reason to remember the date, for the next morning, the first of July, he received that astounding letter from his banker. The letter read:

> Sir: I have to inform you that under date of June 30th, there has been deposited to your account the sum of five thousand pounds. The depositor was Josephine Gage of 25 Lessiter Street, this city.
>
> Very truly yours,
> Arthur W. Diepon, Pres.

Spotswood read this letter three times before he understood it. Then he laid the sheet on the table, took off his glasses and began to polish them absently. Who the devil was Josephine Gage and why should she add money to his decimated bank balance? There must be a mistake somewhere.

He took up his panama and the sheaf of galley proofs for the next issue of the *Journal* and drove into town. He parked before the Planters' Bank, entered and asked to see Mr. Diepon. Presently he was ushered into a large office in the rear; behind a large flat-topped desk sat a distinguished-looking gray-haired man.

"Hullo, Spotswood," Diepon greeted. "I rather thought that letter would fetch you."

"What's this all about?" Spotswood demanded. "Is it your policy to accept money for your depositors from strangers?"

"Strangers?" Diepon's brows arched slightly. "Do you mean to say you're not acquainted with Miss Gage?"

"I never even heard of her," Spotswood said, and asked again, "Do you usually add to a depositor's balance without checking the source?"

Diepon looked uncomfortable. "Under ordinary circumstances, no," he said. "But this woman professed to

be an old friend of yours. She said she was acting by a previous arrangement with you."

Spotswood rattled his silver pencil against his teeth. "What sort of woman was she?" he asked after a moment's silence.

For answer Diepon clicked over the switch of a panel on his desk and spoke into it:

"Have Mr. Allen step in here, please."

A moment later the door opened, and a young, alert-looking clerk entered the room. In a few brief words Diepon explained the situation. "Tell Mr. Spotswood everything you remember," he instructed.

The clerk thought a moment. "The woman came to my window just before closing time," he began. "I remember her very well because she was . . . well . . . quite good-looking. She asked if it were possible to deposit money to another person's account, and I told her it wasn't customary. Then she said it was for the account of Mr. Adam Spotswood and that the matter concerned a recent transaction for a house and monument and that you"—he nodded to the editor—"were a personal friend of hers and knew all about it. Mr. Spotswood had drawn out a large sum only the week before, and I assumed this was a replacement of some sort. I'm sorry, sir, if I did anything wrong."

Spotswood was bewildered. "'. . . a transaction for a house and monument . . .' " he repeated slowly. "Are you certain she said 'monument'?"

The clerk nodded. "Those were her very words, sir."

"Did you notice anything . . . anything strange about her?" Spotswood persisted.

"Strange?" The clerk looked doubtful. "Only that she had her jacket buttoned up to the throat and looked cold in spite of the blinding heat. And, oh yes, one thing more. She left an envelope on the sill when she left. I didn't notice it until she had gone out the door, and I ran after her. But she had disappeared, though I didn't see a single cab on the street."

Spotswood continued to the office of the *Journal* in deep thought. At the door he met the Portuguese lad who served as his lone reporter just as the latter was

leaving for the day's roundup of news. On impulse the editor stopped him.

"Take a run over to 25 Lessiter Street," he said, "and look up a woman named Josephine Gage. Find out who she is, what she does."

In his little office Spotswood read copy for half an hour, but his attention wandered, and he found himself thinking of the queer happenings at the bank. At length he turned to the back files of the *Journal* and began to search for the story of the Ellen Gage suicide. Oddly, he never doubted for a moment but that there was a relationship between the dead woman and the Josephine Gage who was his unknown financial benefactor. The suicide had occurred a year before his coming to Port-of-Spain.

He found it at last. There was no picture, but there was a rather mawkish account of the affair in three running issues in the flowery style of his predecessor. The story told him nothing he did not already know until he reached the final paragraph of the last column.

> Mr. Gage, who always called his wife by her middle name, Josephine, revealed today that he as well as his wife had been a student of the occult for some years and that since her death he had seen and spoken to her several times.
>
> "She told me she would come back," he stated, and added cryptically, "and she had good reason to, though conditions were not good at this time."

That night after his solitary dinner Spotswood went out on his balcony and gazed down at the monument in the center of his garden. He was oppressed by the vague realization that he was on the outer edge of a whirlpool of coalescing events. His Portuguese reporter had returned late in the afternoon to state that he had found no trace of Josephine Gage and that, furthermore, 25 Lessiter Street was not a residence, but was on the outskirts of town and was in the center of the Port-of-Spain cemetery.

As he stood looking into the shadows cast by the cabbage palms, Spotswood started suddenly. For an instant he thought he had seen a tall feminine figure, clad in a simple short-skirted suit and with black hair exposed to the night breeze, moving slowly down the walk toward the stone bench near the fountain. But the figure seemed to dissolve in the gloom, and he took it for a fancy of his eyes.

Back in the house, he strolled thoughtfully into the library and sat down in a fan-back chair. When he had acquired this villa from the Baileys he had done so with all furnishings included, even the bric-a-brac, and now he ran his eye over the mantelpiece at the figurines, miniature candelabrum and ormolu clock which up until now he had not bothered to disturb.

The candelabrum was of white porcelain and somehow did not look appropriate with the other surroundings. Spotswood got up, took it down and looked for something to put in its place. His gaze went to a settee cabinet under the bay window, and moving across to it, he opened the cover with some difficulty. He saw a jumble of articles piled in wild disorder and realized immediately that they were the property of the owner of the villa before the Baileys had taken it over.

There was a box of eggshell writing stationery with the name *Ellen Josephine Gage* embossed on each sheet. There was an odd-shaped dagger with a twisted blade something like a Malay *kris* and with a handle fashioned of yellowed ivory. There were also a dozen or more books, all of which had to do with the same subject: the occult. Spotswood noted with interest that they were not the usual mumbo-jumbo treatises of superstition but psycho-scientific symposiums by authoritative men of letters. At the bottom of the cabinet lay a large photograph in a heavy gold frame. The picture was of a dark-haired young woman who, while not handsome by the usual standards, seemed strangely attractive to the editor. There was a peculiar glint in the girl's eyes that baffled him and at the same time attracted him, and in the end he carried the picture across the room and

placed it on the mantel where the candelabrum had been.

Next day was trackday, and Spotswood left the *Journal* office at one o'clock, driving down Great Queen Street to the Savannah, the open park where the races were run. He intended to get the results of the first three or four races, then hurry back to write the story for his weekly edition which went to press late that afternoon.

There was a good field of horses, and he thought he would do a little betting while he was there. A few moments before the first event he sighted banker Diepon in the crowd, and strolling up to him, told him his intentions.

"I've got a horse of my own running today," Diepon said, "a little filly I call Picture-Girl. She hasn't a chance, of course, but it'll give her the training she needs. Come along to her stall, and I'll show her to you."

They took a shortcut under the grandstand. It was quite dark there, with the rumble of the impatient crowd overhead. As he paced along at Diepon's side, Spotswood was suddenly aware that hurried footsteps were following them.

He turned as what seemed the figure of a woman came abreast of him in the half darkness. The woman brought her face close to the editor's and whispered almost inaudibly over the roar of the crowd,

"One kindness deserves another. Bet everything on Picture-Girl. Do you understand, everything."

Then she was gone, running rapidly back down the cinder path under the grandstand. Spotswood stood stock still, waiting for her figure silhouetted against the sunlit entrance. But no silhouette came. There was a brief blur as if a shadow had passed through the doorway, but that was all.

"What are you stopping for?" Diepon asked.

"That woman . . ." said Spotswood. "She . . . spoke to me. Who was she . . . ?"

The banker looked at him queerly. "You must be dreaming," he said. "There's no one here but the two of us."

Adam Spotswood rarely acted on impulse, but he did that day. He wrote a check for a thousand pounds and placed the entire amount on the filly, Picture-Girl. After that he took his place in the grandstand and proceeded to wait. When Picture-Girl was led out, he noticed idly the woman who paced along at the jockey's side, one arm on the horse's neck as if to reassure the animal. Spotswood started violently.

It was the woman he had seen twice before, once in the garden, and once—he was sure of it now—in the photograph that rested on his mantel. He leaped to his feet and ran down the aisle. But when he reached the gate leading into the track, a guard stopped him. And when he looked again, the woman was gone.

The events that followed were a dream for Spotswood. The filly Picture-Girl won with ease, coming in far ahead of her nearest rival. Spotswood collected his winnings and headed for the *Journal* office. There, he paced back and forth before his desk restlessly. Abruptly a thought struck him, and he took down a dusty reference book entitled *Trinidad—Confidential Colonial Survey.* Opening its pages, he presently found what he was looking for:

> *Gage, Ellen Josephine*: wife of Jerome W. Gage, 1907–1942. Born: Prague. Attended Blueker Madchenschule, Vienna. Tutored by Professor Hans Aingel. Married in London 1932; moved to Port-of-Spain a year later. Member: Trinidad Country Club, Carib Turf Club. She was an active spiritist and interested in all forms of psychic phenomena and was well known for her seances which for a time were attended by the elite of Port-of-Spain. Arrested: July 1939 for alleged beating to death of Negro house-servant. Charges dropped for lack of evidence. Arrested: June 1941 in connection with death by poisoning of itinerant laundress Quadroon. Testimony at-

tempted to show defendant had administered fatal *obeah* potion. Case dismissed for lack of evidence.

That evening as Spotswood drove home he had the unpleasant feeling that someone was sitting next to him in the car, and again at his solitary dinner that an invisible person faced him across the table. But Spotswood was primarily a down-to-earth person; he told himself the manifestations he had witnessed and the queer chain of events must of a necessity stem from coincidence and his own overactive imagination. Nevertheless when the telephone in the library rang a half hour later, the editor started violently at the sound of the bell.

"Hullo," he said. "This is Adam Spotswood, yes. Who . . . ?"

The connection was a bad one, and the voice at the other end seemed far away and indistinct, but it was definitely a woman's voice, a soft throaty contralto.

"You are a kind man, Mr. Spotswood," the voice said. "You have showed your kindliness by two acts: first, the monument, and again the picture. . . . In return I have tried to help you . . . now you must help me . . . I want you to invite a number of persons to your house tomorrow evening . . . listen carefully to the guests you will call . . . Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Leeds . . . Mr. and Mrs. Geoffrey Hale . . . Mr. Hudson Maltig . . . Miss Geraldine Carr . . . each of them must be at your house without fail. . . ."

The voice died off, and the editor sat staring at the instrument. A trick, of course. Someone with a perverted sense of humor was pulling his leg. But on the other hand who would know . . . ?

Not once, but several times at the *Journal* office next day Spotswood glanced at the list of guest name he had scribbled in his notebook. Had he simply imagined that telephone message, his subconscious mind supplying names of his own acquaintances as he listened over a dead wire? But no, in contradiction one set of names focused in his gaze: the Leeds. He knew the Leeds, of course, but by name only; neither of them came in to his

circle of daily contacts, and he would have no reason to list them with the others.

At two o'clock Spotswood visited his place of relaxation, the Carib Club. At three he was a member of a foursome that played nine holes of golf at the Trinidad Country Club. And from five to five-thirty he stopped at no less than four pubs on Frederick Street. The facts he gathered on these calls all added up to the same information: Each of the guests he was to invite was in plain words a gossip-monger. Each of them spent his spare time circulating rumors and scandal which in devious ways had reached his ears. And each of them had been particularly active in broadcasting the unpleasant details of the Josephine Gage affair.

In other words, as Adam Spotswood thoughtfully told himself, each would be a potential enemy of the Gage woman, were she alive today.

He left the office with the firm intention of forgetting the matter. But the seed had been planted; the more he thought about it, the more he wanted to prove to himself that the whole thing was a flight of fancy.

He called the six persons and offered his invitations for the evening. In the case of the Leeds some surprise was manifest, but one way or another all agreed to come. At home Spotswood set about to make preparations for the entertainment, and just at dusk he sent his houseboy into the garden to cut some flowers for the table. He noted a reluctance on the part of the Negro to go into the grounds, but thought nothing of it until ten minutes later when the black came rushing back into the house, eyes wide, lips quivering with fear.

"What's wrong?" Spotswood demanded.

The houseboy leaned against the wall for support. "Dere's a spirit-woman out dere by dat gravestone, sar," he said tremulously.

Spotswood swore. But he went out on the balcony to see for himself. The garden was a place of shadows in the early evening dusk. The faintly cloying smell of night blossoms drifted up to him. Spotswood stared down at the monument, and for a moment he thought

he saw a flash of white; but it was gone as quickly as it had come, and he returned to the library.

Taking everything into consideration, the evening went along smoothly enough. Leeds proved to be a florid-faced pompous man, his wife a lantern-jawed woman with gimlet eyes. Spotswood set them at a table under the huge crystal chandelier, playing *Michigan*. As the hours ticked by, however, he found himself submitting to a growing feeling of unease. The feeling increased as the guests without compunction passed the latest gossip of the colony back and forth across the table. At eleven o'clock Mr. Maltig said,

"You haven't seen any apparition of that Gage woman, have you? She ought to be an interesting ghost."

Spotswood felt a tenseness strike the air about him as if he were suddenly drawn into the field of a magnet.

"Quite a woman," Maltig continued. "She knew how to keep her boy friends as well as her husband."

When it came, Spotswood was just moving across to the punch bowl on the buffet: a light, rasping sound like two pieces of metal grinding against each other. The editor glanced up, and a wave of horror swept over him. The suspending chain which held the crystal chandelier above the table had parted, and the bottom length was sliding toward the open end of the link.

Spotswood leaped for the chairs of Mr. and Mrs. Leeds, gave them a mighty yank backwards. Utilizing all his strength, he seized the table and, using his knee as a fulcrum, overturned it with a crash, shoved the upended top surface forward as a protecting shield for Mr. and Mrs. Hale. Then he shouted to Geraldine Carr: "Get back! The chandelier!"

Maltig was the last to leave his chair; he moved his massive bulk clumsily, bewilderment gaping in his moon face. Even as he stumbled backward, there was a glittering streak, a flash of light and a resounding splintering crash. The chandelier struck the overturned table and slithered to the floor. Shards of glass littered the

carpet and a film of dust rose slowly like a little spiral of smoke.

After his guests had left, Spotswood moved about in a kind of numb mechanical fashion, tidying up the room, aiding his houseboy with broom and dust pan in cleaning up the debris, and locking the doors and windows for the night. He smoked a cigar deliberately and slowly before going to bed, but even the usual restful effect of tobacco failed to clarify his thoughts or soothe his troubled nerves. It would have been a pardonable excitement even had the accident not come so near to resulting in tragedy, but Spotswood *knew* that it could not have been an accident. Only a few days before, in going over the house for possible remodeling, he had examined and tested that chain, doubtful of the great weight it supported. He had found it in perfect condition then.

He could not sleep. He got out of bed and went down to the kitchen and brewed himself a cup of tea. It was while he was sipping the drink that he heard the telephone in the library ring again. He went in to the instrument and answered it.

Far away, as if vast leagues of space separated him, he heard a feminine voice talking as if unaware she had a listener.

"Hello," he said. "Who's there?"

The voice checked, and for an instant there was dead silence over the wire; then it began again, so low that it was barely audible.

"You have tricked me," it said, and repeated the words a second time.

"What do you mean?" the editor demanded, conscious of a little chill rising up his spine.

"But I do not forget that you have been kind . . . and I will give you one more chance . . . one more chance . . . then if you fail I will direct my activities against you. Tomorrow you will go to Mr. Hudson Maltig . . . the unspeakable Maltig . . . you will take that knife which lies in the window cabinet . . . and you will see that

blood is drawn on his right arm just above the wrist . . . do you understand . . . blood must be drawn with that knife . . . I will do the rest . . . but do not fail me . . . this time your life depends on it. . . ."

The voice died off, and Spotswood hung up the receiver slowly. He turned, walked across the room to the window cabinet and opened its cover. Then once again he held that knife in his hands, studying it carefully. He saw now what he had not noticed before, that there were faint spidery lines engraved upon the ivory handle and that those lines formed a picture of some kind. It seemed to be the likeness of a young goat tethered to a tree and a human figure bent over it in the act of plunging a knife into the animal's vitals. Spotswood was sufficiently familiar with West Indian superstition to know that the scene depicted the *obeah* death sacrifice, a rite imported from the Niger River country of West Africa. An *obeah* sacrifice knife . . . !

He turned abruptly, carried the knife to the wall safe on the far side of the room. He spun the combination, opened the door and the inner panel and slammed the knife in as far as it would go. He locked the safe and went back to bed.

Spotswood was to remember the next day as long as he lived. Driving down Great Queen Street, he had the impression that an alien power held the steering wheel and that another unseen foot trod the accelerator. At Marine Square that wheel suddenly twisted out of his hands, and the machine leaped forward like a juggernaut straight toward an approaching truck that tried vainly to maneuver out of his path. They struck with a snapping impact, but Spotswood was thrown clear of his car to the pavement.

Afterward the editor thought he saw a familiar feminine face peering malevolently out at him from the gathering crowd. He arranged to have the wrecked car towed to a garage and continued his way on foot, still shaking from the experience. As he turned toward the entrance of the *Journal* office, a man stepped in front of

him, carrying a heavy ladder. The man pivoted suddenly to avoid another passerby, and his ladder crashed against the window-pane fronting the newspaper office. A six-foot sheet of thick glass wobbled an instant, then fell to the sidewalk. By only a matter of inches did it miss Spotswood.

Those were the major events. There were other minor incidents that plagued his life that day. He found a poisonous-looking beetle in his drinking water. At two P.M. he noticed a strong acrid smell in the composing room and, a lighted cigar between his lips, stepped through the connecting door to investigate. The explosion bludgeoned him against the wall and ripped a large chunk of plaster from the ceiling. The shop man muttered something about "anyone who smokes in front of a broken gas jet is an out-and-out fool."

Finally the clock pointed to five, and Spotswood headed thoughtfully toward home. The feeling of impending evil was a thousand times stronger now. It oppressed and troubled him, and, without quite realizing what he was doing, he found himself heading for the house of old Black Gabrot. Gabrot was an aged black who made a precarious living selling luck potions and health charms to the superstitious Negro population of Port-of-Spain. Twice he had been warned by the Constabulary that continuation of his activities would lead to his arrest and imprisonment at the Convict Depot at Tobago, and it was Spotswood who had interfered in his behalf, advising the Warrant Officer that the old man was harmless.

He found Gabrot in his evil-smelling hut, engaged in whittling one of the many hideous carvings that covered his walls. Now that he was here Spotswood felt some embarrassment for his presence, but the Negro looked up urbanely and smiled.

"Greetings, sar. You hab come wid de debil trouble in your heart. You wish my help, no?"

Spotswood nodded, and Gabrot continued his carving in silence. But presently he put down the block of wood, and a queer light danced in his eyes. He rum-

maged under his dirty pallet and drew forth a small wooden box.

"Damballah," he said shortly, "the serpent god. Take him, sar. He will do evil, but he will fight evil, too, when owned by the right person."

Spotswood hesitated, then accepted the box and pressed a coin into the waiting hand. The Negro mumbled his thanks, voiced what seemed to be a low incantation and went back to his carving.

At home the editor, wearied unto exhaustion by the day's events, ate a brief supper, then went straight to his bedroom. Before extinguishing the light, he opened the box Gabrot had given him.

Its contents were disappointing: a crude carving of a serpent partially coiled, fashioned out of wood with bits of dried snake skin glued to its surface. Occupying the other side of the box was a small sealed paper cone. It seemed to be filled with some kind of powder, for it rustled when Spotswood shook it. He placed the box on the table and switched out the light.

He fell asleep almost immediately but awoke some time after midnight . . . listening. The house was utterly still; only the faint rapid ticking of his wrist watch was audible. Yet he was certain he had heard light and slow footsteps moving down the outer corridor toward the door of his room.

He did hear them! Deliberate and muffled, as if the person were walking in her bare feet, they approached. Then the latch turned and the door began to swing inward. A nameless fear seized Spotswood. He saw the door open wide, saw the figure outlined there against the night light of the corridor.

It was a woman, tall and svelte, clad in a long trailing gown of filmy white, black hair undone and cascading down her shoulders. But the details were vague and indistinct, like a scene viewed through water. Only two things could Spotswood distinguish in the uncertain light: the look of utter malevolence in the woman's face and the long-bladed knife she carried in her hand. The *obeah* sacrifice knife . . . !

A step at a time she entered the room, advancing toward the bed. Now she was directly over him, and he could see the glint of light on the metal knife blade. Her arm came up.

Blindly Spotswood reached across to the table, seized the wooden box given him by Gabrot and flung it out before him. The box seemed to falter there in mid-air, then dropped slowly to the floor.

A narrow elliptical column of mist rose up from it, mounted toward the ceiling. As it hung there, writhing to and fro, the mist slowly thickened, took form and outline. And then a dark, greenish serpent with glinting eyes came out of it, gathered its coils with measured intentness and dropped toward the woman.

She saw it and fell back. "Damballah!" she cried.

Spotswood couldn't be sure what happened after that. He thought he saw the serpent and the woman meet in the center of the room. He heard a hideous scream go echoing through the house. Then the scene faded, and he saw nothing more.

Spotswood's wife returned to Port-of-Spain on the first of September and was shocked at her husband's appearance. The editor was gaunt and drawn, and there was an uncertain look in his eyes. He seemed to lack his old zest and enthusiasm when he took his wife on an inspection tour of the garden of the new house.

Before the granite monument Mrs. Spotswood stopped and looked curiously.

"It's not exactly an attractive ornament for one's garden," she said. "If it weren't for those queer markings around the center, I'd say it was quite ugly."

"What markings?" asked Spotswood.

His wife pointed. "There. They look almost as if an impression had been made by the coils of a huge snake."

Offspring

THE LAVENDER TRIALS are now history. From the day of the arrest of Marie and Philip Lavender to their mother Belle's fantastic unbelievable testimony, the public was given an insight into a case of unparalleled evil. Because I was familiar with the brother's and sister's lives immediately preceding the trial, I have been asked to chronicle the affair, much of which was not generally known.

I first came into contact with Marie and Philip Lavender in the spring of '75 while I was working a chain of clubs through the midwest as a ventriloquist. The Lavenders joined the circuit in Cleveland with a mind-reading act. Marie was then a full-figured woman of about thirty with raven hair and dark lustrous eyes. Her brother, Philip, was a handsome man, broadshouldered, narrow hipped with a dark saturnine face.

At first their act seemed no different from its predecessors. Philip came on stage and after a brief spiel, relating how their travels in India had led to an interest in clairvoyance and precognition, introduced his sister who appeared in a flowing gown of white. He then passed his hands before her eyes and spoke a few words in low inaudible tones.

With Marie in what appeared to be a deep trance, he left the stage and began to pass among the tables, soliciting questions for her to answer.

All mind-reading acts use a code, of course. But as I watched, a strange thrill crept up my spine. There was no change in the intonation of their voices, no trick of speech; no signal passed between them. The Lavenders were using no code.

And I knew they had no confederates in the audience.

Their performance was at once familiar and eerie. Philip would stop at a table and call out, "I have a gentleman here. He wishes to know . . ."

On stage in a quiet but distinct voice, Marie answered the question. But then she raised one hand as in supplication and departed from the usual routine. She named the questioner's wife and relatives, gave his address, described his work. She related facts about his past. She gave the site where he intended to spend his forthcoming vacation. She told his age and nationality. She even gave the year and make of his car. The astounded questioner admitted all her statements were true. With person after person, she repeated this procedure. The audience sat spellbound. Old trooper though I was, I felt as if I were witnessing the opening of the door to beyond.

Every performance the procedure was the same. The reception was tremendous.

But trouble came the night our acts opened at the Club Clenardo, an ornate bistro in St. Louis. The audience was receptive and when Philip came on in a fine fettle, pacing among the tables with a springy step, I expected them to react favorably to his performance too.

Presently, he stopped before a sallow-faced man with shoulder-length hair.

"And have you a question for the lady?" he said. "My sister will answer it if she can."

"A couple of fakirs," the sallow faced man said. "Why don't you go back to the carnival where you belong?"

Even at that distance—I stood off stage near the side entrance—I saw the glitter that entered Philip's eyes. His lips trembled and a look of diabolic evil and hatred contorted his features. It was a look that made me shudder for it revealed an utter malignancy deep in the soul. Abruptly, he brought his hands upward and began to move them back and forth before him in what seemed to be a mystic symbol. The man uttered a cry, his head snapped back and blood came to his mouth. Again and again he recoiled as apparently blow after blow drove into him.

Yet Philip Lavender was fully three feet away and his fists only fanned air in that strange motion.

There was a crash of dishware as the man fell across the table. Waiters rushed forward and hustled a coldly indifferent Philip off to his dressing room. Later I spoke to the club manager in his office.

"Look," I said. "I saw the whole thing. Lavender may have wanted to beat up that fellow, but I'll swear he never touched him."

"Then what did," the manager said. "Some imp of Satan?"

I thought of the look I had seen on Philip's face and it struck me that perhaps the remark wasn't so very far from wrong.

After that I saw little of the Lavenders except during their performances.

It was on a hot breathless night in July when our acts were playing the Blue Slipper that I ran into my old friend, Arden Kelloway, as I was leaving the club. Kelloway was a reporter on the *Chicago News*, and I hadn't seen him in two years. Over a gin and tonic in a nearby bar, I said,

"Don't tell me you're on assignment. Papers seldom send reporters out of town any more. Not with stringers and news services."

He smiled. "Let's say it's more of a personal matter."

"Anyone I know?"

He sipped his drink. "As a matter of fact, yes. Is there a mind-reading act on the same bill with you?"

"There is. What about them?"

With some hesitation, Kelloway began to talk. He was vague at first as if he disliked what he was going to say. "I don't even know if theatrical people are involved," he said. "As yet, I have only an unlinked chain of rumors to go on. But if those rumors are true, we may have one of the biggest stories of terror and horror in a generation. Reports," he continued, "had filtered into his office of the revival of the Sangre Chamarra, a secret society that dated back to Spain and the sixteenth century. Basically," he said, "it's an organization of Satan worshippers. But, it's more than that. It's a society that deals in unholy rites, in sacrifices and torture."

"What has this to do with the Lavenders?" I said.

Kelloway went on, unmindful of my interruption. "It is thought to have been started by Joanna of Spain, the insane mother of Charles V about 1514. The name Sangre Chamarra means Cloak of Blood and is not to be confused with the Italian Comorra which didn't come into existence until three hundred years later. From its localized beginning, it spread to other parts of the Holy Roman Empire and under Charles V: the Netherlands, Italy, the Austrian duchies. It has been outlawed, suppressed and come to life again down through the march of time."

He paused and continued. "In 1955, I was in New Orleans, working on the *Picayune* when a woman was arrested under the name of Jean Da Costa, charged with attempting to organize a chapter. That was the first attempt at revival of the Sangre Chamarra in more than a hundred years. The woman had a brother, Logan Da Costa, who was thought to have aided her. The charges were dismissed for lack of evidence. Although suspicion was strong, there was no evidence that the gatherings they formed were anything but quasi-religious clubs.

"The brother and sister held these meetings in an old rundown mansion on the outskirts of the city. Rumors began to circulate about the place. It was said a strange reddish light hung above the house like fox fire. It was

said a Satan-like figure with horns could be seen dancing at night in the grounds. The police finally raided the place, found nothing but a library completely devoted to books of the occult. There were rarer unexpurgated books, like *Restitution of Decayed Intelligence* by Richard Verstegan, and Zode's *Gomacian Crypt,* which were thought to have been destroyed centuries before. As I said, nothing could be proved but the Da Costas were advised to leave town."

"And you think the Lavenders are this same pair?"

Kelloway shrugged. "The affair in New Orleans took place in '55. That would make the Lavenders in their late fifties now. But you know and I know that they can't be more than thirty. Still . . ." his voice trailed off, "there are details that are amazingly identical. And no one else has attempted to revive the Chamarra until now." He paused again to light a cigar. "Now I've got to get back to Chicago tonight, but I don't want to drop the trail entirely. So would you do me a favor and keep an eye on the Lavenders for me?"

I wondered just what "keeping an eye on" entailed. But I agreed.

Two days later, a rainy windswept afternoon, I was sitting in the hotel lobby reading my newspaper when Marie Lavender, wearing a trench coat and plastic kerchief over her head, crossed to the glass doors to the street. After a moment, I got up and followed her. She strode rapidly down the walk, unmindful of the pouring rain as if heading for some important destination. She crossed intersection after intersection and finally turned into a narrow street, flanked on either side by rows of tenement buildings. I had to wait for a passing van and when I looked, the woman was nowhere to be seen. I was reasonably sure she had entered the second building on the left but I couldn't be sure.

After a moment of hesitation, I went into a street phone booth and called Kelloway in Chicago. When he answered, I briefly sketched the situation.

"Where are you now?"

I told him.

"Can you follow her?"

"I can," I said, "but what do I say if she spots me?"

"I don't think she will," Kelloway said. "If she's implicated, my guess is that she'll probably leave the building by another entrance. I'll tell you what I'd like to have you do. Go in. See what you can see. If anyone accosts you, say the word, 'Indignago'."

"What's that?"

"It's a secret term that was used to identify Chamarra members."

"It strikes me," I said, "that this affair is all conjecture."

"It is," he agreed, "but it may be the biggest revelation of horror we've seen in a long time. Now I don't want you to take any unnecessary chances. If you see anything that threatens trouble, get out of there. Okay?"

I rang off. I crossed the street to the second building. There were two entrances, one at street level, the other down a flight of steps. I chose the latter, descended the stairs and pushed through the door.

A corridor extended before me with doors on either side. From a door to the rear, came the murmur of voices and the muted sound of music cadenced by a drum.

Common sense told me to turn about and leave. But I had promised Kelloway so I approached the door and rapped upon it. There was a moment's wait, then it opened and a tall man with a reddish beard and unkempt hair appeared in the entrance. He wore a kind of robe, all black, and a gold chain and medallion with the design of a skull on it.

"Yes?"

I said quietly, "Indignago."

The man stood aside and motioned me to enter. As I did, he touched my sleeve and I felt a slight sting on my arm. But his face was immobile as he led me through a throng of people to the rear of the room. There he pointed to a chair and left me. The room was dimly lit. Only vaguely could I see that all occupants of the room wore black robes with cowls over their heads. There was

an upraised dais at the far end and a shadowy figure standing motionless upon it. The air was oppressive, filled with the mingled odor of incense and a cloying perfume. As I sank onto the chair, a feeling of vertigo and nausea assailed me.

Then I got the curious impression that there were three or four layers to the room and that one group of robed persons milled about at floor level while another was high up near the ceiling. At the same time, the walls seemed to drift farther back and to change in color from blue to green and then to red.

The figure on the dais began to dance and gyrate, weaving to and fro. It was still blurred in my vision but I could see a study in horror, the head and face, blazing eyes and curved horns protruding from the skull like only one thing I had ever witnessed before—Satan as depicted in medieval woodcuts.

Somewhere a voice spoke. "An intruder is in our midst. Let him be brought forward."

I found myself lifted from the chair and propelled across the room as the figure advanced to meet me. What happened after that I cannot say. I seem to remember the horror of that face close to mine. When I came back to reality, I was outside in the blinding daylight. Somehow, I stumbled across the street, hailed a cab and gave the driver the address of my hotel. In my room, I fell onto the bed and lay there in a stupor. Hours later, I awakened with a blinding headache, reached for the phone and called Kelloway.

"What sort of circus have you led me into?" I demanded and related my experience. Kelloway was silent a long moment.

"You were drugged, of course; it may not have been the Chamarra though I admit it sounds like it. Suppose you forget it and let me handle it from my end. For one thing, I'll contact your local police. I'll call you."

But I couldn't forget it. I kept thinking about that strange apartment and the horrible figure on the dais. If I had been drugged, it must have been a powerful potion to have cast that spell over me so quickly.

Our acts moved on to Omaha.

There the Lavenders were joined by their mother, Belle. She was a blowsy woman in her late fifties with a florid mottled complexion and flame-red hair. She wore clothing several sizes too large for her and she had a belligerent attitude. Like an unwanted warden, she stood offstage during every Lavender performance and at their conclusion made caustic comments on what she considered flaws in the act. What aroused her resentment in particular was the brother and sister attributing their mind-reading ability to clairvoyance and precognition. On one occasion, I overheard her say:

"Fools, didn't I tell you not to tempt the wrath of the unknown? Vengeance will be upon you if you persist."

The animosity was more noticeable between mother and daughter than it was between mother and son. Marie took to leaving the club early to avoid Belle. One night as I emerged, I saw her standing at the curb, waiting for a taxi.

"We might as well walk," I told her. "There's a convention in town and cabs will be at a premium."

She shrugged, turned and strode past me without a word and headed down the walk. I followed more leisurely and soon she was half a block ahead of me. It was a balmy summer evening; the heat of the day had passed and the sky was festooned with stars. Night traffic flowed up and down the street. As I strode along, I noticed a little girl near the next intersection, frolicking along at the side of her mother and bouncing a rubber ball. I watched her and I remember thinking how carefree are the lives of children when suddenly the ball rolled free and bounced toward the curb. The child darted after it and her steps led her directly into the path of Marie Lavender.

And then came the horror!

Like some damned juggernaut, the mind-reading woman did not pause, did not vary her direction, but bowled into the child, knocking her to the walk and unconcernedly trampling over her. The frantic mother rushed forward as my gorge rose. In a moment, a crowd had collected and there were shouts after the woman.

But she continued on her way, totally indifferent. A bystander called police. By that time, she was far out of sight. The child was uninjured and for that reason I stood there, saying nothing. Later I cursed myself for an apathetic fool.

Revulsion, however, was strong within me, and in the days that followed, I found it almost impossible to be civil to the woman. An aura of malignancy hung like a cloud over her and over Philip too.

In mid-August, we opened in Kansas City. Here Philip began to audition young women for a levitation feature of their act. He selected two girls, both blondes with well-developed figures.

Against a black backdrop, the two girls came on stage in daringly scanty costumes. Impeccably handsome in evening clothes, Philip assisted them onto two tables, drawn up side by side. Eight candles were lighted. The stage was semi-darkened and a violet spot came on.

Philip raised one hand above him for silence and began to speak.

"*Paklo lethdra yog nemus* Oh Prince of Darkness. . . ."

There was a stirring of the girls on the tables. Their bodies were rigid, their eyes closed, but slowly they began to rise. Now they were in mid-air moving upward without support. Now inches separated them from the tables . . . now a foot . . . now two feet. Marie Lavender came forward, raised a cane and moved it back and forth over the girls' bodies, cutting an invisible parallelogram, demonstrating to the audience that no wires or mirrors were being used.

Philip's voice became louder.

"*Paklo lethdra* Belzebub . . . Oh mighty Lucifer . . . host of the underworld . . . *Paklo venista zulari* . . ."

The girls continued to rise in the radiance of the violet spot.

Suddenly from the rear of the club there came a scream of horror!

A third figure had materialized in the half-light. Was the thing I seemed to see the incarnation of that devil figure I had witnessed in that strange apartment in

St. Louis? Or was it a residue of my thoughts triggered into mental vision by a memory of that medieval satanic woodcut? Between and slightly above the two floating girls it moved, writhing to and fro like an insane puppet. Curved horns protruded from the scarlet skull, the black hyalescent eyes glittered in base malevolence, the mouth was a horrible grinning slit.

But the outlines were vague and uncertain, and I blinked in disbelief. Yet, for a full moment, it remained there, a thing of evil in the violet light. Then suddenly it was gone.

The levitation act of the Lavender performance was a definite hit. After that first show, there was no reappearance of that figure—to me anyway—but night after night, the Club Tigre was packed and the newspaper reviews waxed ecstatic. Only Belle was displeased. On that first night, she was loud in her denunciation.

"Fools!" she cried. "I warn you again not to play with things you don't understand."

On the 27th of August, Kelloway called me. "I'd like to see you," he said. "What say I drop in on you in a day or so?"

"Come ahead," I said. "We'll be here until the end of the week."

On the night before Kelloway arrived, the levitation sequence was deleted from the Lavender act and the girls did not appear.

Kelloway looked serious when he entered my dressing room. "You've probably guessed why I'm here," he said. "It's the Chamarra. It's big and it's spreading. The police have raided chapters in half a dozen cities. They credit them with ten disappearances and as many deaths. But the important thing is the initial starting of those chapters parallels your theatrical route; that is to say, the route of the Lavenders. That's something the police haven't latched onto yet. I'm convinced they are the same pair who tried to start up the society in New Orleans."

"But, the age discrepancy," I said. "Twenty years ago the Lavenders were children."

"I know," Kelloway agreed. "But there are things about this case that defy explanation. Now what's this about two girls and a levitation act?"

When I told him, he scowled. "And you say Lavender cancelled this part of the act even though it was successful?"

"It went over big," I said. "But suddenly the girls didn't show."

Kelloway pursed his lips. "I'll find out where they live," he said, "and get their side of the story. Meanwhile," he added, "you look around here at the club. Look everywhere."

"But, surely you don't think . . ."

He shrugged. "In a case like this, you never know."

The Club Tigre was a remodeled vaudeville theater. The proscenium had been kept and the rows of seats taken out and tables put in their place. The result was something like a dance hall in a western movie. There was a balcony that was closed off and not used and dressing rooms below the main floor level. I went up into the balcony first. I don't know what I expected to find there. The floor and the red plush seats, dating back forty years, were thick with dust. The place was dim and silent ghosts of a thousand vaudeville audiences seemed to gather about.

I left the balcony and went back downstairs. An entire row of dressing rooms were closed as unused and I entered each one in rotation. Dust and desertion here too, with abandoned furniture, old time posters on the walls and yellowed photographs stuck in the frames of cracked mirrors.

I went farther back and had to grope for a light switch. There was nothing here either save several old trunks in a corner. I was about to leave when impulse prompted me to lift the cover of the nearest trunk and peer inside.

Then I was suddenly sick.

The murder of the two girls blew the Lavender case wide open. But it was the ensuing trial that caused dramatic furor. Because of change in venue, the trials were held in Chicago and the prosecuting attorney was Mark Rutledge who had successfully won the Foolscap case a year before.

Had it not been for Arden Kelloway's finding of the personal day-by-day diary of Philip Lavender, it is doubtful justice would have been done. That diary and its detailed revelations of the Chamarra and the Lavender's activities in the society had fallen into the hands of the levitation girls who had threatened to turn it over to the police. Philip had taken the only way to escape exposure.

In the trial, Lawyer Rutledge brought out the whole fantastic unbelievable web of evil the Lavenders had woven. He described their organizing of the various chapters, their instituting rites and tortures, some of which resulted in deaths. Through it all, Belle Lavender was required to testify twice and she stoutly maintained the innocence of the brother and sister. At length, Rutledge confronted her with a large reproduction of a medieval woodcut of Satan.

"Do you deny your son Philip and your daughter Marie perpetrated these crimes as part of the veneration of this figure?" He thrust the picture squarely before the red haired woman.

Belle Lavender closed her eyes and raised one hand as if to ward off an attack.

"Do you know who is represented in this picture?" Rutledge persisted.

"Yes." Her voice was a whisper.

"Will you tell the court who that figure is?"

The woman covered her face with her hands. Then she staggered erect from the witness chair and stood there swaying. Her face was ashen.

"God help me," she cried. "He was their father!"

Chameleon Town

THE FIVE Checkmates drove into Kingsport that August night in a wrecked Plymouth. Thirty miles back they had caromed off the highway when Dr. Lucius James, who had been driving all day, fell asleep at the wheel. They had headed east down a narrow road because a sign had promised mechanical aid in that direction. But the road, showing little signs of travel, led them farther and farther from the highway. When they finally reached the garage in Kingsport, they were told repairs to their car would take six hours. So the Checkmates put up at the local hotel.

They called themselves the Checkmates because of their hobby. Chess by mail! For three years they had exchanged letters, never seeing each other, but playing the game they loved by correspondence. At Dr. James' invitation, they had finally met in New York, and then driven south with no particular destination, enjoying their new camaraderie.

As their host, Dr. James alone was on native soil. Gomez had never before been out of Mexico. This was an initial trip across the Canadian boundary for Lamont Cagle. And Newcombe and Fielding were first-time visitors from London.

Now at the Kingsport hotel, Dr. James left the others in their room and set out on a nightly stroll, a habit he

was not about to forego despite his fatigue. The backwater town was deserted at this hour and he strode along, enjoying the solitude and the clean brisk air. His steps led him to the harbor, which was larger then he had expected. Here a pier jutted out into the Atlantic and fishing craft rode at anchor. He lit a cigar and stood, listening to the water against the piles.

And then quite suddenly he became aware of his surroundings.

He remembered being here before!

It was impossible, of course. In all his fifty years, he had never visited this part of the East Coast, much less this obscure town. Yet, as his eyes fixed on detail after detail, the familiarity was unmistakable.

The old plank walk, the shadowy warehouses, the distant rolling combers of the ocean—everything was like a picture postcard committed to memory. He began to walk down the pier. Dories, yawls and luggers bobbed in the swell. He remembered it all. His eyes singled out a low white-hulled sloop with the name *Sea Witch* on its bow, and it too was vivid in his memory.

How long he stood there he didn't know. But presently he became aware of a man and woman advancing down the pier. Engrossed in each other, they paid him no heed but passed within a few feet of him and descended to the deck of the sloop.

There they fell into each other's arms in a passionate embrace.

A second shock swept through Dr. James. He recognized them. Recognized them with a conviction that could not be denied. They were straight out of his past. They were his wife and Paul Ganlon, the man with whom she had run off.

Dr. James rubbed his eyes. Two years! Two years they had been dead. Two years ago, they drowned when this same boat had foundered in a storm miles to the north. Now here they were, back from the grave. He didn't know how or why. He only knew that all the justified desire for retaliation which he had managed to suppress these many months suddenly rose within him. He strode forward to the deck of the sloop and came up

before them. The woman's eyes jerked wide, and the man fell back.

And now Dr. James was unable to separate fancy from reality. He found himself lunging, raining blows upon this man who had so ruined his life. Blindly, madly, he struck out. Against the onslaught, Ganlon reeled across the deck, stumbled against a capstan and fell. His head struck with a horrible sudden thud, his neck canted, and he lay still.

The woman seemed dazed. She rushed to the fallen man's side and, when she realized he was lifeless, she staggered across to the rail and clung there, half in space. Then, with a sobbing cry of despair, she slid over the side. An instant later, when Dr. James followed and looked down, he saw nothing but black water below. When he turned and looked back across the deck, the body of Ganlon too was no longer there.

And he knew that this episode of unreality was ended. None of these things had happened. It was a phantasmagoria, a fancy of his mind.

Somehow he made his way back down the pier, retraced his steps through the town and reentered his hotel room. His four companions were playing chess. He was thankful they were too engrossed in their game to notice his trembling hands or the sweat on his brow.

"Go take a walk," he said hoarsely to Gomez. "Take a look at the harbor."

After the Mexican had gone, the physician took his place at the table. His throat was dry; a pulse throbbed at his temple.

"You seem nervous," Fielding said. "Anything wrong?"

Dr. James shook his head. By nature a taciturn man, he could not bring himself to reveal his inner thoughts to these men who, until five days ago, had been strangers. But his mind was a millrace. What was the meaning of the events which had just taken place?

He was a rational man, but he recently had recovered from an illness and there were facts associated with the illusion—for illusion it must have been—which left him completely baffled.

Gomez returned. The Mexican's face was flushed. Dr. James studied him, then turned to Fielding.

"You go too. The night is still young."

It was an hour before Fielding returned. There was a perceptible remoteness about him that did not escape the physician.

"All right, Cagle," Dr. James said. "It's you turn."

The Canadian raised an eyebrow. "What's with these night walks?"

But Dr. James was insistent.

At twelve o'clock, after each of the four had returned from a brief stroll, he sat there in meditative silence, eyes far away.

"A little while ago during my walk," he said, "I found myself party to things which I still do not understand. Now it may be that you in your walks experienced nothing unusual. But I'm inclined to think you did. I'm going to ask you to sit apart and independently write a description of what you saw tonight. Regard it as the whim of an older man, if you wish."

Five minutes later he was staring at four sheets of paper. It was true then, what he had expected. But it wasn't possible . . .

Why should four complete strangers to this country "remember" this town? For each of the Checkmates had written that he had experienced *déjà vu*. Each had had the impression he was in a place where he had been long ago. Each thought the fancy was his alone and so had said nothing to the others.

The physician gnawed his lip. "Gentlemen," he said, "it would seem something is wrong here. I suggest we sleep on it."

Early next morning, while the others were still asleep, James walked to the harbor again. His concern of the night before was still with him. There was no sign of the white sloop. An old man sat on a pier post, fishing.

"A forty-five footer," the physician said. "Gaff rigged. Named the *Sea Witch*. Have you seen her?"

The oldster shook his head.

Back at the hotel, the Checkmates breakfasted, then walked to the garage to pick up their car. It was a beautiful morning without a cloud in the sky. As they passed down the streets, a strangeness about those streets struck Dr. James. He couldn't put his finger on it. The buildings were commonplace, the stores and shops like any others. Yet they seemed to possess a dreamlike quality as if they were a painted backdrop.

At the garage, as he paid the bill, the physician asked, "What's the shortest way back to the highway?"

The man jerked his thumb. "That one joins the highway at Winton, the county seat."

"How far?"

"Twenty-six miles. But if you're goin' to look for info about Kingsport, you won't find it there."

"Why not?"

The man looked uncomfortable. "Because the town is known there by another name. Kingsboro."

They drove the twenty-six miles in contemplative silence. In Winton, on impulse, Dr. James left the others and entered the courthouse. He went into the clerk's office and spent some time looking over the birth and death records of Kingsport. In the adjoining treasurer's office, he found that the garage man had told the truth. All tax and abstract records of the town were listed under the name of Kingsboro.

"When was the name changed?" Dr. James asked.

The treasurer chewed his pencil. "It's been Kingsboro in this office as long as I can remember. Some folks say there's no such place as Kingsport. That's a joke," he said heartily.

The physician returned to the car thoughtfully. He and his four companions then set out to explore Winton on foot. The town was not as old as Kingsport but was more scenic. All the while, Dr. James was brooding over the things he had discovered. Before a phone booth, he suddenly paused.

"Wait for me," he said.

He entered the booth and made a direct-dial call to Washington, D.C., to his friend of many years, Hugh Stanley.

"How are you," Stanley greeted when the connection was made. "Still playing checkers?"

Dr. James winced. "Hugh," he said, "I have a favor to ask. I'd like you to look up the circumstances of my wife's death."

"Lucius! Are you still brooding about that?"

"I'm not brooding. But there are some facts I'd like to have, and you're close to the source. I'd like an autopsy report on Paul Ganlon, for one thing."

"Whatever for?"

"See if there was any evidence of a blow or contusion on the body. Then find out if Ganlon ever had any business in Kingsport or if his logbook ever recorded a trip into these waters. Then look up my medical record. I was a patient at Bethesda Hospital and for a short time at the Washington Convalescent Hospital. Get the dates of my entry and release."

"Is that all?" Hugh Stanley asked sarcastically.

"You might go to the United States Health Service and see if they have any epidemic records of Kingsport."

"What do you mean, epidemic records?"

"Well, let's say, how many persons died in the town of Spanish Influenza in 1918."

"Nineteen eighteen! That's sixty years ago!"

"Call me at the hotel in Kingsport," Dr. James said, and rang off.

On the street again, he turned to Lamont Cagle.

"Didn't you write me once that you were a sketch artist?"

The Canadian smiled modestly. "Only in an amateur way."

"Well, let's see if we can get you some supplies."

In a photographic store that also carried artist's materials, they purchased a small easel, drawing paper, and charcoal pencils.

They returned to their car. Dr. James swung about and headed back for Kingsport.

Cagle may have guessed what he had in mind, but the physician had not yet taken any of his four companions into his confidence. But they were, he told himself, a pretty sharp foursome, and his decision to return to the town they had just left would be accepted without objection. The more he thought about it, the more he was convinced they had stumbled on an enigma that must be divided into two segments: the illusion which had effected all of them, and that episode of fancy which concerned his own past, and for which he felt he must have an explanation.

He could understand the *déjà vu,* of course. Like all men, he had had that feeling of being some place in the long-distant past. But he was not being psychotic, he told himself, in asking Hugh Stanley to reestablish the facts of his wife's death. Even after two years, that dual tragedy was still shrouded in mystery. Moreover, his illness at the time now made him vulnerable for any question about it.

When they arrived back at the hotel, Lamont Cagle said, "What do you want me to sketch?"

"The town," James said simply.

They registered again, to the surprise of the hotel manager. An hour later when Cagle entered their room, he carried several drawings which he spread across the table. To an artistic eye, they left much to be desired, but they abounded in detail, which was what Dr. James wanted.

One of them showed the town's main street with shops and store signs visible. One of these signs read: *Bishop & Son*; another, *Queen's Bakery*; and still another, *The Knight Company.* A placard in a store window read: *Fresh Pawns.* Not "prawns," but "pawns."

There was a sketch of the harbor. Here Cagle had paid even more attention to detail. The pier and the old warehouse were carefully recaptured. In the foreground was a low hulled sloop.

A spurt of excitement darted up the physician's spine as he saw the drawing of the boat.

"Is it there now?" he asked.

Cagle shook his head. "No, it isn't. I drew it from memory."

Late that afternoon, Dr. James went out and began to walk along the street. In a notebook, he made notations as he sauntered along. His impressions seemed worth recording, for that strangeness was apparent again. It was a subtle singularity that seemed to make the shadows too dark, the reflections from the shop windows too bright, the streets unreal. As he went on, he noticed that some passersby regarded him with more than casual interest. Several times he thought he saw covert glances directed toward him.

Gradually another sensation stole over him, a recollection far back in his subconscious. He knew in advance how buildings would look, knew the appearance of shops before he came to them. Around the corner would be a candy store just like the one he had patronized as a boy. It would have a sign like a peppermint stick and in its window licorice whips and those little bottles of chewable wax, filled with a sugary syrup. He turned a corner and the shop was there. Then it was gone, and Dr. James glanced upward.

That glance saved his life. The sign, not a peppermint stick but one advertising a laundry, was swaying violently. Even as the physician lunged sideways, the heavy thing of wood and iron fell, missing him by inches. He turned before a crowd could gather and hurried unsteadily back down the street.

In his hotel room, he discussed the incident with the four.

"Of course, it was an accident," he said. "But was it? It would have been a simple thing to have loosened the sign's fastenings and jerk the guy wire as I passed. There have been other indications we're not wanted here."

"Yes," Fielding said. "The hotel manager didn't seem too happy to see us return."

"As far as official records go, this town doesn't exist," the physician continued. "But even under its alternate name of Kingsboro, there are things that can't be explained."

"And the illusion of our being here before?" asked Fielding.

"I'm coming to that. Last night we experienced *déjà vu*. This, of course, is commonplace and happens to everyone at some time in his life. The oddity lies in the fact that the five of us felt it at the same time. And we saw things not as they are but rather as we wanted them to be. Cagle substituted chess names, *Knight, Queen, Bishop,* in his sketches because chess was uppermost in his mind at the time.

"Fielding, there's a weekly newspaper here. You and Newcombe check its files for anything unusual, and I'll look them over too. But be careful," he added. "I have a feeling our every move is being watched."

Next day, Dr. James accompanied Fielding and Newcombe to the newspaper office. But the task of going through back copies wearied him and he went farther down the street to the library where the shelves seemed to promise more interest. There was no history of the town there, however. There was no book which held the slightest mention of Kingsport's past. And when he looked up the term *déjà vu* in several books, he found the pages dealing with that subject had been neatly cut out.

That afternoon he called Hugh Stanley.

"Where in the hell are you?" Stanley asked. "The operator tried to tell me there was no such place as Kingsport."

"There's such a place all right," Dr. James said. "Did you get the information I wanted?"

"Some of it. The *Sea Witch* was wrecked ten miles north of here. Identification of the bodies was positive, made by Ganlon's sister. The coroner's report did mention a blow to the head, but that was to be expected as the storm smashed the boat onto the rocks. One thing is certain. There's no record of his ever sailing as far south as you are."

"Go on," said Dr. James.

"Well, your medical records show that you were released from Bethesda Hospital July 12th. You entered Washington Convalescent Hospital July 15th."

"That leaves three days unaccounted for," Dr. James said. "When did the *Sea Witch* leave on its fatal cruise?"

"July 13th. But that doesn't mean . . ."

"All right. How about the 'flu epidemic?"

"Sixty years is a long time," Stanley said. "There's a bureau of communicable diseases in Atlanta. They might have what you want. As far as I've been able to learn here, the Spanish 'flu sailed straight past Kingsboro or whatever the name of the town is."

"Okay," Dr. James said. "One thing more, a little more in your line perhaps. You work for the Defense Department. I'd like to know the number of men drafted from here."

"I guess I can get that all right," Stanley said. "Just the Korean War and the Viet Nam War, I suppose."

"And World War I and World War II. And the Civil War."

Stanley uttered an oath. "Civil War! Are you crazy?"

"Don't try to call me," Dr. James said. "I'll call you."

Stanley's phone report was what the physician had expected. No man had been drafted from Kingsport. Of course, the Civil War, if for some crazy reason you wanted to go back that far, was a flexible thing. Anyone could buy his way out of that.

"It's as if the town has been cushioned against all forces of reality," Dr. James said. "Epidemics, drafts, all the mass happenings which are part of every community haven't happened here. There have been the normal rates of births and deaths, but all tragic events capable of being prevented have been prevented."

When night came, he set out for his evening walk. Trailing cigar smoke, he let his steps lead him once again to the harbor. The streets were the same as they were in the daylight. There was a definite oddness about them. The very warehouses hunched in the background seemed curiously out of plumb.

He came to the pier and strode out upon it. And then his heart gave a bound.

The sloop was there, the same racy boat with its polished brass! But the name on the bow was *Cynthia,* not *Sea Witch.*

Steps sounded behind him and a man and a woman approached down the pier. The woman nodded politely and the man said "Good Evening." They went down to the deck of the sloop.

A great weight was suddenly lifted from the physician's shoulders. He knew suddenly he hadn't seen Paul Ganlon or his dead wife that first night. He had seen this boat and these two strangers and he had replaced them with images from his past. And then fancy, or some mystique of this town, had taken over, and he had moved into a complete dream world wherein he had imagined killing his wife's lover and witnessing her death.

Deep in thought, he moved down the pier again and began to walk along the waterfront. He walked slowly, his mind going over and over what he had seen on the pier. About him the air was strong with the smell of fish and wet cordage. He had gone some distance when he became aware of following footsteps. He quickened his pace, but the steps persisted. Dr. James darted into a near alley. Presently a gaunt figure loomed out of the darkness and paused.

Dr. James emerged into the open. "Were you looking for me?" he said.

If he was expecting the stranger to be taken aback, he was disappointed. The man carried a cane and he leaned against it carefully.

"As a matter of fact, I was, Dr. James."

"You know my name?"

The man nodded. "I have been aware of you and your four friends since you came to Kingsport."

The physician looked puzzled. "Who are you?"

"Let us say I am the protector of this community. That's as good a term as any. My name is Black."

Dr. James surveyed the stranger with a calculating eye. He saw a man of middle age and middle build,

swarthy in complexion, wearing an odd-shaped alpine hat. Even in the partial light, the penetrating quality of his eyes was apparent.

"My quarters are close by," Black said. "I suggest you accompany me there. We have some things of mutual interest to discuss." He turned and began to walk back along the waterfront, not looking back, apparently sure Dr. James would follow. And against his better judgement, the physician fell in step. The stranger spoke over his shoulder:

"You see, we in Kingsport are very much concerned about the—shall I say—investigative curiosity of you and your four friends. We in this town have a great desire for aloneness. We want no inquiry into our way of life."

Dr. James bristled. "I don't give a damn about any desire for aloneness," he said. "There's something wrong with this place and we intend to find out what it is."

A larger, darker warehouse loomed out of the gloom. Before it the man who called himself Black halted and opened the door.

"If you please . . ." he said.

Some compulsion made the physician comply. He followed Black up a flight of stairs to the second-floor door which the stranger also opened. The room revealed was definitely not like any that one would expect to find in such a building. It was sumptuously furnished with divans, brocade-covered tables and cabinets; rich drapes covered the walls.

Black removed his hat and coat, lowered himself into a chair and pushed another chair forward.

"Now hear me out," he said. "I said that we are concerned about you and your friends prying. We are more than concerned. In fact, I might say that the lives of your friends rest entirely on you tonight."

Dr. James stared. "Are you telling me my friends will come to some harm unless we . . . unless I stop investigations here?"

"Your choice of words is mild, Dr. James. But that is exactly what I mean."

"But why?"

"The status quo of our town must remain intact. We will stop at nothing to see that it does."

The physician swallowed. "I might agree to anything. How do you know . . ."

"Oh, I am quite ready to accept your word. You see, I have taken the trouble to look you up, and I know that your record, your reputation, is unimpeachable."

He lit a cigarette. "The most important thing I possess is something that has been entrusted to me—the future of this town. My own way of guaranteeing that future is to see that no one probes our way of life. And so I say again, the lives of your friends rest with you tonight. For we are without compunction. No legal angle concerns us in the slightest, and although it may be true that there are preventative agencies here as everywhere, let me assure you they would be powerless to stop us."

He leaned forward and his eyes became intense.

"I have also learned that you possess that indefinable something which some people call the gambling spirit. I, too, am a gambler, Dr. James. In the past, on occasion, I have risked much on fortune—that is, fortune tempered with skill."

"What has that got to do with my friends?"

"I'm saying that you and I might decide our problem in such a manner." He paused. "We might play a game, you and I. Not any game, of course. No, it would have to be one where the outcome is the result of mental dexterity."

"I don't understand."

"Chess is such a game, Dr. James. I don't mind saying that chess instills in me an inner excitement which few other things do. I know that you too consider yourself an expert in the game."

He paused again and spread his hands.

"So we have the stakes. The future of this town against the lives of your friends. Shall we let thirty-two pieces of ivory and ebony decide?"

For a long time, the physician sat there without reply. Everything—this room, this man who spoke so matter-

of-factly of life and death—it all tasted of a fiction melodrama. And yet, as he looked into the other's eyes and saw the implacable, cold-blooded serenity of the man, he knew the stranger had made no idle threat. He was facing a madman who dealt in death.

Without waiting for a reply, Black rose, crossed the room and returned with a small cabinet. From it, he took a set of chessmen.

"I trust," he said, "you will have no objections if I choose the color of my name. Shall we begin?"

Since the age of ten, Dr. James had played the game, but he was far from considering himself an expert. Tonight the enormity of the stakes appalled him. A tremor entered his hand.

Carefully, cautiously they made their initial moves, and as they did, the physician seemed to see his four friends before him. He fancied they stood there watching, but without the power to speak. The tremor in his hand increased. Inadvertently, he touched a chessman.

Black smiled. "You have moved your Knight, Dr. James. I regret the move must stand."

Silence filled the room, broken only by the muffled pounding of the waves against the distant pier. The clock on the far wall ticked away a half hour . . . an hour . . .

It was a curious fact that when Dr. James played, he changed from a conservative to an intellectual adventurer. Now as the shadow of defeat rose before him, he began to make moves no astute player would dare to make. At the same time, it became apparent that Black's ingrained habits of conservatism as a *position* player began to tell. A bead of perspiration appeared on his brow.

Another half hour passed.

The tremor passed from Dr. James' hands. He lit a cigar as a new confidence came over him.

Rooks moved. Bishops moved. The game wore on.

Another hour passed.

And then suddenly, Dr. James pushed his Knight across the board and said very quietly:

"Checkmate!"

Black sat there like an image, as if he hadn't heard. Then with a hoarse intake of breath, he leaped to his feet, sending his chair crashing backwards.

"You have won, Dr. James," he said. "I will keep my part of the bargain."

But the physician shook his head as he rose to his feet. Reaction was setting in and his legs were unsteady beneath him. A grin turned his lips. He reached for his hat and coat.

"No," he said slowly. "Neither of us has won. But my friends and I will leave here, Mr. Black. We will go and trouble you no more. And—" he strode to the door—"God help you and your own."

The five Checkmates were thirty miles down the interstate highway, heading north. In the rear seat, Fielding was reading a copy of the *Kingsport Clarion* which he had neglected to return to the newspaper files. It was dated September 3, 1906. His eye fell on a column he hadn't seen before.

"Read this," he said to Dr. James.

> What was described as a flaming ball of white light passed over the coast area last night, giving rise to many rumors. It was first said to have struck in the vicinity of Kingsport. Early reports stated Kingsport was destroyed.
>
> Rumors of this kind are difficult to stop. The credibility of persons who initiate them is exemplified by one man, who when confronted with the fact that Kingsport was still intact declared, "The town may very well have been destroyed. It is possible what is left may be only a psychic residue of what remains in the perception of its beholders."

A QUIRE OF FOOLSCAP

THE PACKAGE MUST have come by messenger since it bore no postmark of any kind. Rutledge carried it into his dining room, took a sip of his morning coffee, and opened it. His eyes widened as he saw its contents: a handsome pebble leather briefcase with gold snaps and hinges, an expensive pen and pencil set in a plush-lined case, and a quire of foolscap paper, carefully wrapped in foil.

There was an itemized invoice from the Shadow Stationery Shop, 26 Benjamin Street, totalling $78.59.

Rutledge frowned in annoyance. He had ordered nothing of this kind, much less seventy dollars worth. Moreover, he didn't need a new briefcase and never used a pencil. He wrapped the package up again for its return.

26 Benjamin Street was directly on his way to his office, though he couldn't remember any stationery store along the route. When he did sight it, he spotted it only by chance for it was a mere hole in the wall with a faded sign that read: Shadow Stationery, Sam Shadow, Prop. Rutledge parked and went in.

Inside was gloom broken only by a few unshaded drop lights. A man in his sixties with a bulbous nose and a thatch of long unkempt hair approached the counter.

"Yes?"

"I received this package," Rutledge said. "But I didn't order it. Here is the invoice."

The fat man adjusted gold-rimmed spectacles and read the paper without expression. Then he swore under his breath.

"That fool, Eric. I told him not to bill you. I told him this order was paid for. I'm sorry, sir."

"You mean someone paid for these things to be sent to me?" said Rutledge. "Who?"

Sam Shadow consulted a file. "Someone named Childs, Ephram Childs."

Rutledge started. "That's impossible. Ephram Childs died two years ago."

"His son, maybe."

"Childs had no son. He was a bachelor."

The fat man closed his file with a snap of finality. "All I know is that the order has been paid for. So if your name is Mark Rutledge, please take it with you. Good day."

Rutledge returned to his car slowly, the package under his arm. Yes, Ephram Childs had been dead two years. He had been senior member and guiding light of the attorney firm of Childs, Paulson, Brandt and Rutledge, and it had been his death that had prompted Rutledge to sever his connection with the firm and branch out for himself. He had opened his own office, taking Paul Buchanan, a shrewd and capable lawyer, as his partner.

Buchanan was everything Rutledge wasn't. That is to say, he was good looking with wavy dark hair, graceful as a panther, had a deep melodious voice and was attractive to women. Rutledge's wife, Julia, had been unable to keep her eyes off him when she paid an unannounced visit to the office.

"Yes, he *is* a handsome devil," Rutledge had agreed with her. "But more important, he's as good a lawyer as Childs ever was. And Childs was practically a genius, you know."

Genius or not, the fact remained that Childs was dead. So who had ordered that material from the stationery store?

He put the puzzle out of his mind, spent a moderately successful day and returned home, anticipating the writing of his brief and notes for the Colinger case which came up tomorrow.

That evening, he transferred his documents to the new briefcase.

"Never look a gift horse in the mouth," he told Julia. "After all, my old case was beginning to look a little shabby. Going out again?"

She nodded. "You know this is my bowling night. And afterward, we girls usually go somewhere for a bite. So I may be late. . . ."

After she had gone, Rutledge, fortified with a glass of port, moved through the silence of the house to his desk, lit the gooseneck lamp and made ready to write his brief and notes. He was a habitual note writer, never trusting his memory for details he intended to use the following day. Buchanan had once chided him on this.

"Must you read everything you say in court?" he said. "Aren't you afraid the jury will think you're a record player?"

Rutledge had replied rather testily that it was better to have the jury think that than for him to forget or slip by pertinent facts.

Now he unwrapped the foil covering from the quire of foolscap, clicked his ballpoint and began to list the things he intended to say and do in the following day's trial. It struck him as he wrote that the foolscap with its 13 by 15 size was more convenient than the regular $8\frac{1}{2}$ by 11 to which he was accustomed. This paper was of a peculiar quality. It possessed the sheen of a glossy magazine and at the same time, the rough absorbency of newsprint. Moreover, it seemed to have a surface that enabled his pen literally to fly over it. Rutledges's writing in the past had never been able to keep up with his thoughts. Now he found himself writing things even before they were fully developed in his mind.

It was exhilarating and for the first time what had always been at best a chore, he now found was a distinct pleasure. As he continued to write, the foolscap seemed to drift away out of his perspective and to give way to an

opening in space where his imagination pictured himself standing gracefully before a witness, asking questions in a deep resonant voice, making occasional perceptive comments for the benefit of the jury. But he knew the mental picture was not realistic. He was not the handsome, forceful barrister he saw in his mind's eye. Still, it was pleasant to sit there and dream as he wrote.

Presently he became aware that midnight had come and gone. Julia had not returned. He got up, crossed to the phone and called the bowling alley. When he hung up a moment later, there was a deep scowl on his face.

Julia had not gone to the bowling alley!

All the nagging suspicions that had been dormant within him these past weeks abruptly surged to the foreground. The many nights Julia had been away and now the palpable excuses she had given for her absence. As yet, his suspicions had included no man, but now he was sure one was in the background somewhere. On impulse he picked up the phone directory and ran his finger down the column until it stopped under the heading: *Private Investigator.*

The detective was a good man. During the following weeks, he reported to Rutledge five times and the worst of Rutledge's fears were realized. Julia was two-timing him. She had gone to several night clubs and one racy party, always with the same man. But when the investigator told Rutledge the name of that man, it hit him like a thunderbolt.

Paul Buchanan!

In a dazed voice, Rutledge gave his orders. "Keep watching her," he said. "I want to know every place she goes."

With his wife's infidelity uppermost in his mind, his work in court would have suffered, had it not been for his copious notes scribbled on the foolscap. Indeed those notes were not only complete, they opened new avenues in the Colinger case that he himself had not anticipated. He found himself referring to them more and more as the trial progressed and he also found himself reading facts that he didn't even remember

writing, though his scrawled penmanship was unmistakable. With the aid of those notes, he introduced details into the alibi of his client that caused the district attorney to peer at him sharply. After the day's session, he approached Rutledge and remarked about it.

"You were clever today, Rutledge," he said. "I don't know where you got all that material on the garotte. You must have been busy with your research."

Rutledge smiled. The fact was he hadn't done any research on the garotte at all, but the facts were there in his writing on the foolscap.

Any satisfaction he may have had over the day's session, however, was wiped away by another call from his investigator.

Julia had done the ultimate this time. She and Buchanan had checked into the Green Lantern Motel out on Carcosa and checked out again a few hours later. Curiously, Rutledge felt no resentment toward his wife. He viewed her barnyard activities as something she had been tricked or lured into. But his rage at the sheer effrontery of his attorney-partner came to the boiling point.

In the days that followed, he brooded and mentally pictured a hundred different ways in which he could get retaliation and revenge. By Wednesday, it had become an obsession and he knew that Buchanan must pay the extreme penalty. Accordingly, he began to devise ways in which he could bring his thoughts to fruition. He thought of wiring an explosive to the lawyer's car but discarded that immediately. Nor could he administer poison. Such methods would be obvious and would inevitably point the finger of guilt at him. He did not rule out Buchanan's car, however, and at length, for want of anything better, decided simply to loosen the knuckle on the steering gear. Here he was aided by a couple of coincidences. Buchanan lived twenty miles out of town on 56, a comparatively narrow highway, full of hills and curves, and Rutledge knew him to be a fast

and reckless driver. Also—and this was a major part of the plan—Buchanan always had his car serviced at the same filling station, where he was known to carry large sums of money on his person. The attendant at the station happened to be an ex-con who had served five to ten for B. and E. at the state pen at Ludlow. With his record, it needed only Rutledge to leave behind a few clues to have the guilt of the wrecked car laid at his doorstep. But then came the annoying thought that there was no assurance that Buchanan would be anything but injured when the car did go out of control.

Still Rutledge had his mind made up and the decision gave him a certain tranquility. Whatever happened to Buchanan, injury or death, he never for one moment doubted his marital status. Rutledge reasoned that once his attorney-partner was out of the way, even if it wasn't permanently, his wife, Julia, would forget all the attraction and glamour that surrounded Buchanan and would return to being a wife both in spirit and body again.

Meanwhile, fascinated in a vague and uncertain way by the successful results of his notes on the foolscap, he began to enlarge on them, to record facts in greater detail. He was aware that in some unexplained manner, the paper lent a magic quality to those notes. When he sat down at his desk, switched on the gooseneck lamp and began to move his pen over the pages of the quire, a strange mental clarity and deep perceptiveness seemed to steal over him.

Once again, his investigator reported. Once again his wife and Buchanan had spent hours at the motel. With a cold implacable hatred, Rutledge set about to put his plan into action.

But carefully considered though the plan was, it was doomed to failure. Sometime during the preceding week, the ex-con had quit his job as attendant at the filling station. Rutledge must try something else.

And soon. Each day at the office, the two lawyers played a cat-and-mouse game. Buchanan smilingly gracious and friendly in a way that not only infuriated

Rutledge but made it difficult not to reveal that he knew all.

At length, he could stand it no longer. He threw caution to the winds, gave up any idea of finding a patsy on whom to put the blame. He simply followed Buchanan on his way to the parking lot, stole up behind him and delivered a killing blow with a piece of lead pipe.

He trundled the body into the trunk of his car and drove out Pulvada to Cheshire, cut in on the interstate freeway and followed that for three miles, then turned off into a side road that angled to Pither's Point, a picnic area he was familiar with and which would be deserted at this hour. He dragged the body into some bushes near the lake shore, made sure he left no tell-tale footprints or tire tracks and returned home with an inner satisfaction.

The following day was the Armstrong case and Rutledge, calm and sure of himself, now found his notes enabled him to put up a defense that until then had been weak. As he strode back and forth before the jury with the foolscap in his hand, his voice seemed to undergo a change, to become deeper, more resonant, more forceful. His marshalling of the facts constituted a brilliance that amazed even himself. Try though the district attorney would, he could not break down the defense. The jury sat in rapt attention, hypnotized by Rutledge's personality. He found that when he put the foolscap aside momentarily, the spell was broken and he lost command of the situation. Hastily he picked it up again. The jury was out barely an hour. A verdict of not guilty was announced.

On Thursday of the following week, the body of Paul Buchanan was found.

This time coincidence played right into Rutledge's hands. A small-time hood, Skip Lomier, had been picked up in the picnic area and released for insufficient evidence on a narcotic-selling charge. After the body was found, an A.P.B. went out for him and within hours he was back in custody. That same afternoon,

Rutledge received a call from the county jail. Lomier had asked to see him.

But the lawyer was unprepared for the reason why.

"Listen," Lomier said, "I ain't takin' no murder rap. They tell me you're one of the best mouthpieces in the city, that you got both Colinger and Armstrong off. I want you to go to bat for me too. I can pay," he added quickly. "I got some cash socked away that I was fixin' to . . . Well, never mind, I can pay. Name your price."

The irony of it amused Rutledge. If he could free Lomier, he would salve his conscience a little by removing the guilt from an innocent man, and assuming Lomier really had money, pick up some change for himself.

Although the court calendar was crowded as usual, indignation that a fellow barrister was a victim of foul play had moved the Lomier trial up to an early hearing. As a result, Rutledge found himself preparing his brief a scant three weeks later. He had made a play of interviewing Lomier several times and the only thing that concerned him was the fact that he knew the prosecution had two witnesses who were willing to swear they had seen Lomier drag a body into the lake-shore bushes.

"It wasn't me," Lomier insisted. "It was somebody else, I tell you. A lot of people look like me. Same height, same color hair, same build. You, for instance. Even you could look like me in half light."

Rutledge gave him a sharp look. "We'll have to admit you were in the park for a drop. After all, a narco charge, even if it sticks, is better than homicide. But I'll have to work on those two witnesses. As you say, the light wasn't good."

He wrote the first draft of his brief and all his notes on the last remaining pages of the quire of foolscap. Then he set about to console his wife who was in a mild state of shock since the death of Paul Buchanan.

At last came the day of the Lomier trial.

"I'm afraid you're out of luck this time," the district attorney said as they both entered the courthouse.

"We've got an airtight case against Lomier, and you know it. He's going to burn."

Rutledge smiled. "Perhaps," was all he said.

He began his defense by boldly introducing a well-known junkie who admitted he was in the park to meet Lomier and make a heroin buy. But when he cross-questioned the two witnesses, he found it difficult to break down their statements of having seen the defendant carry a body through the bushes to the lake shore.

Nevertheless, his oratory as he carried the foolscap notes in his hand was so dramatic and convincing it was evident the jury was wavering. That same mystique, that same phantom quality which seemed to emanate from the paper, spread an aura around him and transformed him into another person. It colored his words, lent power and resonance to his voice. It made his movements dramatic and graceful.

And then abruptly, Rutledge faced the jury. Now he felt an overpowering compulsion to read directly from the foolscap each and every word that was written there. He couldn't help himself. His voice became louder, succinct, enunciating each syllable with pointed clarity. But what was he reading? In God's name, what was he reading? In his penmanship, yes, but the sentences were strange to his sight. He was conscious of a sudden hush falling over the courtroom. His voice seemed distant now, almost inaudible. Then like a delayed tape, it came booming back to him as from a different dimension, another world.

". . . and I struck him on the head, and when I knew he was dead, I put the body in my car and drove to the picnic area. Yes, I killed him. He violated the sanctity of my home. He stole my wife. He deserved to die. . . ."

It was a confession, detailed and damning, and the shock that swept over the court was matched only by the shock that struck Rutledge. In vain, he tried to recall his words. In vain, he tried to explain.

When he saw it was useless, he turned and began to edge away from the jury box. Slowly he began to move toward the back of the room . . . slowly . . . increasing his

pace as he headed toward the door. Escape . . . that was all that was in his mind now. If he could . . .

Behind him, the judge's voice sounded, loud and commanding, "Bailiff, stop that man!"

THE CHADWICK PIT

> The country of Sleep has no borders, but many roads, and the Dream Traveler needs no visa.
>
> Giles Balinton
> *Images and Fancies*

CHADWICK WALKED SLOWLY up the lane and gazed with satisfaction at his property. The more he saw of it, the more he considered it a stroke of luck. It wasn't often that one could buy ten acres of land and a house of his particular needs for the small amount he had paid. He had wanted a house, modern, yet with an architecture of the past, in an isolated location where he could continue the recluse-like existence he had led in the city.

Owego House answered all those wants. Owego. It was an Indian name, he had been told.

Seen through a copse of cedars, the house looked friendly and inviting, with a wide veranda, oversized burgundy shutters and a new substantial roof tile. Then Chadwick's gaze turned fifty yards east. If Owego was an odd name for a house, Dead Man's Pit was an appropriate name for the great sink hole that marked the end of his property.

Here were rank weeds, thorn bushes and ragged outcroppings. In the center of this wasteland was a deep

depression filled with water so black it didn't even reflect the sky. The borders were strewn with rocks.

Sight of the place depressed Chadwick, and he turned back down the lane toward his house. In the driveway, his parked station wagon reminded him that his weekly trip to town for supplies was overdue. He got into the car and headed toward blacktop 3.

In Chaska, he parked and went to several shops where he talked very little to the tradespeople. In the hardware store, however, he found conversation pressed upon him.

"How do you like your new place?" the hardware man said as he packaged the nails Chadwick had purchased.

"I like it all right," Chadwick said.

"It's a nice house," the man said, "considering that it's been there close to a hundred years."

"I thought a hundred years ago this was all Indian country."

The old man rang up the register. "Farther north, mebbe. Not here. But that Pit on your place was once an old Indian burial mound. The first two owners dug it all up, looking for treasure or somethin'."

"Did they find any?" Chadwick asked.

"I don't think so. The first was before my time, but he's supposed to have shot himself. Accidentally. The second just went away and never came back. Nobody ever saw or heard of him."

Chadwick turned to go. "Well, it's an eyesore," he said. "I suppose I'll have it filled up one of these days."

The man's face darkened perceptibly. "I don't think I'd do that," he said. "If I were you, I'd just leave it alone."

Chadwick went out to his car, musing over the merchant's words. He tossed his packages into the rear seat. The August street was hot and sultry and by contrast, the library on the opposite corner a block away, shaded by a couple of elms, looked cool and inviting. On impulse, he crossed the street, walked the block and climbed the steps. Inside, to the girl behind the desk, he said, "I'd like some information on the building of a

summer house. Plans . . . pictures . . . anything you have."

She was gone almost ten minutes. When she returned, she looked at Chadwick with interest.

"You rarely hear of such things anymore. Are you planning to build one yourself?"

She was attractive in a fragile way, with long dark hair and lustrous eyes. It had been a long time since Chadwick had been attracted to a girl, but now he felt himself talking without restraint. She was a ready listener. Before leaving, he learned her name, Emily Hunter. With a lighter step than he had known for years, he went out again into the blazing street.

Chaska was an old town, built along the Minnesota River. A German settlement with the characteristic neatness evident on all sides, its streets were redolent with the summer musk from the bottomlands. The county seat courthouse faced the center park, and as Chadwick strode past, a heavy-set, redfaced man with a wide brimmed hat came out and hailed him. It was the sheriff, Tom Blunt.

"Just wondered how you were gettin' along," Blunt said, lighting a cigar with a kitchen match.

"I'm okay," Chadwick said.

"You figgerin' on stayin' in your new place alone?"

"I don't suppose there's any law that says a man has to have a regiment around him," Chadwick replied testily.

Blunt grinned. "No law. Only your place is pretty far out."

"I'm used to being alone."

"What are you figgerin' on doin' with the Pit?"

"What do you mean, what am I going to do with it?"

"Well, it's a dangerous place. The Caston boy drowned there a year ago. He'd been studyin' anthropology and he was lookin' for relics."

All this talk about what he considered the one disagreeable feature of his property irritated Chadwick. "I suppose I'll have it filled up," he said.

It was the second time that day he had made that statement, and for the second time it prompted an odd reply.

"I don't think it's necessary to do that," Blunt said quickly. "Why don't you just fence it off and put up a few warning signs?"

Chadwick said that he would consider the matter and as soon as he decently could, he broke away, returned to his car and headed back for home.

For several weeks after that, he busied himself repairing the veranda railing—some of the rungs had rotted out—tidying up the grounds and poring over the construction books that Emily had selected for him. It was true that he had wanted a summer house for a long time. Such a building had lingered in his memories since childhood, and it was the desire for one that had been a major reason behind his move from the city.

He decided to build a conventional structure with a stonework lower portion and a screened upper part open to the air. Most of the material he could obtain in Chaska. The stones for the lower portion were available close at hand—in the Pit.

He went to the sink hole, selected the stones with care and trundled them in a barrow to the house grounds. The work was hard and he was disconcerted to find himself so completely exhausted. Not only did he have tired muscles, but the task, particularly while he was at the Pit, for some reason affected his eyes. Once he fancied he saw a head-shaped rock in the center come to life and move toward him, and once, when he peered down into the black water, he thought he saw an elongated shadow like a sea serpent writhe and twist just below the surface.

But all his troubles vanished several weeks later when the summer house, with the aid of two Chaska youths, was finally completed. Quickly the building molded itself into his life. He began to spend the long summer afternoons there. A strange quality of contentment fell over him as he sat at the little iron table in the circular room, drinking juleps from a frosty glass. He installed a couch and passed the sultry nights stretched

out upon it. To his surprise, he found that sleep, which had always been a problem with him, now came with ease.

His sleep, however, was marred by dreams.

Like all men, Chadwick had had his share of dreams since childhood. And as with most persons, these dreams were usually disconnected, distorted and marked by complete lack of logic. Now, however, they were different.

Though he could remember no details, he now retained three impressions upon awakening: search, flight, and pursuit by persons or things unknown. What he was searching for was not always female. The "flight" followed immediately, whether the search was successful or not. He fled panic-stricken with leaden feet, unable to run or hurry. The "pursuit" was a relentless thing that followed him and constituted a horror from which he knew there was no escape. These dreams formed a cohesive unit too. That is, the action continued chronologically from one night to another.

But the aspect that was incredible, which he could not at first make himself believe, was the fact that these dreams came only when he slept in the summer house. On those occasions when he spent the night in the house bedroom, the sequence was broken, and he either did not dream at all or his sleeping fantasies were the usual bland meaningless affairs of before.

Sometimes he awoke in the middle of the night, bathed in perspiration, shaking with fear, to discover odd things: the door unlocked or his clothes piled in an disorderly heap in the middle of the floor. Yet the very anticipation of those dreams affected him like an opiate and he could not force himself to stay away from the summer house.

On a morning following several nights when the dreams had been particularly enervating, Chadwick was on his veranda when Sheriff Blunt drove up.

"In the neighborhood," Blunt said, "so I thought I'd stop by. Seen any strangers around?"

"I haven't seen anybody," Chadwick said.

"Then you haven't heard what's happened the last few days?"

Chadwick shook his head. "I haven't been to town in more than a week."

"We've had a murder," Blunt said. "And a disappearance which might well be a second."

Chadwick stared.

"We found Jim Evan's wife—he's the Chaska jeweler—strangled in a ditch along 41. And Irene Trask hasn't been seen since Wednesday night.

"I've got two deputies working around the clock," Blunt continued, "but so far we haven't come up with anything. You'd better keep an eye out, living all alone out here."

Chadwick got up and walked to the end of the veranda. He came back slowly and sat down again. A distant look entered his eyes.

"A long time ago," he said haltingly, "it must have been around '55—I did a hitch on the Chicago police force. That's ancient history, of course, but I'd be glad to help in any way I can."

Blunt nodded. "I may take you up on that," he said. "Did you know a detective sergeant named Fallon? I think he was in Chicago about that time."

"I don't recall the name."

In spite of the police background that he had mentioned, Chadwick was disturbed by the sheriff's warning. After Blunt had gone, he began a search of his grounds, although he had no idea what he was looking for. The doom which had seemed to lie in wait for him in his dreams now became almost a reality. He was chagrined to find himself glancing over his shoulder at every wind-tossed clump of foliage.

In the back of the house, facing the direction of the Pit, he found one of the lower windows open. But there were no footprints near, so he attributed it to his own negligence. There were, however, footprints leading to the driveway where he parked his car. Not far away was a little pile of cigarette stubs, as if someone had stood there a long time. Then he saw that they were his brand and realized that he must have forgotten being there.

His car gave him more concern. Though he couldn't be sure, the gas supply seemed less than when he had last driven. But it would have been impossible for anyone to have taken the car without awakening him, even though the driveway was some distance from the house. He had a vague impression of night driving and of walking in the darkness. But this, he knew, was only a residue of his summer house dreams. For years he had never gone anyplace after sundown. The loneliness of his property began to weigh on him. He had the unpleasant feeling of being watched by unseen eyes.

On Friday he drove to Chaska. The town was in a state of excitement. The body of the missing girl, Irene Trask, had been found strangled and there was another disappearance. Sheriff Blunt stood on the courthouse steps talking to his deputies and a state police officer.

Chadwick went into the library to return the construction books. He found Emily Hunter almost in a state of hysteria. She told him the missing girl, Mary Philbin, was one of her closest friends.

"I can't understand why anyone would want to harm her," she said. "She was liked by everybody."

"A tall, thin girl with reddish hair?"

"Yes. Do you know her?"

He shook his head. "I've probably seen her around town." In an effort to calm her, he changed the subject and talked of casual things. She quieted and smiled a little.

"Anyone would know you're a bachelor," she said. "You're wearing one black sock and one brown. And you really should stay out of the mud, Mr. Chadwick. Tell me, did you finish your summer house?"

Chadwick nodded. "Yes, but I'm afraid the job was a little too much for me. I had help on all except the stonework."

"Where did you get the stones?"

"In the Pit. That's a sort of sink hole on my property."

Her face clouded. "Yes, I know the Pit. You shouldn't have taken the stones from there, Mr. Chadwick."

"Why not?"

She fingered her pendent. "Let's just say it isn't a healthy place. It . . . has an evil reputation."

"Yes, I know," Chadwick said. "The Caston boy drowned there a year ago, but he was . . ."

"Billy Caston was one of the finest swimmers in Carver County."

Back home, Chadwick tried to think more of his days as a police officer. He had told Blunt that he was on the Chicago force in '55. But he could recall little of that work save a few trips in a prowl car and even these were hazy, like the recollection of an old gangster movie.

It now occurred to him that there were still some parts of his house that he had not fully examined. It seemed to him as good a time as any to do a little exploring. He took a flashlight and descended to the cellar. There were actually two cellars, one opening off the other, but there was nothing in either except a plenitude of cobwebs and some empty boxes. He went up on the second floor and prowled down the corridor. Toward the rear he came upon a room he had not entered before. Here a wan shaft of sunlight filtered through a dirty pane to reveal a few pieces of discarded furniture and a carpet grey with dust. About to leave, he saw a large cabinet, almost hidden by a pile of drapery. It was filled with books.

Chadwick stepped closer and ran his eyes over the titles. They were a curious assortment. Many were cheap novels of a generation ago, but there were also a few authoritative volumes on psychology, psychic research, strange myths and primitive beliefs. One of the last bore the title, *The Prehistoric Hopewell Culture.*

Chadwick riffled through the pages. He stopped at a passage marked with a pencil check:

> An utterly strange culture preceded the North American Indian by several thousand years. It was unique for its complex burial mounds and its so-called "Cult of the Dead."
>
> It is the warnings of this Cult of the Dead which have come down to us through the mists of the past. Defilers

of the burial mounds were promised all the avenging horrors of the culture's diabology.

Chadwick closed the book thoughtfully. He selected several psychology volumes which, at the moment, were of more interest to him and carried them downstairs. He had become increasingly concerned with dreams the last few days and each of the books had one or more chapters on this subject. For his nightmares in the summer house had grown more and more disturbing. Although he still could remember no specific details upon awakening, the three impressions—search, flight and pursuit—continued. Now the "search" was intensified, a powerful urge to seek out something. The "flight" too was more frantic. And the "pursuit" was a nameless terror that followed him relentlessly.

These dreams were debilitating too. They left Chadwick exhausted, almost as if he had not slept at all. Yet though he knew that he had only to move from the summer house to end them, somehow he couldn't do that. It was as if he were taking a stimulant, sweet, bitter, unpleasant, habit-forming.

Late on a cheerless morning, three days after his trip to Chaska, he was awakened by a distant pistol shot. Ten minutes later, Sheriff Blunt appeared at the edge of his grounds, followed by one of his deputies.

"Thought we saw him," Blunt said disgustedly. "But it was only this jacket hanging on a bush."

"We traced him across Barlow's Swamp," Blunt continued. "He seemed to be heading for the Pit. Then Jake here saw the jacket and took a shot. But the trail was cold. Have you seen anyone?"

"Not a soul," Chadwick said. "Have there been any more killings?"

Blunt looked at his deputy and frowned. "No," he said, "no more murders. But another disappearance. I believe you know her. The Hunter girl."

Chadwick's jaw went slack. "Not Emily!" he cried. He made fists of his hands. "Blunt," he said after a long moment of silence, "you've got to deputize me. If you don't, I'll go on my own."

The sheriff nodded sympathetically. "All right," he said. "I understand."

After Blunt had gone, Chadwick went into his house and looked for his revolver. He found a gun; it wasn't a police special but an old Webley Scott automatic. Outside, he got into his station wagon and drove fast to Blacktop 3. There were a thousand places he could search. Emily Hunter lived close to Chaska on 41, but almost automatically he headed in the opposite direction toward the Victoria cutoff. He didn't know why he did this. He had never driven the cutoff, yet a recollection of this road seemed to come to him. His mind seethed. If only it had been someone else. The thought struck him that his actions now were repetitive, like scenes from a movie run many times. And then abruptly the spell was broken. He looked upon his surroundings with complete unfamiliarity. Puzzled, he turned the car and headed for home.

In the central room, he buried his head in his hands. He must do something . . . He must think. . . .

From the table he took up one of the psychology books he had brought down from the little room upstairs. As if it had been read many times at that place, the book fell open to the chapter on dreams. Half unconsciously, Chadwick began to read:

> The dream is the least understood part of the human psyche. The distortion, irrationality and lack of logical coherence which characterize many of them are no doubt the result of a multitude of subliminal perceptions and is almost impossible to explain.

He turned a page:

> No interpretation of the dream can be made without liberal references to mythology, folklore and primitive beliefs such as witchcraft, lycanthropy, etc. It is a curious fact that the dreamer need have no prior knowledge of these cabala. They are universal in their distribution.

Chadwick discarded the book and took up another. It too opened of its own accord to the dream chapter:

> In 1945 the Belgian, Anatole Arman, quoted the case of a man who, while asleep, not only noctambulated a considerable distance but also lived a life completely divorced from his waking hours. Yet he had no knowledge of that life. To offset this, he created for himself a fantasy past. Such cases are extremely rare and it is thought that only some malignant influence could induce such a condition.

Chadwick's eyes drifted from the page to the table. There, where he had emptied his pockets upon coming in from outside, were a couple of objects he didn't remember seeing before: a length of window sash cord with each end carefully bound with tape to prevent fraying, and a short piece of rounded wood with a wide, deep notch cut about six inches from one end. He looked at them, puzzled, for the moment unable to explain their presence.

It was now several hours since Sheriff Blunt had told him about Emily Hunter, and he suddenly realized he had done absolutely nothing. A confused picture flashed before his inner eye of her, standing at his side, now running before him. He gathered up his things from the table, went back out to his car and headed for Chaska. He seemed to be viewing his surroundings through a prism, with everything strange and out of proportion. At the town outskirts, a car suddenly pulled diagonally across the road in front of his, blocking the way.

The sheriff emerged and approached. "Oh, it's you. We're stoppin' all cars. Where you headin', Chadwick?"

Chadwick spread his hands on the wheel.

"Well, there's no sense to our drivin' two cars," Blunt said. "I'll go along with you."

He walked back, drove his car onto the side of the road, and a moment later climbed in beside Chadwick.

Uncertainly, Chadwick shifted gears. For some time he drove in silence. Then he burst into speech.

"We can't just go blind! You must have some idea . . ."

"No, I haven't." The sheriff's face was immobile. "We don't know if Emily Hunter is alive or dead. We do

know that with the other two victims there was an interlude of about forty hours between the time of their disappearance and their death. We know that both were kept alive in one place and then taken somewhere else to be murdered. I'm hoping the killer will keep to the same schedule. If he does, we may have a small margin of time left."

"Why would he do that?" Chadwick heard himself ask.

The sheriff shrugged. "There's no explaining a psychotic killer. I figure he can go just so far in his lust for blood, then he cools. When the urge comes upon him again, he goes back and finishes the job.

"But why forty hours?"

"After a day and a night, I suppose he's got to sleep."

Blunt was a fool, Chadwick thought. A busybody and a fool. Not even a good sheriff. The car swung past Houseman's Woods. When another fork appeared, he swung into it.

"Now you're going in a circle."

"I know." Chadwick did not say that a strange compulsion was guiding his movements.

"When you were in Chicago, did you ever run into a case of this kind?" The sheriff seemed to be talking only to pass the time.

"No."

"Know anything about fingerprints?"

"I know Bertillon discovered them."

"How about ballistics?"

Chadwick shook his head.

"Most premeditary criminals don't use guns anymore. They make too much noise and bullets can be traced. They prefer a knife."

"Knives can be traced too," Chadwick said.

"I suppose so," Blunt said. "But that pretty well exhausts the field."

"There's the garotte." Chadwick's words were automatic.

"Oh, yes. The garotte. But I'd hardly call that a weapon, would you?"

"Yes, I would," Chadwick said. "It goes back to the fifteenth century. In Spain it was a method of injuring the spinal cord at the base of the brain."

"I didn't know that. Have you done much reading along those lines?"

"It used to be my hobby," Chadwick said.

Blunt expelled a mouthful of smoke. "Where are we? Oh, yes, the old Lake Virginia road."

"It comes to the Pit from the other side," Chadwick said. "Nobody uses it anymore."

The road was deep-rutted and the willows along the narrow shoulders pressed close. Presently the forlorn wasteland that was the Pit opened before them.

It was a different view than Blunt was accustomed to seeing. From this angle, the loneliness of the place was more pronounced. The piles of rock were larger and the black water left only a thin corridor for the car to pass. Then this too ended and Blunt understood why the road was no longer used. It should be posted "Dead-End," he thought.

Chadwick stopped the car. He got out and like an automaton, body stiff, muscles unflexed, began to pace slowly along the water's edge. His gait was shambling, uneven. He stared straight ahead with all the fixed intensity of a sleepwalker.

Quietly Blunt began to follow a few steps behind.

And now, what seemed like Chadwick's destination loomed up, an ugly cairn of black boulders fashioned by nature into a grotto-like structure with a jagged opening on one side and a roof formed by an uptilted rock slab.

Suddenly with a hoarse cry, Chadwick stopped and turned. "Over there!" he cried. "Behind you! Back of that rock!"

Even as Blunt spun around in obeyance to the command, he realized his mistake. But before he could move, a rope encircled his throat, twisted tight with lightning rapidity and choked off his windpipe. The garotte!

He jerked both hands upward in vain effort to tear it away. His throat constricted as his breath was shut off. With the wooden fulcrum turning, exerting double

strength, he felt his senses begin to leave him, blackness rise up to shroud his vision. His legs buckled.

But with a final lunge born of desperation, his right hand reached down and grasped his holstered revolver. He clawed the weapon free, twisted his body sideways, spun the gun barrel down and back and fired.

The shot echoed across the Pit. Behind him, Chadwick uttered a low cry and released his grip. The garotte fell free. Blunt swiveled, brought back his left arm and delivered a final blow. Chadwick fell, almost at the opening of the cairn.

In that opening a third figure now became visible, a girl bound hand and foot, her mouth gagged with a wad of cloth. The sheriff gave a sigh of relief as he saw that she was still alive. And minutes later he assured himself that Emily Hunter was unharmed. He carried her across to the car and lifted her gently into the seat.

"Take it easy, Miss," he said. "I'll have you out of here in a moment."

With Chadwick, he was not so gentle. He saw that his bullet had struck the other man's thigh and although not serious, was completely incapacitating. Nevertheless, he snapped on handcuffs and half dragged him to the car. He turned the car around and headed up the Virginia road. At the fork, he swung left toward Chaska.

"You've been a busy man," he said to Chadwick. "And you'll pay, one way or another, even though you didn't know what you were doing."

Smoke of the Snake

First Edition

1994

Smoke of the Snake by Carl Jacobi was published by Fedogan & Bremer of Minneapolis, Minnesota. Eleven hundred copies have been printed from Antiqua by the Maple Press Company.

About the artists:

Jon Arfstrom began his artistic career in the early Fifties as a free-lance illustrator and cover artist for the original *Weird Tales* magazine. He provided cover art for two other Fedogan & Bremer books, *Colossus* and *The Early Fears*. Recently retired, he lives with his wife in Arden Hills, a suburb of St. Paul, Minnesota.

Rodger Gerberding illustrated *Colossus* for Fedogan & Bremer in 1989. Since then he has gone on to provide cover art and/or interior illustrations for *Obsessions* edited by Gary Raisor (Dark Harvest), *Shrines and Desecrations* by Brian Hodge (TAL), and *Swamp Fetus* by Poppy Z. Brite (Borderlands). Forthcoming books include *Sex and the Single Vampire* by Nancy Kilpatrick (TAL) and *Dark Iowa, Bright Iowa* edited by James Roberts (Whitehawk). He lives in Council Bluffs, Iowa.

DEATH STALKS THE NIGHT

by Hugh B. Cave

This new collection by the award-winning author of *Murgunstrumm and Others* consists of eleven weird menace novelettes from the Thirties. Originally scheduled as a Carcosa release, the stories in *Death Stalks the Night* were selected by Karl Edward Wagner, who also provides the introduction. Contents include "Terror Island," "Unholy Night," "Mistress of the Dead," and "Death's Loving Arms."

Trade edition: $29.00
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About the author:

Carl Jacobi was for years a major contributor to the now-legendary pulp magazine, *Weird Tales*, where he earned early and staunch support from H. P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, and Robert E. Howard. Although best known for his macabre fiction, Jacobi also wrote science fiction, weird-menace yarns, and adventure stories. The prestigious Arkham House published his first three collections of horror and dark fantasy—*Revelations in Black* (1947), *Portraits in Moonlight* (1964), and *Disclosures in Scarlet* (1972). *East of Samarinda*, a major collection of his exotic adventure fiction, came out in 1989. Carl Jacobi lives in Minneapolis.

About the Editor:

R. Dixon Smith is the author of *Lost in the Rentharpian Hills: Spanning the Decades with Carl Jacobi* (1985), *Jeremy Brett and David Burke: An Adventure in Canonical Fidelity* (1986), and *Ronald Colman, Gentleman of the Cinema: A Biography and Filmography* (1991). He edited and introduced *East of Samarinda* (1989), an earlier collection of Carl Jacobi's fiction. He is currently writing a biography of Joseph Payne Brennan and, with Thomas R. Tietzi, a critical study of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's vast literary output. He lives in Cambridge, England, with his wife, Paula, and their four cats.

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