NOT AT NIGHT

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NOT AT NIGHT

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MONSTERS OF THE PIT

PAUL S. POWERS

HOW did I lose my left arm? Well, gentlemen, I have felt that question coming for a long time, and to tell the truth about the matter, I rather dreaded it. For, as well as I have grown to know you during these lonesome nights at the club, I never thought the time would come when I could unburden my mind. I don't expect that you will believe me, either you, Bronson, or Roberts, here. I tried to tell the story once before, to a French doctor at Port Said. He laughed at me at first, and thought me insane afterwards. I won't blame you for doing the same. Sometimes I hardly believe the story myself. It seems more like a nightmare than a reality. But here's the proof, gentlemen —this poor stump that was once a fairly serviceable left arm. It looks like a neat surgical operation, doesn't it? But it took my wife three weeks to get it off.

Waiter! Bring the vermouth! There, thank you. You look startled, gentlemen. Perhaps you'd better have a drop of the wine to take the chill of the London fog from your bones. Beastly night, outside. No, I wasn't joking, Bronson, and if you'll be so good as to hand me a cigarette, I'll tell the tale—spin the yarn, as you Americans put it. You won't believe the story, but that makes little

difference. I think there is a little saying in your country : "If you believe it, it's true."

It happened four years ago when I was down at Port Said with the engineering company. I was a single man, then, with not a thought in the world other than to take my good money while I could get it, and to get out when there was no more to be had. It was good pay, but rotten work in a rottener country. The town wasn't bad for a head-quarters, but it was the trips into the interior that broke us down—from the chief engineer to Tubbs, the youngest apprentice. A year or two and the average man was done, in that country. I saw three white men sent back to the coast on litters, and two more went back in a more gruesome condition. When it wasn't the fever it was the insects, and usually it was both. The snakes and the flies weren't so bad, for a man can kill them, or some of them, but I'll never forget the breath of those awful swamps nor the touch of those ungodly creeping things that were bound to be in your boots in the morning and on your cot at night.

Well, it was half way across the nigger country that stretches between the company offices and Suakin. There were seven of us white men and a party of blacks. One of the black boys, however, I really grew to like and trust. He knew the country, the desert, and the jungle ; and he knew mules. He was in charge of the string we had with us. Kali was this remarkable fellow's name, and I suppose I am the only one who now remembers it.

Can you imagine seeing a beautiful English girl in a filthy native town in the depths of Africa ? I couldn't either, until I saw her. Gad ! She was

white, and young ! When I met her in that market place, with a basket on her arm and dressed like a nun, I got the biggest thrill of my life. She was about eighteen, and though I didn't see the beauty of her at the time, I was shocked beyond words. I learned afterward that I was the first Englishman she had ever seen, with the exception of her father—but more of that later. Just that glimpse was all I had that day, but it was enough to set me thinking.

The chief only laughed when I reached the camp with the news, but the chief was a steady old blighter with grandchildren in Southsea, so I didn't wonder. It was the same when I told the other men—they thought I had been drinking. But it was true, and, of course, I asked Kali.

" Why, that is the daughter of the dread father, the mad white man," he winked over the cigarette I had given him. " But no—all white men are mad."

" And who," I asked, " is this white man ? "

" A learned man," grinned Kali, " but mad, all the same. He was here when my father was as I am, and even then he was mad. If he was not mad, would he creep in the swamps and in the sand, even as the insects ? "

" But how does he live ? "

" Ah, he has gold—English gold. Two times, sometimes three times a year, he goes to the coast and brings back all manner of strange things. Wanaki, one of his blacks, once told me that he brought back devils in tiny bottles, from the English ships. To uncork the bottle means death—a terrible swelling death. Wanaki told of his devils and how a black boy died even as cattle die from the cobra.

But there was no snake—there was only a white powder."

"Does the girl go with him on his trips to Port Said?"

"If she had, Wanaki would have told me. The girl child is made to stay with the black women. The white man is mad, and if you take the advice of Kali you will forget the white child woman in the long black dress."

Kali looked very wise indeed, and I believe he wanted another cigarette. I cursed him sourly and left him to his mules.

The sight of the woman had set something loose within me. You know well how it is in the wilderness, and it had been long weeks since we had left Port Said. To be sure, there were women there—of a kind. I wanted to know this girl, at least to learn something of her history. Kali's gossip had aroused my curiosity, though I did not believe him. Kali's great sin was his love for talk and his hatred for bare facts. But I vowed to see the girl again.

I'll pass over briefly the days that followed. The very afternoon following my talk with Kali I saw her again, but only a glimpse and she was gone. Then several days passed, and during them I learned more about the girl and her father. His name was Denham, a doctor, it appeared, with several letters tacked after his name—a scientist. Those were all the facts I could gather, and what he was doing and had been doing the past twenty years was a mystery. Collecting bugs? Possibly. But Kali and the blacks swore that it was more than that—by the burial pits of their fathers it was more than that. He was a devil-devil doctor, and

made the milk of the cows turn sour. He was a man-witch who poisoned the swamps, and talked with the spiders at evil hours of the night. He was also a number of other undesirable things, according to the superstitious Kali, who continued to divulge more or less valuable information over my cigarettes.

Then came the day when I met the girl face to face. And that day I learned more than ever before, though what I heard scarcely satisfied me.

The girl was timid, and though she permitted me to walk with her a short distance, I left her more disturbed than before. "Yes," she said, "she was English, though born in Africa." She had never seen England, having been no further than Port Said, and then only once, when a mere baby. Her mother? She did not remember her mother, and she had never heard the English tongue spoken except by her father. This was practically all she told me, but it made me long to hear more.

On that short walk with her I learned several important details, not the least important of which was the fact that she was even prettier than I had at first supposed. And she had been well educated—the professor evidently was an excellent teacher—and she had mentioned books, many books. The next morning I was waiting in the market place.

She came. It was more than I had hoped. Why bore you with details, gentlemen? I met her again and again, and grew to know her better than myself. Yes, I was in love, and beyond that there's no explanation needed, I'm sure.

We talked of many things during that first short week of our acquaintance, and on one subject only was she elusive: her father. Of her father only,

she would not speak. When I spoke of him she would turn away with a look on her face much akin to fear. But perhaps I was mistaken. As we grew more intimate it grew upon me that her father, even if he was the dreadful being Kali had made him out to be, was at least a wonderful scholar. I could read it in this child. She was wonderful. In most respects she astounded me with her learning, and then at other times she would show an ignorance that was pathetic. The man she called father had moulded her mind to suit his will, but there is that something about a woman's mind, gentlemen, that no earthly cunning can twist from its course. I began to read it in her eyes that she cared for me more than her innocence knew. I haven't told you her name. It was Irene Denham.

"I would like very much to meet your father," I ventured, one evening. "Doesn't he know that you are meeting me here?"

She hesitated.

"I have told him of you, Scott," she admitted. "And—well, he doesn't exactly approve. Of course, it's because he doesn't know you," she added hastily, "but when I suggested that you visit us at our home on the veldt, he was very angry. Father is like that—sometimes I think he hates all white men. I think it's because he's so wrapped up in his work, the work he has been carrying on for twenty years. But to-morrow, Scott, if you will come——"

I shook my head.

"Not if he disapproves of it," I began, and then I had a sudden thought. I would go and, moreover, I would come to an understanding with this man.

Surely, I had the right, at least, for I was determined to take Irene back to England with me. There was no other course open—I would see Professor Denham, and see him the very next day. I told the girl of my plans—and, well, gentlemen, I won't go into details—but she accepted them. I would meet her in the dirty little market place the next morning, we agreed, and would accompany her home.

I found Kali very much worried that night, and when I pressed for further information, and told him that I was planning to visit Professor Denham the next day, he told me bluntly that I would soon die.

"Nonsense, Kali," I laughed. "Why, I expect to find a respectable old naturalist and a fine collection of ants and butterflies. He's harmless. In my country no one is ever frightened at their doings. He's what is called a scientist, Kali."

"One of the black fellah boys from beyond the village told me to watch my mules," answered Kali. "He told me, also, that the white witch-man has been stealing his cattle. What does he do with the cattle? He takes them into dark pits within his great stone house. Tell me, do butterflies eat cattle?"

I was getting very angry, and could have taken the impudent black scoundrel by the throat with pleasure.

"Hold your tongue!" I commanded, but when I left his hut Kali was smoking one of my cigarettes, all the same. This really was getting interesting. On the morrow, I told myself, I would know just how much Kali had lied. At the time I put the

whole story down as the product of Kali's vivid if not convincing, creative imagination. I was in love. The next morning, *the* morning, I varnished my boots carefully, and put on my best khaki breeches. I would have given a small fortune for the white linen ones of the chief engineer, but I didn't dare ask him for them. It was hard enough to get away for the day.

Irene was at our rendezvous, and I received the thrill of my life when I saw that she had discarded her nun-like dress for one more fitting to the occasion. It seemed to me to be rather a makeshift affair, but it became her—it brought out beauty that I had not thought her to possess. She was a man's woman, was Irene!

"I don't know why, dear, but I dread the meeting between you and father," she murmured.

We had left the village and were climbing a baking sand dune.

"It won't be so bad," I said, cheerfully. "My education hasn't been along the same lines as your father's, and perhaps he won't be interested in me, yet perhaps we shall have some things in common. A white man, you know, is a white man, and even Africa can't change him. I'll wager you that the first question he asks me is, 'Have you an old London *Times* with you?'"

"White men have been near the village before," insisted the girl. "Never has he admitted them to our home, although one was a scientist like him—an explorer. I believe he hates all men—all mankind. True, he finally gave permission to bring you, but I'm afraid——"

"Does he love—you?" I asked.

"I don't know. There was a time when I was sure he did, just as there were times when he would bring flowers from our garden and put them upon my mother's grave, but for many years he has been changed. He hates the world—he plans to destroy——"

She did not finish the sentence, but stopped as if a cold hand had been laid across her red lips. She paled, and I saw that she was trembling. When I pressed her for an explanation, she changed the subject with a frightened, pathetic smile. From that moment on I felt that a chill had crept down from the dunes like a breath from the swamps. We walked on in silence.

"There!" she said, when we had reached the top of a little hillock. "There is—home."

Home! So this was her home! A melancholy house of stone, crumbling like an ancient ruin. It seemed strangely out of place here in this desolation. It belonged to Carthage, or perhaps to some long dead city. And this child lived here! I shuddered, even though the heat was flickering in waves across the distant veldt.

Her steps became slower, as we approached, and she seemed to be labouring under a clutching fear. I remember that the few cheerful and rather idiotic remarks I made fell flat, and truly I was in no mood for jesting.

As we neared the house I could see half a dozen black slaves working about the *kraal*, but I could see no sign of life within the house. It was fearfully hot, and far, far to the east, I thought I could make out the distant line of the sea, but I knew it was a mirage.

Well, I met Dr. Denham. We had entered the coolness of the hallway, and as I stood wondering what fashion of man it was who had furnished this dreary place so well, I saw a smiling face peering at us from beyond the draperies.

"Mr. Scott, I presume?"

A soft voice, and it fitted the man. In the semi-darkness, which was the nearest approach to comfort in sweltering British East Africa, I saw Irene's father. A man of fifty, perhaps, smooth-shaven and neatly dressed in white. The mouth under his rather hooked nose was curved into a smile, and yet, somehow, I felt chilled. No smile of welcome that! Not that there was anything alarming about the doctor's appearance, for he was nearly as I had pictured him, with his scholarly spectacles and abstracted manner. A naturalist and scientist, he looked his part. I bowed.

"I am very glad to know you, ProfessorDenham," I said, and extended my hand.

That handclasp was like ice! Denham's skin was repulsively cold and moist, like that of a bloated leech. I shuddered, and looked at the man closely.

The eyes! The heavy lenses of his glasses failed to utterly conceal the serpentine power of those greenish eyes. They were at once the eyes of a hypnotist and snake charmer. Though the professor was smiling with his thin lips, the eyes remained icy and the skin across his lofty brows was wrinkled into a frown. I remember that he made a few commonplace remarks and invited me inside. Dinner, he said, would soon be served. He was happy to have an Englishman for his guest. Yes, it *was* lonely here, but he was fond of loneliness.

All the time he was talking I could not keep my eyes from his face. There was some mystery here—some strange secret in this man's life. And Irene knew of it, for I remembered that little slip she had made while we were crossing the sands. She was worried now, and she was watching her father with mingled fear and apprehension, if I read aright.

At dinner, which was served by a good-looking black, the professor talked of many things. Did I like the country? When did I expect to return to Cairo and Port Said? He asked many questions, and for the first time since I met him I felt at ease. Perhaps I had been mistaken after all. First impressions do not always furnish one with a character guide. I warmed up, and we talked until late afternoon, over our wine. I was just about to come to the point, and tell him the real reason for my journey here, when he asked me to look at his specimens.

"Something that you'll find interesting, Mr. Scott, I'm sure," he smiled. "I doubt if you've ever seen anything like them. It has taken years for me to perfect my plans, and it is only recently that I have had any success. Do you know anything of bacteriology?"

"Very little," I confessed. "From what your daughter told me I thought your experiments were confined to insects. I did not know that bacteriology, too, was a hobby of yours, doctor."

He eyed me sharply.

"It's more than a hobby," he said, "as you will soon see. As for insects, well, you will see my insects—later."

I felt much like telling him that he need not go to that trouble. Creeping things had always horrified me, and I had seen quite enough of them since I had been working in Africa. However, it was my plan to keep him in good humour until we could reach an understanding, so I followed him into a distant portion of the great house.

"As far as bacteria are concerned," I told him, "I haven't even as much as peeped into a microscope."

Professor Denham laughed.

"Microscope!" he leered. "You won't need a magnifying glass to see my collection!"

Was the man mad? I felt a chill creep over me.

We had reached a sort of laboratory, and the professor withdrew a cloth from a glass case. I looked over his shoulder, then, and received one of the shocks of my life. What were these horribly squirming things? Not insects, for never in my dreams had I pictured things like these! They were writhing like maggots in a substance that appeared to be a sticky gelatine. Some of them resembled scorpions, but most of them were rod-shaped things the size of my little finger. They were moving, moving—never still.

"What—what are they?" I stammered in an awed voice.

"Bacilli," chuckled the doctor.

"You mean germs—of disease?" I asked, horrified.

"Exactly! What do you think of my work? I have multiplied them a million times, in size. Some of those organisms literally breathe death. It has taken me twenty years to find the secret, and

do you know what it means? I am lord of the world!"

It was devilish, and I longed to get out of the room. This man was mad, surely, yet here was the hideous proof before me.

"There they are," went on the scientist, with a horrible smile. "There they are till I am ready to use them, safe in the glass case and in a culture medium of agar agar."

I wiped the cold sweat from my face, and told him that I had seen quite enough and was ready to leave.

"Not till you have seen the most interesting specimens in my exhibit of insect life," smiled the professor. "I wouldn't have you miss that, for worlds."

I wanted to tell him that I wouldn't see another sight like those writhing things in his laboratory for worlds, either, but I followed him from the room and into a corridor. A huge black was waiting for us there.

"Well, Sahem?" asked the professor, in a harsh metallic voice.

The black giant showed his teeth in a look of anxiety.

"The slaves, master," he muttered. "They threaten to fly. They are afraid, and even the cattle whip cannot make them stay longer. Some of them will talk, unless——"

The doctor whipped a revolver from his blouse and handed it to the great negro.

"Tell them that I will have them thrown into the great pit," he snarled, "if they breathe a word! Kill them, Sahem, if they do not obey; and as

for yourself, if you make one slip, the black pit will yawn for your carcase also!"

The slave's face twitched with fear, and it was nearly livid when he bowed to the ground and backed out of the dank passage on his hands and knees. Before I had time to recover from my astonishment a terrible sound echoed at my feet. It was an agonized bellow, ending in a gurgling wail, and it seemed to come from a cavern under the house. The hair tightened on my scalp at that fearful sound—the death sound of some animal in fear and pain. For a moment I heard it and then it died suddenly away into silence.

"My God!" I whispered, "what was that?"

"I fancy," smiled the professor, cheerfully, "that it was an ox."

Kali's weird tale flashed through my head. Perhaps the talkative black man had not lied so much after all. There was a deeper mystery here than I had at first imagined, and for the moment my curiosity was stronger than my dread. While I followed the bobbing form of the scientist up the passage, I turned over in my mind all I had seen and heard. Again I seemed to see those horrible squirming things in the glass case, and once more I seemed to hear that awful wail. An ox! How long would this distorted nightmare last?

"Now, if you'll be so good," murmured the professor, "we will look over my collection of insects."

He had reached a trap-door and was tugging at the rope that raised it. It suddenly yawned open and I saw the first steps of a staircase leading somewhere down into the dark.

"We'll just leave the door open, so we can see," said the scientist, and he led the way cautiously down the wooden steps. With some misgiving I followed, keeping close to his back. The death cry of the ox still rang in my ears and I determined not to lose sight of my guide. Three steps, then four, then five. At that moment I heard steps on the passage above, and a second later saw Irene's white face framed in the square opening at my head.

"Oh, Scott," she whispered. "Come back—come back!"

Even as the words left her lips I saw a great black hand placed over her mouth, and caught a glimpse of the giant negro, his face distorted by a scowl of rage and fury. I leaped up the steps, and as I did so, down came the trap with a bang and I found myself scuffling in the dark with the professor.

I fought furiously, and was overpowering the wiry little fiend, when I felt myself hanging over the edge of a black void. Something seemed to whirl me closer and then I fell, with the doctor's insane laugh ringing in my ears.

Something strangely yielding broke my fall, something that felt like a suspended mass of silken rope. For a moment I was held there, and as the trap-door was opened above me, I saw the face of the professor looking down at me from above. So this was the pit! I struggled, and tried to wrench myself free from the tangling bands that bound me, for Irene's suppressed cry still echoed in my brain. In vain I tried to tear myself loose, and then, as my eyes grew accustomed to the faint light, I ceased. The silken strands that grasped my arms and legs

were as large around as my thumb, and held me like so much steel. The professor was leaning over the edge of the pit. He was speaking, and his voice was quivering with rage.

"Fool! Miserable fool!" he mocked. "So you sought to steal my daughter, did you? And she the future princess of the world! I know your kind, and now I can watch you die. Soon you will see my collection of *insects!*"

And then in the distant corner I could see a huge pair of phosphorescent eyes staring at me through the gloom—then another pair and another! They seemed to appear as if by magic from some dark recess within the pit. Then I saw what covered the floor of the place! Bones! Bones of cattle and of sheep! And in the maze of ropey threads about me hung the carcase of a great ox! I was being held in nothing less than the web of a monstrous spider!

I screamed, and as an echo to the scream I heard the throaty laugh of the demented man in the gallery. *Insects!* God! Great bloated spiders, foul and gigantic, were watching me from their awful lairs! Again I struggled to wrench myself away, but I fell exhausted. Then I saw the hideous monsters begin slowly to advance, and I felt the web tremble as if something of great weight was gliding upon it.

Above me and to the right was one of the ghastly spiders. I saw its multiple eyes watching me as it paused. Fangs, shining like polished ebony, protruded beneath those terrible eyes, and when I saw the thing perched on the great web ready to pounce upon me, I cried out in horror. The web shook

again, and I closed my eyes and waited for the dreadful impact. Even now, gentlemen, the sight of a fly buzzing his wings in a spider's web makes me sick and weak. Why I did not faint then, I don't know. Perhaps I was too terror-stricken.

I believe the monster would have leaped at that instant had it not been for a cry on the other wall of the pit. At the sound I began to hope again. It was Irene.

She was descending by a ladder, under a large trap on the other side, doubtless the one through which the ox had been cast. In her hand was an axe.

"Leave me!" I shouted, sick with fear for her safety. "You cannot save me! Back! Back!"

But she came, and I saw the terrible thing above me turn on its great legs, and watch her. At that second I heard a yell of fury from the professor. He was descending a rope ladder on the other side of the pit, and was foaming with rage.

The great spider had faced me again, and I could feel its legs rasp against the web that held me. I saw that the monster was covered with hair, like a huge bear, though no bear was ever so disgustingly sickening as this dreadful thing. I felt like a helpless fish about to be seized by a bloated octopus. Yet once again it hesitated, as if not knowing whether to turn on Irene or the professor.

Irene reached me first, and her axe whistled through the air at my feet as she cut me loose from the tenacious web. As she did so the hideous monster leaped at her! Like a steel trap and with terrible ferocity, the spider sprang, only to meet Irene's axe.

The keen edge of the tool sank into its horrible flesh. I wrenched the weapon from Irene's hand and finished the awful thing—saw it writhe out its death struggle, entangled by its own web. I struck again and again, and then threw aside the axe with a feeling of nausea and disgust. Irene clung to me and sobbed.

"Quick!" I cried, as I tore my eyes away from the throes of the monster I had killed. "Your father—look!"

The unfortunate professor was pinned under the dreadful body of another spider. It had sprung upon him while I was occupied with my own troubles.

Seizing the axe, I dashed toward him, taking care to avoid the treacherous web. I struck at the insect of hell with all my strength, and it turned upon me savagely. I saw those awful fangs poised above me as I struck again upward with the axe. My blow landed squarely, but it was too late to avoid the knifelike poison tubes. Something swept into my left hand like a razor, just as the dying and distended body of the spider bore me to the ground. I felt a fetid, cold breath on my neck and something flabby and soft seemed to encircle my chest. For a moment I lost consciousness.

The next thing I remembered was the sense of a great weight being removed from my body. I groaned, and sat upright. Irene helped me to my feet, and she was calm, though the dead body of the professor lay not three feet away. I had been too late, and the spider had accomplished his deadly work. The scientist had been killed by the product of his own insane cunning.

We made good our escape, and it was well, for if another spider—well, I had reached the limit of my sanity.

In the passageway, Irene caught a glimpse of my hand for the first time.

"Scott!" she screamed. "Look!"

My hand was enormously swollen, and even as I watched I could see a blue discolouration working its way toward my elbow. In the excitement I had forgotten the slash from the keen fangs of the spider. I was as good as doomed.

Irene still held the axe, and as I stood there, shaking like a leaf, she raised her eyes in a prayer for courage. I read the answer in her face, and without being told I laid down my swollen arm.

Well, gentlemen, it took her three hacks to get it off. How the blood was staunched I don't know, for the next thing I remember was being jolted along in an ox-cart, bound for the nearest surgeon. A nigger was driving, and I was feeling fine. My head was pillowed in Irene's lap. I looked back, then, and saw a red glow against the evening sky. The slaves had fired the place and fled. From what I have been able to learn, the spiders died in the ruins, for I've never seen a spider any bigger than my hand since that day. To tell the truth, I don't want to.

Irene married me at Cairo, and as soon as I was able, we left for England.

Now there's the story, gentlemen; you may believe it or not. . . . Waiter, will you kindly bring another bottle of vermouth?

FOUR WOODEN STAKES

VICTOR ROMAN

THERE it lay on the desk in front of me, that missive so simple in wording, yet so perplexing, so urgent in tone.

JACK,

Come at once for old-time's sake. Am all alone. Will explain upon arrival.

REMSON.

Having spent the past three weeks in bringing to a successful termination a case that had puzzled the police and two of the best detective agencies in the city, I decided I was entitled to a rest, so I ordered two suit cases packed and went in search of a time-table. It was several years since I had seen Remson Holroyd ; in fact, I had not seen him since we had matriculated from college together. I was curious to know how he was getting along, to say nothing of the little diversion he promised me in the way of a mystery.

The following afternoon found me standing on the platform of the little town of Charing, a village of about fifteen hundred souls. Remson's place was about ten miles from there, so I stepped forward to the driver of a shay and asked if he would kindly take me to the Holroyd estate. He clasped his hands in what seemed to be a silent prayer, shuddered slightly, then looked at me with an air of wonder, mingled with suspicion.

"I dun't know whut ye wants to go out there fer, stranger, but if ye'll take the advice o' a God-fearin' man ye'll turn back where ye come from. There be some mighty fearful tales concernin' that place floatin' around, and more'n one tramp's been found near there so weak from loss of blood and fear he could hardly crawl. They's somethin' there. Be it man or beast I dun't know, but as fer me, I wouldn't drive ye out there for a hundred dollars—cash."

This was not at all encouraging, but I was not to be influenced by the talk of a superstitious old gossip, so I cast about for a less impressionable rustic who would undertake the trip to earn the ample reward I promised at the end of the ride. To my chagrin, they all acted like the first; some crossed themselves fervently, while others gave me one wild look and ran, as if I were in alliance with the devil.

By now my curiosity was thoroughly aroused, and I was determined to see the thing through to a finish if it cost me my life. So, casting a last, contemptuous look on those poor, misguided souls, I stepped out briskly in the direction pointed out to me. However, I had gone but a scant two miles when the weight of the suit cases began to tell, and I slackened pace considerably.

The sun was just disappearing beneath the tree-tops when I caught my first glimpse of the old homestead, now deserted but for its one occupant. Time and the elements had laid heavy hands upon it, for there was hardly a window that could boast its full quota of panes, while the shutters banged and creaked with a noise dismal enough to daunt even the strong of heart.

About one hundred yards back I discerned a small building built of grey stone, pieces of which seemed to be lying all around it, partly covered by the dense growth of vegetation that overran the entire countryside. On closer observation I realized that the building was a crypt, while what I had taken to be pieces of the material scattered around were really tombstones. Evidently this was the family burying ground. But why had certain members been interred in a mausoleum while the remainder of the family had been buried in the ground in the usual manner?

Having observed thus much, I turned my steps toward the house, for I had no intention of spending the night with naught but the dead for company. Indeed, I began to realize just why those simple country folk had refused to aid me, and a hesitant doubt began to assert itself as to the expediency of my being here, when I might have been at the shore or at the country club enjoying life to the full.

By now the sun had completely slid from view, and in the semi-darkness the place presented an even drearier aspect than before. With a great display of bravado I stepped upon the veranda, slammed my suit cases upon a seat very much the worse for wear, and pulled lustily at the knob.

Peal after peal reverberated throughout the house, echoing and re-echoing from room to room, till the whole structure rang. Then all was still once more, save for the sighing of the wind and the creaking of the shutters.

A few minutes passed, and the sound of footsteps approaching the door reached my ears. Another interval, and the door was cautiously

opened a few inches, while a head shrouded by the darkness scrutinized me closely. Then the door was flung wide, and Remson (I hardly knew him, so changed was he) rushed forward and, throwing his arms around me, thanked me again and again for heeding his plea, till I thought he would go into hysterics.

I begged him to brace up, and the sound of my voice seemed to help him, for he apologized rather shamefacedly for his discourtesy and led the way along the wide hall. There was a fire blazing merrily away in the sitting room, and after partaking generously of a repast, for I was famished after my long walk, I was seated in front of it, facing Remson and waiting to hear his story.

"Jack," he began, "I'll start at the beginning and try to give you the facts in their proper sequence. Five years ago my family circle consisted of five persons : my grandfather, my father, two brothers, and myself, the baby of the family. My mother died, you know, when I was a baby. Now——"

His voice broke, and for a moment he was unable to continue.

"There's only myself left," he went on, "and so help me God, I'm going, too, unless you can solve the damnable mystery that hovers over this house, and put an end to that something which took my kin and is gradually taking me.

"Grandad was the first to go. He spent the last few years of his life in South America. Just before leaving there he was attacked while asleep by one of those huge bats. Next morning he was so weak he couldn't walk. That awful thing had sucked his life blood away. He arrived here, but was sickly

until his death, a few weeks later. The doctors couldn't agree as to the cause of death, so they laid it to old age and let it go at that. But I knew better. It was his experience in the south that had done for him. In his will he asked that a crypt be built immediately and his body interred therein. His wish was carried out, and his remains lie in that little grey vault that you may have noticed if you cut around behind the house. Then my dad began failing and just pined away until he died. What puzzled the doctors was the fact that right up until the end he consumed enough food to sustain three men, yet he was so weak he lacked the strength to drag his legs over the floor. He was buried, or rather interred, with granddad. The same symptoms were in evidence in the cases of George and Fred. They are both lying in the vault. And now, Jack, I'm going, too, for of late my appetite has increased to alarming proportions, yet I am as weak as a kitten."

"Nonsense!" I chided. "We'll just leave this place for a while and take a trip somewhere, and when you return you'll laugh at your fears. It's all a case of overwrought nerves, and there is certainly nothing strange about the deaths you speak of. Probably due to some hereditary disease. More than one family has passed out in a hurry just on that account."

"Jack, I only wish I could think so, but somehow I know better. And as for leaving here, I just can't. Understand, I hate the place; I loathe it, but I can't get away. There is a morbid fascination about the place which holds me. If you want to be a real friend, just stay with me for a couple of days,

and if you don't find anything I'm sure the sight of you and the sound of your voice will do wonders for me."

I agreed to do my best, although I was hard put to keep from smiling at his fears, so apparently groundless were they. We talked on other subjects for several hours, then I proposed bed, saying that I was very tired after my journey and subsequent walk. Remson showed me to my room, and, after seeing that everything was as comfortable as possible, he bade me good-night.

As he turned to leave the room the flickering light from the lamp fell on his neck and I noticed two small punctures in the skin. I questioned him regarding them, but he replied that he must have beheaded a pimple and that he hadn't noticed them before. He again said good-night and left the room.

I undressed and tumbled into bed. During the night I was conscious of an overpowering feeling of suffocation—as if some great burden was lying on my chest which I could not dislodge ; and in the morning when I awoke, I experienced a curious sensation of weakness. I arose, not without an effort, and began divesting myself of my sleeping suit.

As I folded the jacket I noticed a thin line of blood on the collar. I felt my neck, a terrible fear overwhelming me. It pained slightly at the touch. I rushed to examine it in the mirror. Two tiny dots rimmed with blood—my blood—and on my neck ! No longer did I chuckle at Remson's fears, for *it*, the thing, had attacked me as I slept !

I dressed as quickly as my condition would permit and went downstairs, thinking to find my friend there. He was not about, so I looked about

outside, but he was not in evidence. There was but one answer to the question. He had not yet risen. It was nine o'clock, so I resolved to awaken him.

Not knowing which room he occupied, I entered one after another in a fruitless search. They were all in various stages of disorder, and the thick coating of dust on the furniture showed that they had been untenanted for some time. At last, in a bedroom on the north side of the third floor, I found him.

He was lying spread-eagle fashion across the bed, still in his pyjamas, and as I leaned forward to shake him, my eyes fell on two drops of blood, splattered on the coverlet. I crushed back a wild desire to scream and shook Remson rather roughly. His head rolled to one side, and the hellish perforations on his throat showed up vividly. They looked fresh and raw, and had increased to much greater dimensions. I shook him with increased vigour, and at last he opened his eyes stupidly and looked around. Then, seeing me, he said in a voice loaded with anguish, resignation and despair :

" It's been here again, Jack. I can't hold out much longer. May God take my soul when I do ! "

So saying he fell back again from sheer weakness. I left him and went about preparing myself some breakfast. I thought it best not to destroy his faith in me by telling him that I, too, had suffered at the hands of his persecutor.

A walk brought me some peace of mind, if not a solution, and when I returned about noon to the big house, Remson was up and around. Together we prepared a really excellent meal. I was hungry

and did justice to my share ; but after I had finished, my friend continued eating until I thought he must either disgorge or burst. Then, after putting things to rights, we strolled about the long hall, looking at the oil paintings, many of which were very valuable.

At one end of the hall I discovered a portrait of an old gentleman, evidently a Beau Brummel in his day. He wore his hair in the long, flowing fashion adopted by the old school, and sported a carefully trimmed moustache and Vandyke beard. Remson noticed my interest in the painting and came forward.

" I don't wonder that picture holds your interest Jack. It has a great fascination for me, also. At times I sit for hours studying the expression on that face. I sometimes think he has something to tell me, but, of course, that's all tommy rot. But I beg your pardon, I haven't introduced the old gent yet, have I ? This is my granddad. He was a great old boy in his day, and he might be living yet but for that cursed bloodsucker. Perhaps, it is such a creature that's doing for me ; what do you think ? "

" I wouldn't like to venture an opinion, Remson, but unless I'm badly mistaken we must dig deeper for an explanation. We'll know to-night, however. You retire as usual and I'll keep a close watch and we'll solve the riddle or die in the attempt."

Remson said not a word, but silently extended his hand. I clasped it in a firm embrace and in each other's eyes we read complete understanding. To change the trend of thought I questioned him on the servant problem.

"I've tried time and again to get servants that would stay," he replied, "but about the third day they would begin acting queer, and the first thing I'd know they'd have skipped, bag and baggage."

That night I accompanied my friend to his room and remained until he had disrobed and was ready to retire. Several of the window panes were cracked and one was entirely missing. I suggested boarding up the aperture, but he declined, saying that he rather enjoyed the night air, so I dropped the matter.

As it was still early, I sat by the fire in the sitting room and read for an hour or two. I confess that there were many times when my mind wandered from the printed page before me and chills raced up and down my spine as some new sound was borne to my ears. The wind had risen, and was whistling through the trees with a peculiar whining sound. The creaking of the shutters tended to further the eerie effect, and in the distance could be heard the hooting of numerous owls, mingled with the cries of miscellaneous night fowl and other nocturnal creatures.

As I ascended the two flights of steps, the candle in my hand casting grotesque shadows on the walls and ceiling, I had little liking for my job. Many times in the course of duty I had been called upon to display courage, but it took more than mere courage to keep me going now.

I extinguished the candle and crept forward to Remson's room, the door of which was closed. Being careful to make no noise, I knelt and looked in at the keyhole. It afforded me a clear view of the bed and two of the windows in the opposite wall.

Gradually my eye became accustomed to the darkness and I noticed a faint reddish glow outside one of the windows. It apparently emanated from nowhere. Hundreds of little specks danced and whirled in the spot of light, and as I watched them, fascinated, they seemed to take on the form of a human face. The features were masculine, as was also the arrangement of the hair. Then the mysterious glow disappeared.

So great had the strain been on me that I was wet from perspiration, although the night was quite cool. For a moment I was undecided whether to enter the room or to stay where I was and use the keyhole as a means of observation. I concluded that to remain where I was would be the better plan, so I once more placed my eye to the hole.

Immediately my attention was drawn to something moving where the light had been. At first, owing to the poor light, I was unable to distinguish the general outline and form of the thing; then I saw. It was a man's head.

I will swear it was the exact reproduction of that picture I had seen in the hall that very morning. But, oh, the difference in expression! The lips were drawn back in a snarl, disclosing two sets of pearly white teeth, the canines over-developed and remarkably sharp. The eyes, an emerald green in colour, stared in a look of consuming hate. The hair was sadly disarranged, while on the beard was a large clot of what seemed to be congealed blood.

I noticed thus much, then the head melted from my sight and I transferred my attention to a great bat that circled round and round, his huge wings beating a tattoo on the panes. Finally he circled

round the broken pane and flew straight through the hole made by the missing glass. For a few moments he was shut off from my view, then he reappeared and began circling around my friend, who lay sound asleep, blissfully ignorant of all that was occurring. Nearer and nearer it drew, then swooped down and fastened itself on Remson's throat, just over the jugular vein.

At this I rushed into the room and made a wild dash for the thing that had come night after night to gorge itself on my friend ; but to no avail. It flew out of the window and away, and I turned my attention to the sleeper.

" Remson, old man, get up."

He sat up like a shot.

" What's the matter, Jack, has it been here ? "

" Never mind just now," I replied. " Just dress as hurriedly as possible. We have a little work before us this evening."

He glanced questioningly toward me, but followed my command without argument. I turned and cast my eye about the room for a suitable weapon. There was a stout stick lying in the corner and I made toward it.

" Jack ! "

I wheeled about.

" What is it ? Damn it all, haven't you any sense, almost scaring a man to death ? "

He pointed a shaking finger toward the window.

" There ! I swear I saw him. It was my granddad, but oh, how disfigured ! "

He threw himself upon the bed and began sobbing. The shock had completely unnerved him.

"Forgive me, old man," I pleaded; "I was too quick. Pull yourself together and we may get to the bottom of things to-night yet."

I handed him my flask. He took a generous swallow and squared up.

When he had finished dressing we left the house. There was no moon out, and it was pitch dark.

I led the way, and soon we came to within ten yards of the little grey crypt. I stationed Remson behind a tree with instructions to just use his eyes, and I took up my stand on the other side of the vault, after making sure that the door into it was closed and locked. For the greater part of an hour we waited without results, and I was about ready to call it off when I perceived a white figure flitting between the trees about fifty feet away.

Slowly it advanced, straight toward us, and as it drew closer I looked, not *at* it, but *through* it. The wind was blowing strongly, yet not a fold in the long shroud quivered. Just outside the vault it paused and looked around. Even knowing as I did about what to expect, it was a decided shock when I looked into the eyes of the old Holroyd, deceased these past five years. I heard a gasp and knew that Remson had seen, too, and recognized. Then the spirit, ghost, or whatever it was, passed into the crypt through the crack between the door and the jamb, a space not one-sixteenth of an inch wide.

As it disappeared, Remson came running forward, his face wholly drawn of colour.

"What was it, Jack, what was it? I know it resembled granddad, but it couldn't have been he. He's been dead five years!"

"Let us go back to the house," I answered, "and

I'll do my best to explain things to the best of my ability, I may be wrong, of course, but it won't hurt to try my remedy. Remson, what we are up against is a vampire. Not the female species usually spoken of to-day, but the real thing. I noticed you had an old edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. If you'll bring me volume XXIV I'll be able to explain more fully the meaning of the word."

He left the room and returned, carrying the desired book. Turning to page 52, I read :

> *Vampire.*—A term apparently of Servian origin originally applied in Eastern Europe to blood-sucking ghosts, but in modern usage transferred to one or more species of blood-sucking bats inhabiting South America. . . . In the first-mentioned meaning a vampire is usually supposed to be the soul of a dead man which quits the buried body by night to suck the blood of living persons. Hence, when the vampire's grave is opened his corpse is found to be fresh and rosy from the blood thus absorbed. . . . They are accredited with the power of assuming any form they may so desire, and often fly about as specks of dust, pieces of down or straw, etc. . . . To put an end to his ravages a stake is driven through him, or his head cut off, or his heart torn out, or boiling water and vinegar poured over the grave. . . . The persons who turn vampires are wizards, witches, suicides, and those who have come to a violent end. Also, the death of anyone resulting from these vampires will cause that person to join their hellish throng. . . . See Calumet's " Dissertation on the Vampires of Hungary."

I looked at Remson. He was staring straight into the fire. I knew that he realized the task before us and was steeling himself to it. Then he turned to me.

" Jack, we'll wait until morning."

That was all. I understood, and he knew. There we sat, each struggling with his own thoughts, until the first faint glimmers of light came struggling

through the trees and warned us of approaching dawn.

Remson left to fetch a sledge hammer and a large knife with its edge honed to a razorlike keenness. I busied myself making four wooden stakes, shaped like wedges. He returned bearing the horrible tools, and we struck out toward the crypt. We walked rapidly, for had either hesitated an instant I verily believe both would have fled incontinently. However, our duty lay clearly before us. Remson unlocked the door and swung it outward. With a prayer on our lips we entered.

As if by mutual understanding, we both turned toward the coffin on our left. It belonged to the grandfather. We unplaced the lid, and there lay the old Holroyd. He appeared to be sleeping ; his face was full of colour, and he had none of the stiffness of death. The hair was matted, the moustache untrimmed, and on the beard were matted stains of a dull brownish hue.

But it was his eyes that attracted me. They were greenish, and they glowed with an expression of fiendish malevolence such as I had never seen before. The look of baffled rage on the face might well have adorned the features of the devil in his hell.

Remson swayed and would have fallen, but I forced some whisky down his throat and he took a grip on himself. He placed one of the stakes directly over its heart, then shut his eyes and prayed that the good God above take this soul that was to be delivered unto Him.

I took a step backward, aimed carefully, and swung the sledge with all my strength. It hit the wedge squarely, and a terrible scream filled the

place, while the blood gushed out of the open wound, up, and over us, staining the walls and our clothes. Without hesitating, I swung again, and again, and again, while it struggled vainly to rid itself of that awful instrument of death. Another swing and the stake was driven through.

The thing squirmed about in the narrow confines of the coffin, much after the manner of a dismembered worm, and Remson proceeded to sever the head from the body, making a rather crude but effectual job of it. As the final stroke of the knife cut the connection a scream issued from the mouth; and the whole corpse fell away into dust, leaving nothing but a wooden stake lying in a bed of bones.

This finished, we despatched the remaining three. Simultaneously, as if struck by the same thought, we felt our throats. The slight pain was gone from mine, and the wounds had entirely disappeared from my friend's, leaving not even a scar.

I wished to place before the world the whole facts contingent upon the mystery and the solution, but Remson prevailed upon me to hold my peace.

Some years later Remson died a Christian death, and with him went the only confirmation of my tale. However, ten miles from the little town of Charing there sits an old house, forgotten these many years, and near it is a little grey crypt. Within are four coffins ; and in each lies a wooden stake stained a brownish hue, and bearing the finger prints of the deceased Remson Holroyd.

THE THIRD THUMB-PRINT

MORTIMER LEVITAN

THE persistent ringing of the doorbell angered Professor Sanders; it brought to his lips words unscholarly and almost profane; it worried disgusted, and sickened him. Still, he let the bell ring, ring, ring. . . . In his study, littered with papers of infinite variety and darkened by drawn blinds, he tramped to and fro. In a frenzied effort to defeat the clamouring bell, he held his hands tightly to his ears; but the odious sounds went around the hands, went through them, ignored them. The batteries were suffering, too; already the vehement clangour had degenerated into buzzes and tinkles. Soon, very soon, the benevolent laws of physics would disarm the batteries, and the bell would thenceforth be silent.

The ringing stopped. Professor Sanders fell into a chair, exhausted, desperately in need of calm reflection. The batteries, he meditated, would cost five shillings apiece; two of them would cost ten shillings—quite a sum; an electrician would have to install them. The inconsiderate reporters should be compelled to pay for them. Three short feeble buzzes. . . . The professor arose automatically. He could not understand why his reflections had ended so abruptly. He fumbled around for a reason. Somehow or other, that weak convulsion of the bell

reminded him of something—something he had promised, something he must do, some engagement he must fulfil. Unconsciously he strolled to the front door, opened it absent-mindedly, and admitted a dapper young man of twenty-two. Then he closed and locked the door.

"I'll appreciate this very much, Professor," said the visitor.

"There's something I ought to do," confided the professor, "but I can't think what it is. The cursed bell rang three times, and that reminded me of something, but I can't think what."

"You promised to let me in when I gave that signal."

"That's so!" The professor was ingenuously surprised. "I knew it was something. But you're in already! I opened the door without being aware of it. One of those barbaric reporters might have slipped in, and then—they're mischief-makers, they are; there ought to be a law against them."

The grey-haired, bespectacled, full-bearded man would have forgotten the presence of the other, would have declaimed long and bitterly, had not Guy Steel interposed in friendly though selfish fashion:

"You can't blame the reporters. You've made history by your great work. The people are interested; they want to know more about you, and the business of the reporter is to find out for them."

"I don't care to have my name and my work flung about in your yellow newspapers. I'm satisfied to have the scientific journals treat the matter; and besides, my manuscript has not yet been sent to the publishers."

The professor led the way to the study. Not that Guy Steel had need for guidance, however, for he had been in the study many times during his undergraduate days. A sort of protégé of the queer old pedagogue who lived a solitary life in a cottage, Guy had established a close intimacy (it was not really friendship) which gave him frequent access to the study. He was a shy man, was Professor Sanders, and few people possessed his confidence or friendship.

"Why have you the curtains down?" inquired the younger man.

"So those pests of reporters will think no one is at home. But those reporters don't think; they merely bother. Let's see—you're not a reporter are you?"

"I'm in business. You know, Professor, I've heard so much about your wonderful work that I thought I'd presume upon old friendship and come straight to headquarters to get the right material. I explained in my note; don't you remember?"

"Too bad. You would have made a scientist."

"There must be business men as well as scientists. Besides, I shouldn't have the patience to work at a thing the way you do. How long did it take you to work out your system for the determination of criminals by thumb-prints?"

"Nineteen years—all the time I could spare from my teaching for nineteen years. I had to work for a living my boy, or I'd have given my results to the world ten years ago."

"Nineteen years! So that's what you've been doing with your spare time! We used to think you were making a new translation of Homer, or

something of that sort. And so you've been grinding away on the greatest book of the century without anyone knowing a thing about it ! "

" Secrecy was essential. When a man begins work along channels that mark a radical departure from generally accepted notions, the scientific world laughs and scoffs. The derision of the public never touches a true scientist : it is the ridicule of fellow scientists that stings and discourages. Now you understand why I told no one—not even you—of my work."

" How did you ever get the idea in the first place ? "

" Two men formed the foundation—Galton and Lombroso."

" Galton ? Any relation to the eugenics man ? "

" The same man. His really great work consisted in systematizing the old observation that no two persons have the same thumb-mark. Now, Lombroso, the great Italian anthropologist, showed the scientific world that external marks frequently determine criminality. The shape of a head will often show a murderer. But Lombroso didn't go far enough : he didn't produce a working system. All I did was to combine Galton and Lombroso. My work consisted in showing that the lines on the thumbs, which differ in each person, mean something, just as much as the shape of the skull. It took nineteen years, but I've succeeded. I've reduced Lombroso to a workable system on Galton lines. My system enables you to tell whether a man is a criminal merely by measuring and classifying his thumb-print. Moreover, you can determine what particular course the criminality will take.

There is an infinite distinction between the print of a robber and murderer ; you can easily detect the difference between a man who would commit arson and one who would commit rape. You can tell the degree of cruelty to be used in the crime ; whether the crime is to be committed with passion, cold blood, stealth, cunning."

Neither spoke for a time. Each watched the other through eyes accustomed to the dim light of the study. The professor, who had given his account with rare enthusiasm, waited for questions : he expected no one to listen to the simplest lecture without asking questions—a habit acquired in the classroom.

" Aren't the thumbs the same in a child as when he grows up ? "

" The designs on the thumbs never change."

" Then you can tell whether a new-born baby is going to be a murderer ? "

" As surely as you can tell its sex."

" Well, I'm not going to let you see any of my thumb-prints."

The professor removed his spectacles and toyed with them before answering.

" You'll find some of our best friends are murderers. Some haven't killed anyone as yet, to be sure, but they will in time, just as surely as an object thrown into the air will fall to ground at a certain rate of speed. Psychological laws are as fixed as physical laws."

" But there must be a chance for exceptions or mistakes. "

" None at all. A science that permits of exceptions or mistakes is no science."

The professor stopped to emphasize the statement.

"I have succeeded in formulating a new science. I've studied the thumb-prints of ten thousand criminals, and only one apparent exception did I find. He was an old man serving a life term for murder of the most brutal type; yet his thumb-print was that of an innocent man. I obtained all the records of his trial and found that the evidence against him was purely circumstantial. That man was innocent; and if it hadn't been for the dread of revealing my system prematurely, I would have taken the matter up with the governor. I might have freed the man, but it would have imperilled the system. My system is infallible."

Steel smiled as he said: "Of course, Professor Sanders, I believe every word you say, but it's rather hard to swallow. If you've really accomplished what you say, you've done the greatest work of the century. Why, it won't be possible for a guilty person to escape."

"They might cut their thumbs off, but the absence of thumbs would be considered conclusive evidence of guilt after my system has supplanted the antiquated notions of criminal procedure now in vogue."

Steel arose, walked over to the desk, and nervously played with various articles scattered about, as he talked.

"Professor," he began, from his newly assumed position, "would you make a test for me? Suppose I bring you five or six thumb-prints, will you tell me whether their owners are criminals or not?"

"You demand final proof? Well, I scarcely

can object, even though it hurts my vanity. You bring me the prints, and I'll convince even you."

The doorbell rang, not clamorously as an hour ago, but persistently.

"There they go again," lamented Sanders.

"Why don't you disconnect the bell, if the ringing annoys you?"

"That is a good suggestion. How does one accomplish that result?"

"I'll do it for you," volunteered Steel, starting for the tiny kitchen where the disconsolate bell was fastened to the wall.

"I'll show you where——"

Sanders stopped short and fumbled around his desk. He ran his hands through all his pockets and then searched blindly over the surface of the desk.

"I can't find them," he murmured to himself.

"What's the trouble?" asked Steel, when he returned from the kitchen.

"It's no use; I can't find them. I put them some place. . . ."

"Your glasses?"

"I know I had them a few seconds ago."

"Shall I pull up the blinds?"

"No, no! Those reporters would probably grin through the windows like a pack of wolves at a lamb. I can see them licking their reportorial chops now, ready to pounce upon me and tear me asunder."

"They won't see the light if I turn it on."

"Don't turn on the light! I can't see a foot away without my glasses, but I'd rather be blind than have those reporters get me."

"I'll look, but I can't see much here."

Steel searched the room—on the desk, under the desk, on chairs, under books—but the glasses remained unfound.

"Never mind," sighed Sanders. "If I don't find them myself, Mrs. Jones will find them in the morning. She always finds everything."

"As you say. Well, I'll have to be going now. I'll come back to-morrow with the prints. Thanks very much for this interview."

"The back door! For the sake of things scientific, take the back door!" shouted the professor, when he heard Steel advancing toward the front door.

Holding the young man's arm, the Professor shuffled into the kitchen, blindly felt for the key, opened the door and fairly shoved the visitor out of the house, such was his haste to regain the safety of locked doors. He feared lest some one of the enemy, more skilled and adventurous than the rest, might cross the threshold with a single foot and thus effect an entrance. Luckily no such calamity occurred. He groped his way back into the study and there renewed his search for the delinquent spectacles. It was a long search, exasperating, futile. Touch, with the questionable aid of extremely near-sighted eyes, revealed no clue. The bewildered Professor paced aimlessly about the room until he was thrown prostrate upon the floor by a chair. He made no attempt to rise; but every now and then he would vaguely make the rounds of all his pockets. Wretched with despair, rendered helpless and useless by ineffective vision, he reconciled himself to the separation from his spectacles until

morning, when Mrs. Jones, who put his house in order each day, would assuredly find them. Until then, however, he must suffer ; he must refrain from work ; he must simply think.

Eight o'clock the next morning there came three loud knocks on the door. Professor Sanders painfully picked himself up, stumbled toward the front door and opened it.

"Guy, is that you?"

"Good morning, Professor," was the cordial reply. "Have you found your glasses?"

"Found them? No. The house-keeper will, doubtless, find them when she gets here."

"Well, that's too bad," sympathized Guy Steel, as he locked the door behind him. "Have you looked all over?"

"I've felt all over."

They moved toward the study, Steel holding to Sanders' arm and gently pushing him along.

"Let's give one good last search," suggested Guy, as he energetically started to peep into all possible and impossible corners.

"It won't do any good," was the pessimistic rejoinder. "I ought to have an extra pair of spectacles, but I never could afford them."

"Now you'll soon be able to afford several hundred pairs."

The young man was feeling along the floor between the desk and the wall. Triumphantly he announced, "But you won't need any extra. Here they are!"

Tears were in the old man's eyes as he wiped the lenses with his handkerchief. He put on the spectacles and gazed at the youth before him.

"Thanks, my boy. It's like coming back to life to get these glasses. You can never know how nearly dead I feel when I can't read, can't write, can't see. I really am partially dead. I'm glad you came; I'm glad you came."

"I glad I came, too. Now that we've found your glasses, you can make the tests you promised me."

"Tests I promised you?"

"Don't you remember? You said you'd tell me the character of the owners of five or six thumb-prints; and I've got five of them here."

"Where are they? I'll do them immediately."

Sanders sat down at his desk, turned on the light, and laid out a variety of instruments before him.

"Don't you think I'd better pull up the shades?" inquired Steel, as he placed a strip of rough paper containing the reproductions of five thumb-prints on the desk.

"No! No! Those reporters may still be hovering about."

Sanders looked at the paper before him. He was puzzled.

"These aren't on smoked paper. Smoke the paper, press your thumb on it, and run it through shellac—you know how."

"These were made that way, but I had plates made. It'll work just the same."

Professor Sanders was doubtful as to the adequacy of the prints, but he was willing to try them. He set to work measuring. Angles, curves, relations, lengths—all had to be determined and recorded. For two solid hours he kept his attention riveted on the prints; and during these hours not a word

was spoken. Mrs. Jones, bent on straightening the study, was shooed away by Steel, who spent the time tiptoeing about the room or gazing over Sander's shoulders. Finally, the measurements were completed.

Referring to a mass of unbound sheets that rested to one side of the desk, the Professor explained, "Here is the manuscript of my book, *The Determination of Criminals*. By referring to the charts I have prepared, everything becomes clear. It is merely a matter of classification from now on. Let's take No. 1 first."

He turned to several charts and trailed the particular combination of measurements to its class.

"No. 1 is an innocent man. He will never commit any crimes of violence. He will commit only those acts of petty thievery to which all mankind is addicted. No. 2."

Again he went through the routine of classification.

"No. 2—the same as No. 1. Now we'll take No. 3. . . . No. 3 is a murderer—a cold-blooded murderer, who will kill for logical reasons."

Steel, who had jotted down the verdicts in the first two cases, recorded nothing for No. 3. He asked, "You're sure this is No. 3 you're talking about?"

"That is the one."

"You probably got them mixed."

"Don't dare to say that a man of my age and experience could get mixed in such a simple operation! Now, I don't mean that this man has already committed murder; I merely mean that he either has or will."

"But it can't be."

"Why can't it be?" demanded Sanders. "Everything can be. You know the man?"

"Yes."

"And you think his reputation such that he can't ever become a murderer?"

"I know he's as innocent and peaceful a man as ever lived."

"Still, he has killed a human being in cold blood, or will in the future."

"But he—why, Professor Sanders, it's absolutely silly! This man is—why——"

He ended in a laugh.

"I'm sorry if I've exposed one of your friends. That is the penalty we pay for scientific certainty."

"Well, if there's any certainty in this world, it's absolutely certain that No. 3 is not a criminal and never will be."

"Who, then, is the man in whose outward appearance you place more faith than in scientific truth?"

"You."

Professor Sanders looked at Guy Steel for a moment; he had heard the single word but had not grasped its significance.

"I?" he questioned, calmly, with tragic simplicity.

"Oh, Professor, it's all foolishness!"

"That was my thumb-print?"

"Yes; but——"

"There may have been some mistake, but I think not. It has never occurred to me to try my methods on myself. To be certain let us try again. I'll take the print on smoked paper to be sure."

The professor walked over to the table that stretched along an entire wall, upon which divers instruments of the psychology laboratory rested, attached a strip of prepared paper to the drum, lit the three gas jets that sent blackening flames upon the paper, revolved the drum, and soon had the proper coating of soot. He detached the paper and pressed his thumb on a corner. He did not put the print into shellac to make it permanent, nor did he wash the smutch from his thumb, but set to work immediately with the measurements.

While Sanders worked serenely on, Steel stood behind him, apparently fixed to the spot. The necessary data were collected. The Professor turned to his ponderous manuscript. Both men breathed in long-separated gasps while Sanders classified the print.

And then the Professor took a deep breath, placed the manuscript to one side, and quietly announced, "There was no mistake."

"Oh, well, every system has some exceptions."

"My system is infallible. There are no exceptions."

"I'm in for it now," confided Steel. "You see, I had those five thumb-prints published in last evening's paper; and we announced that you would give the readings."

"Published? Why?"

"Well, Professor, I might as well confess that I'm a reporter and published the entire interview."

"You said you were in business."

"I knew you wouldn't give me the interview if I told you the truth."

"I don't understand why you did that."

The Professor meditated for a few minutes before continuing.

"You say you promised to print the results in your yellow sheet?"

"I'll fake reading for you and Nos. 4 and 5."

"That's true. I haven't finished the last two."

He referred to his charts again, performed the necessary classification, and announced: "No. 5 is a thief—cunning, deliberate, daring. No. 6 is a half-witted murderer—kills for no reason at all."

"Thanks ever so much," said Steel, as he put his notebook and pencil away.

"You published the names under the prints?"

"Yes; the names were published last evening. There's something to your system, for the last two men have just been convicted of the crimes you charge them with, and the first two are prominent business men. I'll fake a reading for you, Professor, unless you give me a more truthful one."

Instantly the old man arose, his voice and temper raised to the highest pitch.

"Fake a reading!" he exclaimed. "You publish the results as I gave them to you."

"I couldn't do that. It would make you out either a murderer or a faker."

"You've told the public I'd report on five thumb-prints. Young man, it is your plain duty to give the public my reports as I gave them to you."

"But don't you see what that would mean to you?"

"I understand; but personalities cannot stand in the way of duties. Now, Mr. Steel, farewell. I must think."

Guy Steel slowly went out of the room, out into the open. No click of the lock followed his departure.

Professor Sanders sat at his desk and thought. He ate no breakfast, no lunch; indeed, he was unconscious of the coming and passing of the mid-day hours. He thought of the nineteen years of constant labour on a single idea, of the endless days and nights spent in collecting, classifying, and analyzing material for his one great work. He had gained little of that seductive publicity that the world confuses with success, but he cared not for the fame of life : he wanted the fame that lasts through all eternity. He sought for the imperishable glory that belongs to him who adds to the store of human knowledge.

Nineteen years—and then, success ! He had nursed a chance idea into a marvellous science. He had reduced the investigations of nearly two decades into the bounds of a single volume. Although the book had not been sent to the publishers (it would be sent in a few days), the scientific men all over the world were attacking it, defending it, discussing it. Scholar and layman alike awaited the appearance of the book—the general expectation was the immediate result of a simple announcement Sanders had made to one of his fellow teachers. The newspapers had somehow learned of the startling discoveries, had informed the public, and then sought to satisfy with imaginative interviews the curiosity they had aroused. Fame had burst upon Professor Sanders. Already life promised to be easier for him. The college had raised his salary ; the royalties from his book would doubtless be of dignified dimensions ; magazines would offer astonishing sums for authentic

articles on the new science. In some slight measure he would be recompensed for the meagre years just ended. Instead of being the withered hermit, he would be the fêted scholar. Fame, pleasant and satisfying, would be his while yet alive ; and unending fame would be his after death.

His mind wandered back to the incident of the morning. He, Professor Sanders, the originator of the system of determining criminality from thumb-prints, was a murderer. . . . That might be ; after all, an individual is not master of his fate. If the world would consider him a murderer, Sanders would be satisfied ; but the world would not consider him a criminal ; it would say, with sneers and laughter, "Ah, a wonderful system ! The only trouble is that it fails when applied to its originator." This would bring the entire system into disrepute, would cause hilarity at the expense of the pedagogue who had foolishly wasted his life erecting the frame-work of a science that tumbled down when subjected to a final test. The scientific world would smile a knowing smile and then pass its learned attention to other matters. Professor Sanders would be for-gotten by everyone except the humorists. He winced at the thought ; it was more than he could bear. He had wanted eternal fame and had been only too glad to sacrifice all in life to gain it. And now—well, now that he seemed on the point of success, when all his fondest hopes and dreams were almost realized, utter failure blackened all the future.

"How are you this afternoon, Professor ?"

The words startled : they shattered a train of thoughts like a stroke of lightning.

"I thought you had gone home, Guy."

"I just came back. You didn't answer the door, so I walked right in. I came back to apologize for the dirty trick I played on you."

"Never mind. As long as I did not know you were a reporter, I did not mind talking to you."

"But I mean for taking your glasses."

"You found my glasses; you did not take them."

"I'm ashamed, but I took them. It occurred to me in an unfortunate moment that it would be a good joke to try your system on yourself. You were playing with your glasses, and I just took a long chance that your thumb-mark would be on them. I managed to pick them up from your desk and get away with them. The lines of your thumb were there all right, and I had them copied; and this morning I made believe that I found your glasses on the floor."

He looked downward, repentant, thoroughly sorry for his misdeed.

"I know you won't forgive me, but——"

Professor Sanders did not answer at once. He looked at the young man before him—the youth he had taken a liking to as an undergraduate, the man whose visit he had enjoyed the day before. A smile—the vaguest trace of a smile—lit up his face, as he languidly spoke:

"When you took my spectacles yesterday, you cast me among the dead for many hours during the brief period of fame. My partial death served your purpose; your complete death will serve mine."

He took a revolver from a lower drawer, an old-fashioned weapon that belonged to past generations, and pointed it at Steel. Guy stood speechless, strengthless, thoughtless.

"The system demands as a final proof that I be a murderer. Forces beyond my control require that I kill someone. You, my lad, have caused me more misery than anyone else. It is only logical, therefore, that I should kill you."

"God!" screamed Guy Steel, finally regaining the use of his voice; but he said nothing more.

The bullet hit him in the heart, and he fell over without even a moan. Professor Sanders took one look at the dead man, walked to the front door, opened it, and shouted to all the world:

"Murder!"

LIPS OF THE DEAD

W. J. STAMPER

"DOWN with Théodor! Death to Black Oscar!"

It was the raucous, horrifying yell of the inevitable Haitian mob as it assembled in the historic Champs de Mars outside the palace in Port au Prince, the scene of hundreds of such meetings that had never meant less than murders and gutters flowing red with human blood. The rapacious rule of President Théodor and his favourite general, Black Oscar, was tottering to its fall. That day Théodor had violated a sacred session of the Senate and dissolved it at the point of the bayonet because it had, for the second time, refused to support him in a dastardly measure to filch more money from the already pauper citizenry.

As night came on, aged senators lay cringing in the filthy prison, in the courtyard of the palace, and double sentinels paced the flagstones outside.

In the domed council chamber of the palace sat Papillon, the favourite senator of the common people, bound hand and foot, subjected to the jeers and insults of the two beasts. Théodor, lean and emaciated, his yellow, pock-marked face pinched with terror, fingered nervously some loose papers that lay on the table. Oscar, a giant in stature, with a waxed moustache curling up crescent-shaped till

the two points almost met above his gaping, black nostrils, pounded his huge fist on the table and fixed his sinister gaze on Papillon.

"Do you think we sleep, idiot?" he stormed. "It is your tongue that has sown the seeds of unrest among the populace and stirred them to rebellion against our authority. What have you to say to this—and this?" He thrust two papers into the face of Papillon, and his black face twitched with rage.

"I should think it would be unnecessary for *le général* to rob the mails for the same information he might easily obtain by listening to any group of citizens conversing on our street corners. It is the sentiment of all true Haitians. You have robbed the coffers of the treasury; you have murdered our best citizens; and now you seek the aid of the Senate in carrying out your cursed schemes," sarcastically answered Papillon.

Stung by the truth of this remark, Oscar lifted his great fist and crashed it against the thin lips of the helpless prisoner. Blood streamed from the cracked lips, ran down the chin and stained the white bosom of the senator's shirt. Papillon, still holding high his proud head, mumbled through his bleeding lips:

"'Tis no better nor redder than that you spilled at Mole St. Nicholas when you shot down Vilbrun, or when you butchered the patriot, Céléstin, at Jacmel. It is the blood of Haiti."

As Papillon finished speaking, in through the window shone the baleful red glare of the torches of the mob, and through the casement came frenzied yells: "Down with Théodor! Death to Oscar!"

Théodor shivered as he sensed the woeful power

behind this thing that he hated and feared, and his lips trembled as he turned to Oscar.

"Has not *le général* some plan? Something must be done," he whined.

"If they become unruly we can toss—we can toss them a head," answered the black brute as he curled his waxed moustache and shot a wicked glance at the bleeding Papillon.

"I have ever been the first to draw my sword for Haiti—I have lived for her and her misguided people—and, *mon général*, I shall gladly offer my life and my blood for her," came from the puffed lips of the prisoner.

"Cur! Worshipper of Voodoo!" shrieked Théodor as he confronted Papillon. "You shall speak to the vermin from yonder window—order them to return to their homes, or I swear by the great Capoix, your head shall roll at their feet."

"Excellency, I am at your service. Such has been the course of liberty for a thousand years—blood, torture, death. Long live the common people! Long live liberty!"

Without another word Théodor seized him by the collar, lifted him from the chair, snatched the gleaming sword from the scabbard and plunged it through the body of the patriot. With a gurgling groan Papillon sank to the floor, while a crimson stream, gushing from a jagged wound in the breast, poured over the carpet of the room. Then with one horrible stroke Théodor severed the head from the trunk. The gory thing, rolling a few feet, stood upright on the bloody, slippery stub, then slid across the room to the wall. There it sat in the pale light of the lamp, and the hair, still unruffled, was

smoothly parted in the middle. Then occurred the most singularly awe-inspiring thing that ever greeted the eyes and ears of mortal man. What do men yet know of the mysteries of Voodoo—its powers—the miracles it may perform ?

Two great tears oozed from the eyes and dropped to the floor. The dead lips moved and a voice issued from the crimson mouth.

" To-morrow, Théodor, to-morrow ! "

Slowly the quivering lids closed over the glazing eyeballs, then opened, and the eyes fixed in the icy stare of death.

Théodor laughed a hoarse, bestial laugh, wiped the thickening gore from his blade on the leg of his trousers and said : " To-morrow, Théodor, to-morrow ! A pretty speech indeed, General."

Picking up the ghastly head by the long black hair and holding it as far away as possible, Théodor walked to the window and deliberately hurled it out into the very face of the mob, yelling through the casement as he watched it catapult across the street : " Haitians, this is but the beginning ! Depart at once, lest all the others meet the fate of Papillon."

Screams of rage rent the night. Crash on crash of musketry in the street below. The mob had rushed the gate and the troops had opened fire.

It was the terrified voice of Théodor. " We must flee, General ! To the French legation for our lives ! "

" My soldiers will defend the palace to the last man, Excellency. If we must go down, let us go down in a blaze of blood. To the prison ! "

The helpless senators cringed beneath the covers

as the sentinel passed. His clanking bayonet scabbard sent a hollow sound through the corridors, while his footfalls sounded like some weird echo in an empty tomb.

A key grated in the lock. Théodor and Oscar entered, and the murderous work began. Silently they went from man to man. There was a sickening slushing sound as the sharp points of their blades found the vitals of those dark masses beneath the ragged covers of the rickety bunks. Now and then a stifled groan, a rattle in the throat, which was suddenly choked by a rush of blood. This ghastly work lasted but a few minutes, and a crime was consummated that will forever brand Haiti as an outlaw among nations. With his own hands, Oscar put out the one dim light, and following in the wake of the butcher, left the room to darkness and the dead.

Their vile work finished, Théodor and Oscar fled through the night and sought shelter at the French legation.

Daylight revealed their absence from the palace. News of the massacre spread like wildfire to every nook and corner of the city. The troops defending the palace fled when they discovered their chiefs had deserted them. Papillon had been followed in death by all the other senators, and their souls cried aloud for vengeance.

Groups of cursing men and weeping women rushed from house to house, from hiding place to hiding place. Swift horsemen galloped over the roads leading to Gonaives and Saint Marc in search of the fugitives.

The sun was low in the heavens, when at length

came word that Théodor and Oscar had been found in hiding at the French legation. The bugles sounded the assembly, and the bloodthirsty mob, armed with axes, spades and whatever other weapons could be procured, moved upon the legation. The streets were choked with a seething, writhing mass of humanity, undulating like some huge serpent as it approaches its prey.

The warning voice of the grey-haired consul, as he stood on the portico of the legation house, pleading with the bloodthirsty mob to remember the sacredness of an embassy, was drowned with rasping yells.

"Give us Théodor! Give us Black Oscar!"

There was a sudden irresistible surge of that black mass. The gate and fence went down with a crash. On, on, up to the very doors it went. There was a splintering of wood, a rattling of broken glass, screams and shrieks. Oscar was dragged out first, and his body riddled with bullets. As his black carcass lay in the gutter, oozing red from a thousand punctures, and the thick tongue lolled out from between the yellow teeth, cheer after cheer went up from the multitude.

The exit of Théodor was more orderly. With downcast eyes his lean figure shambled out of the building between three huge blacks, one of whom carried three stout ropes. The mob gave back to permit ample passage, and strangely enough the street looking westward was without a single soul. There was at last a peculiar system, even in its innate madness, in which this mob carried out its vengeance.

The prisoner arrived at the edge of the street

amid deafening shouts : " Murderer, where is our Papillon ? "

A buggy arrived pulled by a strong Haitian mule.

Now, as if by mutual consent, the three blacks took charge of the situation. They proceeded to secure the end of one rope about the neck of Théodor, the other end to the axle of the buggy. The other two ropes were fastened above the ankles, leaving one end of each free. The ropes about the ankles were, however, much longer than the one about the neck. As certain ones of the mob grasped the intention of the three blacks they gave loud and prolonged cheers of approval.

At last all was ready. The buggy was in motion toward the west. Théodor, striving to keep on his feet, had his legs jerked from under him by the two men manning the loose ends of the ropes about the ankles. He was bruised beyond description. His neck was scarred and bleeding from the noose, his tongue swollen and covered with dust. Bloody froth oozed from his nose and mouth as he was jolted from one side of the street to the other.

Suddenly he ceased to struggle and strive to keep his feet. There was apparent a certain limpness of the body that gave evidence of unconciousness. Two trails of red showed in the street behind where the body was being dragged. Sharp stones wearing through the clothing had bit into the bare flesh.

Onward this weird procession went, followed by the crowding, yelling, approving mob, onward toward the west. At length the buggy stopped

beneath the shadow of the Sacred Arch. The mob, like hungry vultures encircling a piece of carrion, surged around in a great circle with eyes staring and necks craning lest one single detail of this noisome scene be missed.

There fell upon this vengeful multitude a solemn silence, as from somewhere came the measured beat of the tom-tom—a terrible sound, such a sound as is heard in the fastness of the northern mountains when the priests lead the death-march. One of the blacks was untying the ropes from the gory victim ; another was removing the grime and dirt from the distorted face with a damp gunny sack.

What could this mean ? Could it be that the hearts of those two men were relenting ? Low growls and sharp hisses escaped from the mob. A bottle of spirits, the powerful heathen rum, was held beneath the distended nostrils. A few drops were poured into the gaping, bruised mouth. A convulsive shudder passed through the body. The chest heaved, rose and fell. Consciousness was returning.

The circle had narrowed and the mob was on the point of pouncing upon the reviving victim, when one of the blacks, rising from where he knelt over the prostrate figure, extended his ham-like hand high above his head and shouted with such a stentorian voice that it could be heard by the most distant one of the crowd :

" Are you fools, Haitians ? Would you have this beast who has glutted himself upon our reddest blood die before your vengeance has been appeased ? Let us torture him ; let him writhe in agony ; is that not good, countrymen ? "

"Yes, yes!" came the answer from every mouth of that vast and blood-craving throng.

A ladder was placed against the face of the Sacred Arch. The last rays of the setting sun shed a purplish light over the city; the drums beat the measured march of the dead. Théodor opened his bleary eyes and shuddered.

Two long ropes were tied under the armpits. Two heavy stones, attached to the other ends, were hurled over the top of the arch. Slowly, but without much difficulty, two men hoisted upward the spare, bedraggled figure of Théodor; upward, till it dangled against the solid wall of the archway. Loud jeers rent the gathering dusk of approaching night: "*Vive le Président! Vive Théodor!*"

Now one of the blacks was mounting the ladder. He carried under his arm a small chest, such as carpenters use.

The mob, expectant, gloating, their hawk-like eyes on the cruel scene, stood breathless—waiting.

At last the top was reached. The black secured the peculiar chest to the topmost rung. The mob surged up about the foot of the ladder. A thousand eager, curious faces were upturned, as he seized the right arm of Théodor, extended it to full length along the wall and, without looking, scrambled among the contents of the chest. He drew out a small hand-axe and a long spike. With one powerful blow he drove the pointed nail through the bony hand, deep into the adobe of the wall.

Beads of black blood trickled down and spattered in the dust below. Mortal agony twisted and distorted the pock-marked face of Théodor, and sharp rasping cries issued from the swollen mouth.

Another blow, in strange unison with the beat of the tom-tom, pinioned the other arm. The legs dangled ; the body writhed in the throes of approaching death. The skinny legs were drawn apart. Again, and yet again, rose and fell the fatal axe. There was a gritting sound, such as is made by the surgeon's saw, when the cruel spikes pierced the bones of the feet.

"*Vive Théodor! Vive Théodor!*" shrieked the demoniacal mob.

Mortal man could not long survive such inhuman torture. Slowly the head sank down upon the scrawny chest ; the eyes bulged from their sockets. The cooling blood had ceased to flow and now merely oozed from around the nails.

Grasping the dishevelled hair with his left hand, the black straightened up the bowed head, the axe ascended once more and there was a sickening thud as it fell upon the distended leaders of the bare throat.

The mob slunk back as the gory head dropped to the street, rolled a few feet, stood upright on the bloody stub of the neck. As the glazing eyeballs fixed in the cold stare of death, there issued from the purple lips a scarcely audible murmur :

"To-day, Papillon, to-day !"

Had Black Oscar been yet among the living, he alone, of all that multitude, would have noted how strangely these words from dead lips appeared an answer to the words from other dead lips, once sadly murmured at dead of night, in the domed council chamber of the palace.

THE DEVIL BED

GERALD DEAN

I MAY as well state at the beginning that I am not, either by gift or inclination, a writing man; this story must, therefore, be pardoned in advance for its rough manner of narration, its absolute lack of all literary polish. Fortunately, the fantastic and well-nigh incredible happenings which make up my narrative stand by themselves. They need no furbishing of brilliant phrases, but rather a stark and truthful simplicity for their telling. Let me commence, then, without further apology or explanation.

My name matters little to the story. I am a man of middle age, a bachelor, and fairly successful in the practice of the law. The one hobby which I possess is the collecting of Colonial furniture of the earlier periods, and it was through this interest that I first made the acquaintance of Harry Ware.

Harry, unlike me, is rather an unusual fellow. He is, first and foremost, a scholar; widely travelled, tremendously learned and well read. As a friend old Harry is the salt of the earth. I know of no other man whom I would choose in preference to him as a companion and intimate. He is, incidentally, the last male descendant of a fine old American family of English stock, and one of the most discreet and intelligent of collectors of

early Americana. What with me is merely a diverting hobby and pastime is to Harry an overpowering obsession—a life-work, almost.

We met for the first time at an auction in White River Junction, Vermont, some eight or nine years ago, on which occasion we fought each other amicably enough, for the possession of an unusual block-front highboy. We returned to New York together, and from then on our acquaintance gradually progressed and developed into the closest and happiest friendship I have ever known. For several years it was our habit, every summer, to make collecting trips together through the South and New England. Once each week during the rest of the year we dined together, alternately at Harry's huge barracks of a place, and my rooms in town.

I remember that it was on a cheerless and murky morning in early February, about three years ago, that Harry called me up at my office.

"I've got something very interesting to tell you," he said. "If you're not going to be busy to-night, come up to the house." And then, before I could reply: "Why not come straight out from the office, and have dinner with me?"

I replied that I had nothing else on hand, and promised to be at his home, which is in Fieldston, on the northern outskirts of the city, at about eight o'clock. I presented myself there, accordingly, at the stated time, and after an excellent dinner we repaired to the library for cigarettes and coffee. I could see that something had happened to disturb Harry's usual calm, sleepy manner; for the first time in my experience he seemed bubbling over

with suppressed excitement. As soon as the man-servant had withdrawn, closing the great doors silently after him, Harry extinguished his cigarette and drew his chair up closer to mine.

"Charles," he announced dramatically, "I've had the most unusual thing happen to me—it's like something you'd read about. If it weren't that I have tangible proof, I'd think I'd dreamed it. You can't possibly imagine what it is."

"Well, for Pete's sake, man, let's have it!" I demanded, somewhat testily. "You sound as though you'd seen spooks. What's it all about?"

Harry leaned forward.

"You know the Collingwood escritoire, of course," he began.

And of course I did. A wonderful and priceless piece of furniture; one of the prizes of Harry's collection, which he has had in his possession for all of twenty years. It stands in his bedroom, and he uses it for a writing desk, but it is willed to the Metropolitan Museum, to be added to that institution's collection after Harry's death. . . . I nodded, therefore, without answering.

"What would you say," Harry went on, "if I were to tell you that I have just discovered a secret drawer in it?"

It was my turn to lean forward. "Not really!" I exclaimed. "When? Where? How?"

"It was quite accidental. You know the desk has been sounded, time and again, for any possible secret cubby holes or recesses—always unsuccessfully. Last night I'd been very prosaically making out cheques to pay my various bills, and I reached for one of my old books of stubs in another

receptacle. Something happened. . . . I was awkward, perhaps, and lost my balance. Anyway, my elbow struck sharply against a corner, and at the same instant a panel of wood moved smoothly across, and a tiny drawer came sliding out. I think I sat there staring at it for fully five minutes, before I appreciated the evidence of my eyes. Think of it, man, after owning it for twenty years. A secret drawer!"

"It was—empty, of course?"

Harry shook his head. I could see that he was enjoying the whole thing vastly. "No. Interesting and exciting though it was even to discover such a drawer, there was a further thrill to come. The drawer held a miniature and a letter. Wait—I'll get them and let you see them."

For a minute I suspected Harry of tricking me, and believed the whole affair an elaborate joke at my expense. When he returned, therefore, and placed a small miniature in my hand, I accepted it silently and took it over to the table, where I examined it with critical attention under the shaded lamp.

The miniature was undoubtedly authentic—a lovely bit of early eighteenth century work, in perfect condition. The portrait was of a boy, a charming, aristocratic, rather haughty youth of not more than eighteen or twenty years. I turned the miniature over. Pasted to the back was a slip of paper, and on it written in characters so faded as to be almost indecipherable, the following words:

Lennox. Born July 18*th*, 1694.
Died, by his owne hande, Aprille 10*th*, 1713.

As I stood there, staring wordlessly at the

inscription, a vague pity swept over me; an intolerable sadness for some unknown and long-forgotten tragedy which I could never hope to comprehend. Who was this handsome lad who had, at the age of nineteen, ended his own life? Why, how, and where? . . . I looked over at Harry, who was watching me from across the room.

"Rather pathetic, eh?" I said brusquely.

He merely nodded. "Yes. Handsome boy, too. I'd like to find out who he was. But here's the prize find—this letter. Read it, and tell me what you make of it."

I took the letter, a folded slip of paper, written apparently by the same feminine hand that had inscribed its tragedy on the back of the miniature. As well as I can remember, it ran as follows:

KIRKWOOD,

All is well. A merciful God hath seen fit to spare us frightfulle shame and ignominie. No slightest shade of suspicion hath fallen upon Lennox, and he may proceede safely to Philadelphia. He is doubly safe in that the suspicion of the people hath fallen upon a poore half-wit, whom yesternight they did take and burn alive. So once againe the family fate is averted.

Our bond-man, Foulke Barton, goes to Fort La Tour within the week. I give him £50, and household belongings. Allso in obedience to your wish, the Deville Bed.

A thousand fonde kisses to you and our poor boy,

ANTOINETTE.

I read this strange letter once, standing up beside the table. Then I seated myself, lit another cigarette, and read it over. Harry still watched me, enjoying my complete mystification. "Well? What do you make of it? Tell me just your impressions?" he demanded, finally.

"I can't make anything of it," I said in exaspera-

tion. "Unless—well, let's see." As Harry waited impatiently, I groped for words to convey my bewildered impressions. "This young man of the miniature—Lennox—has apparently committed a crime, and fled from the scene. A terrible crime, I imagine, since the people burned alive a half-wit whom they suspected of it. . . . But the second paragraph is meaningless, to me. What has this bondman to do with the affair? There's no way of telling whether he was an accomplice, or a witness. Yet it seems irrelevant, doesn't it, that the mother should mention his leaving for some fort, and that she gave him household furnishings? And what in the name of all that's holy, is a Devil Bed?"

Harry laughed. "Your deductions are admirable, Dr. Watson," he said. "But I must say that the crime and the burning alive do not interest me. It's the reference to the bed—the Devil Bed—that has me fascinated. Don't you realize that the writer of this letter is probably referring to something that I've been trying to find for years—one of those marvellous old carved oak bedsteads with gargoyle heads that we know were brought over from England by a few wealthy families, and have never been able to trace? Great Kingdom, Charles! Just think! This hidden drawer and this letter may be the means of our discovering one of those beds. I tell you, I'd give ten years of my life, and all I own, if I could be lucky enough to find one, or even part of one. It would be the most wonderful thing in my life. It would make my collection the most famous in America!"

I sat wordless before Harry's unexpected enthusiasm and excitement. To tell the truth, the

personal side of the story unveiled by this mysterious letter interested me far more than the reference to the bed. The sinister hints of a nameless crime, its innocent victim, and the unhappy, guilt-burdened Lennox reached out to me across a span of two silent centuries, and held me enthralled. But I realized that Harry had valid cause to place more stress upon the reference to the bed, that collectors' will-o'-the-wisp. What, after all, did it matter who had committed a crime two hundred years ago? The guilty man had paid the price of his sin long years past, having died by his own hand. But the bed, if it could be traced, was a matter of living importance. . . . Still, how could the fact that one Foulke Barton, a bondman, had taken such a piece of furniture to Fort La Tour, two hundred years ago, lead one to believe that it might be traced now, after such a lapse of time? I said as much to Harry.

"There's just a chance," he replied, quickly. "Just one chance in ten thousand. God alone knows why the bedstead was given to him, but the man must have realized its value, and been overcome by such a gift. Even then a carved bedstead of that type would be worth an enormous amount of money. He, and possibly his descendants, could not help but recognize its beauty and worth. Just think! It may be standing, even yet, in the bedroom of some little New Brunswick farm house!"

"New Brunswick?" I repeated, stupidly. "You mean New Brunswick, in Jersey?"

Harry shook his head impatiently. "No! Fort La Tour is the old French settlement in Canada where the city of Saint John, New Brunswick, now

stands. I tell you, Charles, if it's the last thing I do, I'm going up to the province and hunt for that bed!"

I remember laughing a little at Harry's impetuous manner.

"Starting to-night?" I asked, lightly.

And then Harry Ware gave me the surprise of my life.

"I've already packed," he said, "ready to leave in the morning. Why don't you skip business for a week or so, and come along with me?"

As it happened, I was not in a position at that time to leave the city, my firm was working under heavy pressure and I could not possibly hope to take a vacation. It was rather regretfully, therefore, that I declined Harry's invitation, for the Devil Bed had me interested, and even a wild goose chase can be exciting under certain conditions and with certain companions.

However, I accompanied Harry to the Grand Central Station next day, and wished him the best of luck in his search. Even at the last minute, standing in the noisy train shed, he tried again to coerce me into the hunt. "I'm going to scour every inch of New Brunswick," he said. "Lord knows what other finds I may run across in the meanwhile. Come along!"

I hated to refuse, but business was business, and unlike Harry I was dependent for bread and butter upon my profession. So I let him go alone, and in the heavy stress of work during the next few weeks I put the whole affair out of my mind completely, so that the secret drawer and the miniature and the Devil Bed faded slightly in my memory, and lost

something of the entrancing glamour they had held that evening in Harry's library.

It was sometime during March that I next heard anything of interest from my adventurous friend. He had written me one or two brief letters during that time, describing his various attempts to trace the descendants of Foulke Barton, which attempts had been, so far, a complete failure. Now there came a note that was almost jubilant in tone—the baying of the bloodhound in full scent :

> I think I've found them, and strangely enough, through another crime or rather a series of crimes. This time, it's something rather ghastly. A man named Amos Barton, whom I have found to be a direct descendant of Foulke Barton, was hanged in the prison here in 1848, having been condemned for the wanton murder of (just imagine !) a family of nine people. I've found all sorts of details concerning him and his forbears from the old files of newspapers. They were a bad lot, and Amos wasn't the first to end his days inside prison-walls. The whole family, from away back, seemed tainted with homicidal mania, which cropped out every few generations in some atrocious crime. Amos Barton was a farmer, settled in a small place called Rothsay. He was apparently a mild and peaceable man. One night, so the old records say, he ran amuck and slaughtered a houseful of neighbours, against whom he had no discoverable grudge or grievance. When found, he made no attempt to disprove his guilt, and was summarily hanged by the neck until dead, a week later. Justice moved more quickly in those days, apparently. Well, the interesting and hopeful fact remains that he left a family of generous size, which is doubtless scattered through the province. The deuce of it is, they are supposed to have changed their name, because of the disgrace. However, I'm out to find them, and I feel in my very bones that some one of them will be found, and I'll still trace my Devil Bed. Why don't you come on now, and help in the search ?

That letter made a deep and strange impression upon me. I'm no believer in ghosts, the Lord

knows ; no one could be more sceptical or cold-blooded in that sort of thing than I am. And yet—

Well, I didn't like this constant shadow of murder connected with the Devil Bed. The laughing, charming face of the boy in the miniature rose up before my mind's eye. What evil impulse could have caused such an innocent-looking chap to commit a horrible crime ? What could have made this unknown farmer, Amos Barton, wantonly slay an entire family ? What legacy of evil had descended through the Barton family ? Was there a pursuing demon——?

So far my reverie went, and then, with a conscious effort, I turned my thoughts deliberately from the whole affair. Yet the lurking horror remained in the background. I found myself wishing that my friend Harry had never discovered the secret drawer in his escritoire ; had never started out on his mad hunt for the Devil Bed. And I wrote Harry, what was quite true, that an important case forced me to remain indefinitely in New York.

And then, perhaps two months later, came a triumphant telegram. The search was over ; the Devil Bed had, unbelievably, been found at last. The message was sent from the village of X——. I cannot for obvious reasons give the correct name of the little New Brunswick hamlet in which the bed was discovered.

> Come at once. Search successful. Want you to verify and help in packing and crating. Have notified Blank at the museum. Reply immediately when you will arrive.
>
> (Signed) WARE.

Of course, there was nothing else to do, in the light of my friendship and various obligations to

Harry, but to comply. I dropped everything, put my affairs in hurried order, and having sent a wire in response, I took the train the next day for Boston.

Harry met me at the station, in Saint John. He was glowing with triumph, almost ecstatic in his delight. "Wait till you see it," were his first words. "Man, I can't believe my own luck! It's too marvellous—the bed, you understand. Almost perfect condition; the most exquisite carving in oak I've ever seen. But I mustn't rave. I mustn't spoil it for you. Just think, though. Out in the hay-loft of an old barn; hidden behind the filth and débris of years. I tell you, when I first saw it I couldn't speak, or think. I just stood there, and gibbered like a madman!"

Harry's enthusiasm was contagious. "They're tremendously excited at the museum," I told him. "Are you sure the present owners will be willing to sell?"

He nodded briefly. "Oh, yes. They have no idea how important, how priceless, it is. In fact, they dislike it." Talking constantly, he led the way from the station to his hotel. It was then early evening—we were to stay at the hotel overnight, and proceed to X—— by train in the morning.

Over our dinner, and later, in my somewhat rococo sitting-room, Harry described his search and all its heart-breaking disappointments and failures. "I had the devil's own time, tracing the children of Amos Barton," he said. "There were six of them, five sons and one daughter, and they'd changed their name to Shilling, after their father was hanged. I thought from the first that if any of the children had got the bed, it would be the

daughter. As events proved, I was right. . . . But, in the beginning, I couldn't find any of them. Lord, what a job ! Searching birth records, death notices, newspaper files. Yet the thing had me fascinated, and I couldn't give up. Finally I found them, first one, then another, and so on. You see, there was one thing that made the whole affair comparatively simple ; they hadn't any of them left New Brunswick. They're quiet, unprogressive, narrow people. The whole stock seems sort of stunned by the family disgrace and trouble that's followed them so long. Even——"

"But tell me," I interrupted, as Harry fell silent, "how did you finally locate the people that had the bed ?"

Harry stretched his long, lanky frame in a spindling gilt chair, and stared up at the ceiling. "Well, there was that daughter of old Amos," he said. "She was the oldest, and the only girl. After infinite trouble I found she'd married a man named Lyons. They'd been married before this wholesale murder affair, and her husband didn't like the disgrace, or else he objected to the sort of family he married into—anyway, he ran off, leaving his wife with a boy about two years old. She left Rothsay, sold the house there, and went into service as housekeeper for an old farmer in X——, named Nagle. The important thing for us is, that she took with her all her household belongings, including the Devil Bed. She must have been canny enough to realize its value. This old fellow whom she went to work for must have taken a liking to her, for they got married, later on, and he left the farm to her when he died. And the boy (Fanny Barton Lyon's

son, you understand) took the name of Nagle and got possession of the place when his mother died. So there you are. To-morrow, at X——, you'll meet him ; he's still alive and as spry as a cricket. He's the owner of the bed, and his grand-daughter, who lives with him, is the one who helped me to find it in the hayloft. Pretty piece of work, eh ? "

I stared at Harry with infinite admiration. " You should have been a detective," I declared. " You're wasting excellent talents in the mere tracing of old furniture." Then a new thought struck me, or rather a thought I had so far deliberately submerged. " Harry," I said, " what do you make of the fact of these—murders ? Here are several nasty crimes in connection with this bed, or in connection with the owners of it. Is there—can there be—any *real* connection ? "

Harry stared at me, very oddly, I thought. He started impulsively to say something, then checked himself.

" Pure coincidence," he said, lightly. " What else can it be ? . . . *What are you trying to say ?* "

Something angry, something almost furious in his eyes and voice, a strange, half-suppressed rage, made me draw back from him.

" Why, Harry, my dear old chap ! " I stuttered. " I don't mean a thing. Just a fancy of mine ! "

The subject was changed immediately, but I went to bed that night with sombre, undefined horror lurking in the shadowy depths of my consciousness.

We started out early the next morning, complete harmony restored between us, and arrived about noon at the little village of X——. From there we

took a carriage, hired at a local livery-stable, and drove out through pleasantly hilly and wooded country to the Nagle farm. It was an unkempt and run-down place, hidden snugly between low, rolling hills ; the farm-house itself a dull, indefinite-looking yellow building, with barns and outhouses in an almost inconceivable state of dilapidation.

As our carriage drove up, a huge mongrel dog darted out, barking vociferously, and ran along at our horse's heels. A moment later a sturdy young woman came out to the side door, and called the dog away. Behind her I could see an old wizened man, who later came hobbling down the pathway to our carriage. His faded eyes stared at me in blinking amazement, and at our introduction he bowed and scraped most obsequiously. I, in turn, stared back at him. So this was the descendant of that almost mythical bondman, Foulke Barton, and of the strange murderer, Amos Barton ! Well, there was nothing of murderer about this poor, doddering old nondescript, surely. The girl, his grand-daughter, Sophie, rather pleased me. She was a rosy-cheeked, strong young thing, and whatever the outside condition of the place, the interior, due to her efforts, was spotlessly clean and tidy.

I was shown to a pleasant though sparsely furnished bedroom, but almost before I could set my luggage down, Harry was insisting that I come out to see the Devil Bed. He had, himself, gone straight to the barn as soon as we arrived, to assure himself that his discovery was quite safe. Now, his suit powdered with cobwebs and dust, he stood in the doorway, commanding that I hurry.

Nothing loth, I followed him down the narrow

staircase and out through the back yard to the barn. The place seemed unusually dark and gloomy after the cheerful radiance of out-of-doors, and my eyes, blinded by sunshine, were at first unable to make out my surroundings. Gradually becoming accustomed to the dimness, I looked about me. Rusty rakes and hay-forks leaned disconsolately against the sweating walls, and the empty stalls were piled high with discarded farm machinery of all sorts. Though the place had obviously been long unused, a faintly ammoniac odour filled the air, struggling through a dank, mildewed atmosphere, and creating a ghastly combination of filth and decay. At the rear of the barn stood a ladder that reached up to the hay-loft above. Harry ascended this, deftly as a monkey, and I followed, protesting faintly; my hands were reluctant to take hold of the dirt-encrusted sides. At every step, huge spiders drew back cautiously into quivering webs, and as I halted for a moment at the top, I experienced again that strange, indescribable fear which had tormented me the night before. Then I threw the unreasonable horror from me, and stepped up into the hay-loft.

There, in a pale, hazy light, stood the four carven pieces of oak that made the Devil Bed. Harry had pulled them out from their ignominious hiding-place to the centre of the loft floor. For an instant as he had done, I merely stood there looking at it, and "gibbering like a madman." The bedstead was truly a gorgeous thing, the most marvellous piece of furniture I have ever laid eyes upon. Only those who love the rare and exquisite work of old-time craftsmen, who gave their whole lives to the

fashioning of beautiful objects, can understand the thrill that tingled through me. Never, anywhere, have I seen human handicraft of greater loveliness.

And then, even as I stood there, that perfect feeling of delight passed, and a chill came over me. For there was something nameless, something horrible and full of evil coming to me, like a sluggish wave, from the direction of the Devil Bed. I came closer to it, staring intently. The carvings that at first glance were so admirable in their perfection, I now saw to be of a most perverse and suggestive obscenity. Here were strange, writhing forms struggling in bestial embraces ; snakes, knotted and upreared ; a thousand morbid visions emanating from an unclean mind. . . . And all the while, the power of that evil, hypnotic spell drawing me ! . . . I looked up suddenly, as one does who feels the steady gaze of human eyes. And then I saw what had, undeniably, given the Devil Bed its name. All along the sides of the tester ran a carved series of faces, the evil, the vileness of which, I can never hope to express. Contorted, leering faces ; faces of imbeciles in lustful paroxysms ; faces only half human, yet doubly disgusting in their perverted humanity. The most hideous gargoyles of Gothic architecture were angels of serenity beside these frightful visions. No nightmare could evoke a more terrible crew.

And then, abruptly, came Harry's triumphant voice. " Well, what do you think of it ? "

It was with a definitely physical effort that I drew my eyes away.

" Marvellous, but how evil ! " I cried. " No

wonder they called it the Devil Bed. . . . It's—Harry, can't you see?—it's wicked! It's the most wicked thing I've seen."

He brushed me aside. "Yes, perhaps so. Perhaps you're right. It's hardly the thing to grace a Victorian bedroom, eh?"

A thin, mocking laughter filled the hay-loft, and tinkled into silence. I looked up. The leering lips of the grimacing devil nearest me seemed still curved in malicious scorn. Yet it must have been Harry who laughed.

Something within me protested. "It's a gorgeous piece," I said slowly, almost grudgingly. "You're lucky, Harry, to have discovered it. And yet it seems to me that it were better if it had not been found. It's decadent. It hasn't the splendid sturdy quality I had expected to find in it. I'm disappointed."

No sooner were the words said than I regretted them. For Harry glared at me with a rage and contempt beyond words. His face, usually so pale and calm, was mottled with angry red, and his eyes fairly bulged from their sockets. I think he suspected me then of the rankest jealousy.

"Doubtless I should leave it here," he suggested furiously. "Or better still, burn it up, because it offends your prudish taste! Or, perhaps, you're afraid of it?"

And then, instantly, I knew that Harry had hit upon the truth. I *was* afraid of it. As God is my judge, I hated and feared that inanimate thing—that mere bulk of carved wood! And I felt, somehow, that Harry was afraid of it also, and was masking his own inexplicable horror behind

this false indignation and bravado. For neither of us would, or could as sane men, admit the truth.

"We're talking nonsense," I said. "It's undeniable that you've made the discovery of a century. The bed is far too valuable to be destroyed, and it will make a tremendously interesting museum piece. I only know that I dislike the ornamentation, and that I wouldn't sleep under those faces for a fortune!"

Harry eyed me curiously. "It's odd that you should have said that," he remarked. "Because I intend to rope up the bed, and sleep in it to-night, myself."

There was no deterring him. He had made up his mind, and like many men of his type he was as immovable in his intentions as a block of granite. I don't know what subconscious premonition made me attempt to dissuade him, but at all events my vague objections were quite ignored. Harry had determined to set the Devil Bed up in one of the farm-house bedrooms, and he carried out that purpose without further discussion.

Between us, with infinite pains and precautions, we carried the tremendously heavy pieces down that tottering old ladder, out into the yard, and into the farm-house. I remember that the old man and his grand-daughter watched us closely at our task, but made no offer of assistance. When the bed was finally set in place in the spare room, its bulk filled almost every inch of available space, and it towered aloft, barely missing the ceiling. Harry and I stood together in the doorway, breathing gustily from our efforts. I must admit that here, between

practical, sunny walls, something of horror and mystery seemed to have departed from the great bedstead. The carven heads were just as appallingly hideous, but less terrifying. I remember thinking that I had been rather a fool to have felt any horror of the thing. After all, a bed was nothing but a bed, no matter how peculiarly ornamented, and if Harry wished to sleep in it, what possible harm could ensue therefrom ?

A minute later we went downstairs to supper in the best of spirits. The table was laid in the kitchen and Sophie bustled cheerfully to and fro, serving us. As I ate, I marvelled at the equable manner in which Harry and I had been accepted in this quaint home. Even the mongrel dog had become friendly, and now sat at Harry's feet, begging for an occasional scrap with pleading eyes. Through the window at my right, I could see the old man pottering about the yard, puffing peacefully at a villainous-looking pipe. In this simple, homely atmosphere, how shadowy and far away seemed the annals of horror and bloodshed connected with the Barton clan ! And how ridiculous seemed my own vague fears of the Devil Bed !

When we had finished our meal, Harry called to Sophie, with whom he was plainly on the best of terms.

" I wonder whether you have a spare mattress for the old bed," he said. " I intend to sleep in it to-night."

Sophie had been standing in the doorway, looking out into the yard. At Harry's words she swung around, and her face turned slowly paler and paler, until it was almost grey in the half-light.

"Oh, Mr. Ware," she said. "You're not going to—to sleep in it?"

Harry laughed irritably. "Yes. Why not? Are you afraid of it, too?"

I waited what seemed an interminable time for the girl's reply. Sophie stood immovable for a moment, then she came quickly over toward us, and stood gripping the edge of the table.

"Yes, I *am* afraid of it," she said, simply. "I've always been, and so has all our family. We've even been afraid to destroy it. There was an old French priest who saw it once, and he said it was unholy. There's a curse'll fall on anybody who sleeps in it. Oh, Mr. Ware! Buy it if you want, and put it into a museum for people to look at, but don't sleep in it. Something terrible will happen to you. I *know!*"

There was a certain quiet earnestness in the girl's voice that brought back to me, with sickening force, all my own indefinable dread. I hoped against hope that Harry would accept her warning. But his first words showed that hope to be vain.

"There's nothing you could have said," he returned lightly, "that would have made me more determined to sleep in the bed. I tell you, Sophie, that you and other people have allowed yourselves to be frightened by the cowardly superstitions of priests and old women. Don't think me discourteous in saying this. I know how ghost stories can persist, unreasonably, from one generation to another. A horrible tragedy is often connected with an inanimate object, but I for one have no faith in such nonsense as haunted houses, and accurst beds.

How much will you wager that I sleep better to-night and have better dreams, than you or my friend, here—either of you?"

Sophie seemed to realize that there was nothing more to say. Without answering she turned away and went upstairs. Half an hour later she came out to us, where we were smoking and chatting on the porch in the fragrant dusk, and announced that the big bed was ready to be slept in.

And now I come to that part of my story which must tax the credulity of the ordinary reader. I can only say that these eyes have seen the sights I tell of; these ears have heard the sounds.

At nine-thirty, Sophie and her grandfather having gone up to bed, Harry and I extinguished our last cigarettes and walked upstairs together. At the door of the spare room where the Devil Bed had been placed, we paused and stood for an instant. Then Harry pushed open the door and went in, and I followed him.

The bed filled the room so completely that no other piece of furniture save a plain wooden chair could be squeezed in. On this one chair Sophie had placed a small kerosene lamp with a plain glass shade. A thin, flickering light drifted across the carved surface of the bed, so that the gargoyle faces seemed ever leering out into the light, and then withdrawing into obscene darkness again. The bed, in that first hurried glimpse, struck me as more ghastly than ever before. I can only say that it seemed—living.

I commenced speaking hurriedly, stammering in my excitement.

"Harry! Call me an old woman—an old fool—anything you want!" I said. "But don't sleep in that infernal bed. I don't believe in ghosts or spooks any more than you do, but I tell you this thing has *got* me!"

Harry shook his head obstinately, without answering.

Yet I couldn't give up.

"Humour me this once, for old friendship's sake," I pleaded. "Sleep in the bed some other time. Not to-night."

"This is my only chance," Harry replied. "To-morrow it is to be crated, remember. And once in the museum—well, I couldn't very well sleep in it there! No, Charles, my mind is made up." We looked at each other for a moment, in complete silence. Then Harry stepped closer to me, and gripped my shoulder. "Don't think me just an obstinate fool!" he said. "I have reasons—for wanting to sleep in the Devil Bed! If you could guess the things I've heard whispered—and it's all nonsense, Charles! Nonsense!"

"You're quite sure?" I said, grimly.

"Positive! But the only way to prove it, is by sleeping in the thing myself. So—good night, Charles, old fellow! We'll be laughing over this scene to-morrow morning at breakfast!"

There was no use in wasting any further words; I bade Harry good-night and went to my own room. Here I undressed, and lay down. For a long time I remained awake, listening for—what? Eventually I fell into a restless sleep.

Some hours later I was awakened suddenly by a most strange and dreadful sound. It can be

described only as something between a scream and a howl, and it was not human. . . . I sat up in bed, trembling all over. And at the same time a queer relief came over me. Here, at all events, was actuality at last, and no matter what the horror might prove to be, it was better than blind dread and waiting. I got out of bed, stumbled across the room in the dark, and lit my lamp with shaking fingers. Then, barefooted, holding the lamp high, I hurried out into the hallway.

The house was now absolutely still. I went first to Harry's room. The bed was empty, and I knew that Harry must be connected in some way with that fearful, agonized, inhuman cry. . . .

At the head of the staircase I halted for a moment, then slowly descended. Since I was quite unfamiliar with the house, I was unaware that these were the back stairs which would lead me to the kitchen. There was not the slightest sound to be heard anywhere—yet I felt, I *knew*, that someone was crawling about, somewhere, in the turgid darkness below.

At the foot of the stairs I met with a closed door. I threw it open, and then stopped short on the threshold. The feeble rays of the lamp showed me that I had found what I sought. On the floor of the kitchen, in a spreading pool of blood, lay the unfortunate mongrel dog whose death scream I had heard. And facing me, his back to the wall, stood Harry, the lamplight flickering on the wet blade of a carving-knife he brandished in his hand !

May I never again see, in dreams or in reality, such a face as Harry presented then to my horrified

gaze ! His eyes were wide and staring—his lips curled back in a snarling grimace. If I had never before seen blood-lust and fury in a human face, I saw it now. . . . Just an instant we looked at each other, then he came hurtling toward me. I knew him for a maniac, and I set down the lamp, and grappled with him for the possession of the knife.

He was too strong for me. Ordinarily, I could have conquered and disarmed him, for Harry is a lighter man, and possessed of less physical strength. But now he was not a man ; he was a killer, and he had gained the terrific force of a maniac. In the implacable grip of his hand about my throat I felt that my last moment had come ; I could see the knife in his right hand poised for the thrust that would mean my death ! Then suddenly, I heard running feet on the stairs behind me, a woman's sharp cry, and the deafening explosion of a revolver shot. At the same instant, Harry's grip on my throat relaxed, and he slid grotesquely to the floor. I turned, weak and shaking, toward the direction from which the shot had come. Sophie stood there, at the foot of the stairs, with a smoking revolver in her hand.

"I had to kill him," she cried, hysterically. "I had to kill him, or he would have murdered us all."

Harry did not die. The wound which Sophie had given him, and which had saved my life, was merely a deep and extremely painful flesh wound in the shoulder, from which he soon recovered.

But the shock to his nervous system—to his very mind and soul—went deeper. It was only after

many days of rest that he could bear to speak of the terrible experience through which he had gone.

And then, strangely enough, he had nothing to tell us which we did not already know. He remembered nothing, from the time he fell asleep in the Devil Bed, till the moment when he dropped to the floor wounded by Sophie's shot. What malignant and mysterious impulse had entered his body, guiding him to the kitchen, putting the knife in his hand, filling him with a fierce lust to kill—he could no more guess than we could. His amazement and horror when we told him what he had done were unspeakably piteous to see, as was his utter remorse over the stabbing of the hapless dog.

"I didn't know what I was doing," he kept repeating dully, over and over. And my mind flashed to the boy Lennox, who also had killed, and all those notorious members of the Barton clan, who had swung for dreadful murders of which they were, in a deeper sense, completely innocent.

On Harry's recovery, there remained but one thing to do before our return to New York. The Devil Bed was taken apart, and hauled unceremoniously to the yard, where we burned it. Not again should this accurst thing bring death and tragedy to innocent victims! Sophie and Harry and I watched it burn, in silence. The flames licked hungrily about those leering gargoyle faces, and we shivered a little, for the eyes seemed almost human. So heavy was the wood that it took hours before the last vestige of it was destroyed.

There is still one thing to tell. As I was hacking the bed apart for easier burning, I found

a crude scrawl carved in the under-bracing of the tester :

BLOODE WARM AND RED
ON HIS HANDS THATTE CARVED THIS BED.
BLOODE SHALL BE SHED
BY HIM WHO HEREON RESTS HIS HEAD.

Doggerel ? Curse ? Joke ? Who knows . . For an instant the old chill and horror went through me as I read it, then I tossed the piece vindictively into the flames, and it too was consumed.

DEATH-WATERS

FRANK BELKNAP LONG, Jr.

WE were seated in the pilot-house of the *Habakkuk*, a queer little tug which carries daily passengers from New York steamers south along the coast of Honduras, from Trujillo to the Carataska lagoon. We were a chatty, odd group. Shabby promoters elbowed enthusiastic young naturalists (botanists from Olanchito, and entomologists from beyond Jamalteca) and tired, disillusioned surveyors from the plateau. The air was thick with unwholesome bluish smoke from fantastic pipes, which formed curious nimbuses about the heads of the older men. No one had a reputation to lose, and conversation was genial and unaffected.

One of the veterans stood in the centre of the cabin and pounded with his fists upon a small wooden table. His face was the colour of ripe corn, and from time to time he nodded at his companion. His companion did not return his salutations. The face of his companion was covered ; and he lay upon the floor in an oblong box six feet long. No word of complaint issued from the box, and yet, whenever the veteran brought his eyes to bear upon the fastened lid, tears of pity ran rapidly down his cheeks and dampened his reddish beard. But he

acknowledged to himself that the tears were blatantly sentimental, and not quite in good taste.

Everyone else in the cabin ignored the existence of the man in the box—perhaps intentionally. A man's popularity depends largely upon his attitude. The attitude of the man in the box was not pleasing, since he had been dead for precisely four days. The veteran choked out his words fiercely between ominous coughs.

"My dear friends, you must be sensible of my embarrassment. It is my opinion that I am not an orator, and it is impossible for me to make you understand. I can explain, but you will never appreciate. There were millions of them, and they came after *him*. They attacked me only when I defended him. But it was hard—to see him collapse and turn black. The skin on his face shrivelled up before he could speak. He never left me a last word. It is very hard when—one is a devoted friend! And yet his perversity was absurd. He brought it upon himself. 'The man has a warm temper,' I said. 'You must be careful. You must humour him. It is not good to provoke a man without morality, without standards, without taste.' A little thing would have been sufficient, a small compromise—but Byrne lacked a sense of humour. He paid horribly. He died on his feet, with the nasty things stabbing him, and he never emitted a shriek—only a guggling sob."

The veteran looked reproachfully at the six-foot box, and the ceiling.

"I don't blame you for thinking me queer—but how do you explain this?—and this?" he added, rolling up his sleeve and baring a scrawny brown arm.

We pressed forward and surrounded him. We were eager and amused, and a sleepy Indian in the corner ran his fingers through his fragile black beard, and tittered.

The veteran's arm was covered with tiny yellow scars. The skin had evidently been punctured repeatedly by some pin-like instrument. Each scar was surrounded by a miniature halo of inflamed tissue.

"Can any of you explain 'em?" he asked.

He drummed on the taut skin. He was a tired, nervous little man, with faded blue eyes and eyebrows that met above the arch of his nose. He had an amusing habit of screwing up the corners of his mouth whenever he spoke.

One of the young men took him solemnly aside and whispered something into his ear. The man with the punctured arm laughed. "Righto!" he said. The young man closed his eyes, and shuddered. "You—you shouldn't be alive." The youth had great difficulty in getting his lips to shape the words properly. "It isn't a bit of all right, you know! One bite is nearly always fatal, and you—you have dozens of 'em."

"Precisely!" Our man of the scars screwed up his lips and looked piercingly at us all. Some faces fell or blanched before him, but most of the young men returned a questioning gaze. "You know that the culebra de sangre is more certain than the taboba, more deadly than the rattler, more vicious than the corali. Well, I've been bitten ten times by culebras, five times by rattlers and thrice by our innocent little friend, the boba.

"I took great pains to verify these facts by study-

ing the wounds, for each snake inflicts a slightly different one. Then how is it that I am still alive? My dear friends, you must believe me when I say that I do not know. Perhaps the poisons neutralized each other. Perhaps the venom of culebra de sangre is an antidote for that of the rattler, or vice versa. But it is enough that I stand here and talk to you. It is enough that I find within me the strength of youth—but my heart is dead."

His last comment seemed melodramatic and unnecessary, and we suddenly realized that the veteran was not an artist. He lacked a sense of dramatic values. We turned wearily aside, and puffed vigorously on our long pipes. It is difficult to forgive these little defects of technique.

The veteran seemed sufficiently conscious of our reproach. But he kept right on, and his voice was low and muffled, and it was difficult to follow the turnings and twistings of his disconcerting narrative. I remember distinctly that he bored us at first, and spoke at great length about things that did not interest us at all, but suddenly his voice became gritty, like the raucous blundering of an amateur with a viol, and we pressed closer about him.

"I would have you bear this constantly in mind: We were alone in the centre of that lake, with no human being except a huge black savage within a radius of ten miles. It was risky business, of course, but Byrne was devilishly set on making a chemical analysis of the water just above the source of our spring.

"He was amazingly enthusiastic. I didn't care to parade my emotions in the presence of the black man, and I longed to subdue the glitter in Byrne's

eye. Enthusiasm grates upon a savage, and I could see that the black was decidedly piqued. Byrne stood up in the stern, and raved. I endeavoured to make him sit down. From the tone of suppressed excitement his voice rose to a shout. 'It's the finest water in Honduras. There's a fortune in it —it means—'

"I cut him short with a cold, reproachful look that must have hurt him. He winced under it, and sat down. I was level-headed enough to avoid unnecessary enthusiasms.

"Well, there we were, two old men who had come all the way from New York for the privilege of sitting in the sun in the centre of a black, miasmal lake, and examining water that would have shocked a professional scavenger. But Byrne was unusually shrewd in a detestable, business-like way and he knew very well that the value of water doesn't reside in its taste. He had carefully pointed out to me that whenever water is taken from the centre of a lake directly over a well it can be bottled and sold under attractive labels without the slightest risk. I admired Byrne's sagacity, but I didn't like the way the cannibal in the front was looking at the sky. I don't mean to suggest that he actually was a cannibal or anything monstrous or abnormal, but I distrusted his damnable mannerisms.

"He sat hunched in the bow, with his back towards me, with his hands on his knees and his eyes turned towards the shore. He was naked to the waist, and his dark, oily skin glistened with perspiration. There was something tremendously impressive about the rigidity of his animal-like body, and I didn't like the lethal growth of crisp black

hair on his chest and arms. The upper portion of his body was hideously tattooed.

"I wish I could make you perceive the deadly horror of the man. I couldn't look at him without an inevitable shudder, and I felt that I could never really know him, never break through his crust of reserve, never fathom the murky depths of his abominable soul. I knew that he had a soul, but every decent instinct in me revolted at the thought of coming into contact with it. And yet I realized with jubilation that the soul of the monster was buried very deep, and that it would scarcely show itself upon slight provocation. And we had done nothing to call it forth; we had acted reasonably decent.

"But Byrne lacked tact. He wasn't properly schooled to flattery and the polite usages of rational society. He somehow got the queer notion into his head that the water should be tasted then and there. He was naturally averse to tasting it himself, and he knew that I couldn't stomach spring water of any sort. But he had a weird idea that perhaps the water contained a septic poison, and he was determined to settle his doubts on the spot.

"He scooped up a cupful of the detestable stuff and carried it to his nose. Then he gave it to me to smell. I was properly horrified. The water was yellowish and alive with animalculæ—but the horror of it did not reside in its appearance. Hot shame flushed scarlet over Byrne's face. I was brought sharply and agonizingly to a sense of spiritual guilt. 'We can't bottle that. It wouldn't be sportsmanship; it wouldn't be—'

"'Of course we can bottle it. People like that

sort of thing. The smell will be a splendid advertising asset. Who ever heard of medicinal spring water without an excessive smell? It is a great feather in our cap. Didn't you suppose that a smell was absolutely necessary?'

"'But——'"

"'Let us have no "buts." That water has made our fortune. It is only necessary now to discover its taste.'

"He laughed and pointed to the black man in the bow. I shook my head. But what can you do when a man is determined? And, after all, why should I defend a savage? I simply sat and stared while Byrne handed the cup to our black companion. The black sat up very stiff and straight, and a puzzled, hurt expression crept into his dark eyes. He looked fixedly at Byrne and at the cup, and then he looked away towards the sky. The muscles in his face began to contract—horribly. I didn't like it, and I motioned to Byrne to withdraw the cup.

"But Byrne was determined that the black should drink. The stubbornness of a northern man in equatorial latitudes is often shocking. I have always avoided that pose, but Byrne never failed to do the conventional thing under given circumstances.

"He virtually bifurcated the savage with his eyes, and did it without a trace of condescension. 'I'm not going to sit here and hold this! I want you to taste the water and tell me precisely what you think of it. Tell me whether you like the way it tastes, and after you have tasted it, if you feel somewhat out of sorts and a bit dizzy it is only necessary for you to describe your feelings. I don't want to force

it upon you, but you can't sit there and refuse to take part in this—er—experiment !'

"The black removed his eyes from the sky and gazed scornfully into Byrne's face. 'Na. I don't want this water. I didn't come out here to drink water.'

"Perhaps you have never seen the clash of two racially different wills, each as set and as primitive and as humourless as the other. A silent contest went on between Byrne and that black imp, and the latter's face kept getting more sinister and hostile ; and I watched the muscles contracting and the eyes narrowing, and I began to feel sorry for Byrne.

"But even I hadn't fathomed Byrne's power of will. He dominated that savage through sheer psychic superiority. The black man didn't cower, but you could see that he knew he was fighting against fate.

"He knew that he had to drink the water ; the fact had been settled when Byrne had first extended the cup, and his rebellion was pure resentment at the cruelty of Byrne in forcing the water upon him. I shall never forget the way he seized the cup and drained off the water. It was sickening to watch his teeth chatter and his eyes bulge as the water slid between his swollen lips. Great spasms seemed to run up and down his back, and I fancied that I could discern a velvety play of rebellious muscles throughout the whole length of his perspiring torso. Then he handed the cup back without a word, and began to look again at the sky.

"Byrne waited for a moment or two, and then he commenced to question the black in a way which I did not think very tactful. But Byrne imagined

that his spiritual supremacy had been firmly established. I could have pointed out to him—but why cry over spilt milk. I can see Byrne now, knee-deep in questions, with his eyes scintillating and his cheeks flushing red. 'I made you drink that water because I wanted to know. It is very important that I should know. Have you ever tasted a bad egg? Did it taste like that? Did it have a salty flavour, and did it burn you when you swallowed it?'

"The black sat immobile and refused to answer. There is no understanding the psychology of a black man in the centre of a black lake. I felt that the perversity of Nature had entered into the wretch, and I urged Byrne to ease up. But Byrne kept right on, and then finally—it happened.

"The black stood up in the boat and shrieked—and shrieked again. You cannot imagine the unearthly bestiality of the cries that proceeded out of his revolting throat. They were not human cries at all, and they might have come from a gorilla under torture. I could only sit and stare and listen, and I became as flabby as an arachnid on stilts. I felt at that moment nothing but unutterable fright, mixed with contempt for Byrne and his deliberate tempting of—well, not fate exactly, but the inexcusable phenomena of cannibalistic hysteria. I longed to get up and shriek louder than the savage in order to humiliate and shame him into silence.

"I thought at first, as the screams went echoing across the lake, that the black would upset the canoe. He was standing in the bow, and swaying from side to side, and with every lurch the canoe would ship some water. One cry followed another

in maddening succession, and each cry was more sinister and more virulent and unnatural, and I observed that the devil's body was drawn up as taut as an electric wire.

"Then Byrne began to tug at his shoulders in a frantic effort to make him sit down. It was a hideous sight to see them struggling and swaying in the bow, and I even began to pity the black. Byrne hung on viciously, and I suddenly became aware that he was pummeling his antagonist fiercely on the back and under the arms. 'Sit down, or you'll wreck us! Good heavens! To create such a rumpus—and for a triviality!'

"The canoe was filling rapidly, and I expected her to capsize at any moment. I didn't relish the thought of swimming through a noisome cesspool, and I glared incontinently at Byrne. Poor chap! Had I known, I should have been more tolerant. Byrne deserved censure, but he paid—paid horribly.

"The black devil sat down quite suddenly and looked at the sky. All of his rebellion seemed to leave him. There was a genial, almost enthusiastic expression upon his loathsome face. He leered beneficently and pattered Byrne on the shoulder. His familiarity shocked me, and I could see that it annoyed Byrne. The black's voice was peculiarly calm.

"'I didn't mean anything, now. It's just the weather, I guess. I liked the water. I can't see why you shouldn't bottle it, and sell it. It's good water. I have often wondered why no one ever thought of bottling it before. The people who come out here are rather stupid, I guess.'

"Byrne looked at me rather sheepishly. The

savage possessed intelligence and taste. His English was reasonably correct, and his manners were those of a gentleman. He had indeed acted outlandishly, and given us good reason to distrust him ; but Byrne's tactics had been scurrilous, and deserving of rebuke.

"Byrne had sense enough to acknowledge his error. He grumbled a bit, but in conciliatory mood, and he asked the black to row to shore with a geniality that I thought admirable.

"Byrne put his hand over the side and let it trail in the water. I lit a cigarette and watched the greenish tide swirl and eddy beneath us. It was some time before I glimpsed the first of the little obscenities.

"I tried to warn Byrne, but he suddenly drew his hand up with a shriek and I knew that he would understand. 'Something bit me!' he said. I fancied that the black scowled and bent lower over his oars.

"'Look at the water,' I replied. Byrne dropped his eyes, rather reluctantly, I thought. Then he blanched. 'Snakes—water snakes. Good Lord! Water snakes!' He repeated it again and again. 'Water snakes. There are thousands! Water snakes!'

"'These are quite harmless. But I never saw anything like this before!' And I was indeed shocked. Imagine an unexpected upheaving of a million nasty little pink river snakes, from dank depths, and without rhyme or reason. They swam about the boat, and stuck their ugly little heads in the air, and hissed and shot out hideous tongues. I leaned over the boat and looked down into the

greenish water. The river was alive with myriads of swaying pink bodies, which writhed in volatile contortions, and made the water foam and bubble. Then I saw that several had coiled themselves over the side of the canoe and were dropping down inside. I felt instinctively that the black devil had something to do with it.

"Such indignities were unthinkable. I stood up in the boat, and stormed. The black lifted his sleepy eyes and grinned broadly. But I saw that he was making directly for the shore. The snakes were crawling all about the boat, and they were attacking Byrne's legs, and their hissing sickened me. But I knew the species—a harmless and pretentious one. Still, the thought of taking them up by the tails and throwing them overboard was repugnant to me. And yet I knew that the noisome things horrified Byrne. He shrieked with the pain of their aggressive little bites and swore immoderately. When I assured him that they were innocuous he eyed me reproachfully and continued to mash them with the heels of his boots. He ground their loathsome heads into a pulp, and blood ran out of their tiny mouths and fairly flooded the bottom of the boat. But more kept on dropping over the sides and Byrne had his hands full. And the black rowed fiercely towards the shore, and said nothing. But he smiled, which made me long to strangle him. But I didn't care to offend him, for his methods of retaliation were apt to be unsavoury.

"We finally reached the shore. Byrne jumped out with a shout and waded through several feet of black, sluggish mud. Then he turned about on the shore and looked back over the water. The

whole surface was covered with swimming pink bodies, and they crisscrossed, and interlaced on the top of the tides, and when the lurid sunlight fell upon them they resembled unctuous charnel worms seething and boiling in some colossal vat.

"I got out somehow and joined Byrne. We were furious when we saw the black push off and make for the opposite shore. Byrne was upset and nearly delirious, and he assured me that the snakes were poisonous. 'Don't be a fool,' I said. 'None of the water snakes hereabouts are poisonous. If you had any sense——'

"'But why should they have attacked me? They crawled up and bit me. Why should they have done that? They were scions of Satan. That black ensorceled them! He called them and they came.'

"I knew that Byrne was developing a monomania, and I sought to divert him. 'You have nothing to fear. Had we rattlers or culebras de sangre to deal with, but water snakes—bah!'

"Then I saw that the black was standing up in the canoe and waving his arms and shrieking exultantly. I turned about and looked up toward the crest of the hill in back of us. It was a savage hill, and it rose wild and bleak before us, and over the crest of it there poured an army of slithering things—and it is impossible for me to describe them in detail.

"I didn't wait for Byrne to turn about. I sought to keep him interested in the lake and in the black devil who was standing up in the canoe and shouting. I pointed out to him that the black had made himself ridiculous, and I slapped him soundly on the

back and we congratulated each other on our superiority.

"But eventually I had to face them—the things that were crawling upon us from over the sombre gray crest of the hill. I turned and I looked at the deep blue sky and the great clouds rolling over the summit, and then my eyes went a little lower, and I saw them again, and knew that they were crawling slowly towards us and that there was no avoiding them.

"And I gently took Byrne by the arm, and turned him about and pointed silently. There were tears in my eyes and a curious heaviness in my legs and arms. But Byrne bore it like a gentleman. He didn't even express surprise, although I could clearly perceive that his soul had been mortally wounded and was sick unto death. And I saw shame and a monstrous fear staring at me out of Byrne's bloodshot eyes. And I pitied Byrne, but I knew what we had to do.

"The day was drawing to a close, amidst lovely earth-mists, which hung over the hill; and blue veils made the water gorgeous and hid the canoe and the gesticulating savage. I longed to sit calmly down there by the water, and to dream, but I knew that we had something to do. Near the edge of the water we found a gleaming yellow growth of shrubs and of stout vegetation, and we made stout clubs and strong cutting whips. And the army of reptiles continued to advance, and they filled me with a sense of infinite sadness and regret, and pity for Byrne.

"We stood very still and waited; and the mass of seething corruption rolled down the hill until it

reached the level rocky lake shore, and then it oozed obnoxiously towards us. And we cried out when we counted the number of rattlers and culebras and bobas, but when we saw the other snakes we did not cry at all, for the centres of speech froze up in us, and we were very unhappy.

" My dear friends, you cannot imagine, you cannot conceive of our unhappiness. There were charnel reptiles with green, flattened heads and glazed eyes, which I did not attempt to identify, and there were legions of horned lizards, with blistered black tongues, and little venomous toads that hopped nervously about, and made odd, weird noises in their throats ; and we knew that they were lethal, and to be avoided.

" But we met them face to face, and Byrne fought with genuine nobility. But the odds were overwhelming, and I saw him go down, panting, suffocated, annihilated. They crawled up his legs, and they bit him in the back and sides, and on the face, and I saw his face blacken before my eyes. I saw his lips writhe back from his teeth, and his eyes glaze, and the skin on his face pucker and shrivel.

" And I fought to keep them from him, and my club was never idle. I flattened innumerable heads that were round, and I rounded heads that were flat, and I made sickening crimson pellets out of quivering gelatinous tissue.

" My dear friends, they went away at last, and left him there. And the blue calm of the hills seemed inexplicable under the circumstances, but I was thankful for the coolness and quiet, and the deepening shadows. I sat down with peace in my

soul, and waited. I looked at the tiny punctures on my arms, and I smiled. I was reasonably happy.

"But my dear friends, I did not die. The realization that I was not to die amazed me. It was several hours before I could be certain, and then I did a shocking thing. I took my beard firmly between my two hands and pulled out the hair in great tufts. The pain sobered me.

"I tramped for two days with the body. It was the decent, the proper thing to do. I waited in Trujillo for the fashioning of the coffin, and I personally supervised its construction. I wanted everything done properly, in the grand manner. I have very few regrets—but my soul is dead!"

There was an infinite misery in the veteran's eye. His voice grew raucous, and he stopped talking. We noticed that he shivered a little as he turned up his collar and went out through the cabin door into a night of stars. We pressed our faces against the glass of the one window and saw him standing before the rail, with the rain and moonlight glistening upon his beard, and the salt spray striking against his incredibly chastened face.

BLACK CURTAINS

G. FREDERICK MONTEFIORE

VICTOR Stapleton, artist, seated himself opposite the gloomy black curtains that covered the folding doors separating his studio from the next room.

"I want to paint something different," he thought, "something to wake them up! Gruesome, perhaps, but with a touch of pathos and the ever necessary feminine interest!"

It had occurred to him that gazing at certain objects which have the effect of not imposing any marked impression on the mind leaves that organ freer to roam the realms of imagination. The crystal used by the seer has no intrinsic power of revealing past or future, but the watcher, because his eyes, though open, see only the crystal's nothingness which neutralizes the immediate earthly sights, brings his mind into a receptive state for supernormal visions.

It suggested itself to the artist that those black, velvet curtains might take the place of the crystal and give him precisely that effect of staring into nothingness.

Long he sat, pondering, conjuring up fanciful scenes, mentally placing one character in juxtaposition with another of harshly opposite tendencies; raking over half-forgotten ideas of his

earliest imaginings for startling subjects; now shutting his eyes completely, now through half-closed lids, allowing his sight to play upon the black curtains. But nothing came. No passion-filled, new idea swept into his brain. No grotesque phantasm, moulded from life's realities, flashed before him, to be caught, analysed and committed to tangible pigments and canvas.

His thoughts strayed from the intended picture and he began to muse idly on the man who had recently taken rooms the next to his. Old Mr. Fland was reputed to be a miser, and wild tales had been told of his strangling the poor relations who came to him begging for a share of his gold. Victor had not yet seen him, but the landlady had chattered, and he had once spoken a word to the old man's grand-daughter, a girl of singular beauty, possessed of masses of golden hair that had excited the artist's pictorial instinct. He had frequently heard the girl and the old man quarrelling, and the landlady had expressed a fear that some day the miser would kill his grand-daughter, as he was said to have killed his other relations. "And then," she had added tremulously, "He'll thrust her body away somewhere to get it out of his sight!"

Hours passed and the artist was about to give up his vigil, as nothing came—nothing came—Hush!

What was that?

A hand, lean and yellow, was slowly pushing its way through the black curtains.

The artist was on his feet, his eyes staring, a strange sinking sensation pervading his whole body.

Then appeared the head, the grinning, maniacal

face, of a yellow and shrivelled old man, blinking and leering at the artist with baleful eyes.

"I—I didn't know you were in," wheezed a voice. "You were so very quiet! I—I would like to make your acquaintance. Won't you come into my room? It is larger than your's. You are an artist, eh? I have many things of interest to an artist. I have a grand-daughter! Ha!"

He chuckled in a weirdly enticing way, while a second skinny claw appeared and rubbed itself over the other one.

Victor was indignant at the intrusion, but inclined to forgive the old man because he was reputed to be half-witted. Perhaps he really did need human companionship . . . . besides—the grand-daughter!—with hair of gold!

He followed the old man through the black curtains and into the room which the folding-doors had concealed.

They sat together in a musty room breathing antiquity from every corner, before a little oil-stove. One feeble gas-jet sent its yellow rays down upon the miser's cheerless face. His mouth was toothless, his nose hooked and seemingly as devoid of flesh as the beak of a bird. The skin was stretched so tightly over his temples that his skull seemed to be breaking through it to summon its owner to the grave; while the cheeks were so sunken that the artist fancied, with a quaint twist of thought, that they must have encroached uncomfortably upon his mouth space.

This strange old man seemed well aware of his own shortcomings, for his eyes gloated upon the handsome face and physique of the artist.

Noting the latter's glances of distaste around the room, he laid his yellow talon on his knee and said : "Looks old and shrivelled, doesn't it? Like its owner! But it has hidden beauties! There is gold hidden there! Yes, gold!"

His shrill voice arose to a shriek and he writhed in delight.

"Gold! Hidden gold! And—" (he crept over and put his dry lips close to the artist's ear) "it's yours! The gold is all yours—if you can find it!"

He wriggled back into his chair, his limbs shivering with mocking laughter at what he thought a magnificent joke . . . "If you can find it!"

Then, as Victor remained silent, sickened by the atmosphere of the place, he continued briskly : "Look for it! Search for the gold! Get up! If you find it, it's yours!"

Thankful for an excuse for moving about, and shaking the horror from him, Victor arose and began the strangest search that even his Bohemian existence, spent among art treasures, antiques and grotesqueries, had ever led him into.

He opened first the top drawer of a desk, ancient and emitting an odour of decay. He inserted his hand ; the light was too feeble to trust alone to sight. He withdrew it with a cry of horror, echoed by a mirthless chuckle from the old man. His touch had encountered the five hewn fingers of a human hand!

He pulled the drawer wide open.

The old man laughed. His cries rang through the room.

"Not there!" he howled. "Not that time!

Some one else looked there—and you see what happened to him !"

It was true then, as the landlady had said. This detestable old wretch murdered the people, kinfolk no doubt, who came to him for money, then concealed horrid mementoes of his deeds about this temple of his iniquities.

Victor felt that he would go insane if he remained longer in that polluted air. He stumbled toward the folding-doors and his own room, which he had already made up his mind to vacate on the morrow, but the miser's ghoulish hands restrained him.

"Search for it !" he cried. "Look for my gold. It's yours—if you find it ! And remember—my grand-daughter !"

He tantalized the artist cunningly. He knew, and Victor knew, that he could not leave the place while thoughts of the girl and her possible danger from the fiend filled his brain.

"Search !" snarled the old man. "Find the gold !"

Victor was now searching wildly among all the rot and stench that the unhallowed place possessed. He raised a glass bowl with a hollow stem that looked like a place of concealment, and from the stem protruded the shorn lips of a man.

He dashed the bowl to fragments on the floor and fled, trembling and white into a corner.

"Ha, ha, ha !" rasped the maniac. "Another one looked there, and see what he got ! He speaks of gold no more. His lips ! Ha, ha !"

"Let me go !" cried Victor, in a strange voice. "Let me go, I say ! Why do you hold me in this accursed place to torture me ? Let me go, I say !"

He held out his hands in supplication.

The old man seemed to have him chained to the room by an influence that drained the will from his victim.

"Find the gold!" he snarled. "Search and find." Then suddenly: "Look behind you!"

Victor turned as if galvanized. His eyes encountered a picture, its subject obliterated by grime. He tore it aside, and there in a niche in the wall a skull grinned derision at him.

Madly battering his clenched fists against the grisly piece of bone, laughing and sobbing in hideous fright, he dashed across the room. But before he reached the folding-doors his frenzied eyes saw a tall, straight cupboard which he had not before observed. By some odd trick of the mind he resolved to undo his tormentor and discover his gold, even if it cost his reason. He tore at the knob of the door and immediately had the cupboard open.

Something heavy—something that had been leaning against the door, fell into his very arms. It was the body of a girl, strangely beautiful, with masses of golden hair piled high upon her head and falling in a glittering riot about her white shoulders.

She fell limply upon his chest. At first he dreaded she had met the fate of the other searchers, but gladly he felt her heart beat and knew that the warmth of life was still within her.

Eagerly his arms encircled her and he turned her around so that his eyes might the better see the wonder of her beauty. Then his eyes fell to her breast, and all the horror of that night was as a frolic to the enormity of dread that seemed to freeze

his soul as he saw, sticking in her bosom, a knife.

And this had been all the time he was in the room —and he had not known !

" So you've found it ! " the voice of the hell-fiend wheezed from behind him. " You've found my gold ? You like it ? Look at it ! See ! On her head ! "

His hideous claw touched her hair.

" Gold ! All gold ! "

Victor supporting the girl with one arm, seized the handle of the knife to draw it from its human sheath. At that instant the old man uttered a peculiar shrill whistle, the like of which he had never before heard. Immediately the door was thrown open and two men entered.

" Caught ! " screamed the old man. " See the murderer ! With his hand on the dagger, plunging it into her heart ! "

Victor turned. The body of the girl slipped from his arm. He looked into the barrels of two automatic pistols.

" Caught ! " chuckled the old man. " Caught red-handed ! "

Victor, facing the guns, backed slowly through the folding door into his own room and sank inert into the armchair. A slight gust of wind caught the black velvet curtains and they fell together, leaving him in total darkness.

" Yes," he said to himself, " I think that wounded girl on the chest of the handsome young man, those two levelled guns, held by the two grim executors of the law, the grisly skull and the hideous old man grinning in the background will make an excellently gruesome but romantic picture for the jaded public

taste. By Jove, I got some inspiration from sitting in the dark and staring at those old black curtains after all ! "

He rose with a satisfied smile and stretched his long-cramped limbs.

" Good old curtains ! " he cried aloud.

As he spoke he laughingly gave the curtains a thump. His hand went through the curtains and as he drew it back he saw that the fingers were stained red.

He tore aside the hangings, and there lolled against him the body of a young girl, the hair a piteous mass of red and . . . *gold !*

" My God ! " he cried. " Old Fland *did* murder his grand-daughter, and thrust her body through the folding doors while I dozed and fancied ! And she has been there—like that—all the time ! "

A faint, dry chuckle came from behind the black curtains.

THE PLANT-THING

R. G. MACREADY

"THIS morning, Dick, I have something special for you," said Norris, city editor of the *Clarion*, as I approached his desk. "Interview with Professor Carter. You've heard of him, of course?"

"Certainly," I replied. "There are some rather weird stories concerning him."

"Exactly. And the latest of these stories is that Carter is conducting wanton vivisection on a prodigious scale. Holder, of the local Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, went over yesterday to investigate, but was turned away at the gate. He laid the matter before me and I promised to try for an interview."

"Who started the vivisection story?"

"Several farmers, according to Holder. During the past four months they've sold Carter more than a hundred and fifty pigs, sheep and calves. It is well known that the professor is a scientist and not a stock-raiser; ergo he dissects the animals . . . Can you start now?"

En route to the Carter home I stopped at a hardware store and bought a thirty-foot length of rope. I foresaw difficulty in securing admittance to the professor's domain.

While driving, I brought to mind everything I

knew about him. Four years ago he had bought the old Wells place, ten miles west of town. No sooner had it passed into his hands than he commenced the construction of a high board wall about the five acres, in the centre of which the house was situated. The wall completed, he had moved in with a young lady, apparently his daughter, and eight Malay retainers. From that time on he and his household might have been dead for all the town saw of them. Our tradesmen made frequent trips to the place, but all their business was transacted with a Malay at the gate.

I drove rapidly and soon came in sight of my destination, which stood on a hill half-mile back from the road. Five minutes later I drew up before the gate, and in response to my hail the Malay appeared. He was a nice-looking young chap, dressed irreproachably, and spoke excellent English. I gave him my card and after a perfunctory glance at it he shook his head.

"I am sorry, sir, but it is the master's order that no one be admitted ; and if you will pardon my saying so, least of all, representatives of the Press."

"But my business is urgent. Serious charges have been laid against him, and it is possible that I may be the medium by which these charges are refuted."

The Malay's ivory teeth flashed in a smile.

"Thank you, sir, but I do not doubt that the master is able to take care of himself. Good day." This last was spoken in a tone of polite finality as he turned on his heel and walked away.

I entered my car and drove back to the highway. However, I was determined to get that interview

by crook if not by hook ; if I may say it, this policy of mine had made me star reporter of the *Clarion's* staff. So I continued on down the road a few hundred yards and parked the car in the grove, where it was hidden well. I then took the coil of rope and made my way through the grove, which swung in a huge, narrowing semicircle up the hill-side to the north-west corner of the Carter grounds. Arrived there under the fifteen-foot wall, I looked cautiously about me. So far as I could see, I was unobserved.

Just within the wall grew a great oak, one of whose major branches extended well outside. Quietly I flung one end of my rope over this limb, fashioned a running noose and drew the rope tight. Then slowly I wormed up the barrier.

From the top I gazed down upon a glory of wonderful, luxuriant flora. Stately ferns waved gently in the stirring air, beautiful flowering shrubs were interspersed here and there, while everywhere in the emerald grass, still wet with dew, nodded strange, exotic plants. Ever a lover of flowers, I forgot my mission as I looked. There came to my nostrils odours more fragrant and elusive than any I had heretofore known.

Suddenly I crouched low. On noiseless feet there passed beneath me a Malay, who had emerged without warning from a clump of ferns. He paused for a moment to brush an insect from a shrub, then disappeared from view in a thicket of high, green bushes.

Stealthily I slid to the ground and started toward the house, guiding myself by the observations I had made while on the wall. It was very likely, indeed,

that the professor would kick me forth the instant he discovered my presence, but at any odds I should have something to tell the readers of the *Clarion*. Too, my audacity might count in my favour.

I had not gone far before I became conscious of an odour utterly different from the others. It was vague, but none the less disquieting. A feeling of loathing and dread pervaded me, a desire to clamber back over the wall and return to the city. The scent came again, much stronger, and I stood irresolute for several minutes, fighting down a sense of faintness as well as the longing to take flight. Then I advanced. In thirty seconds I came to the edge of a small, open space. At what I beheld, I put out my hand to a large fern to steady myself.

In the middle of that tiny clearing grew a thing which, even now I shudder to describe. In form it was a gigantic tree, unspeakably stunted, fully twelve feet in diameter at the base and twenty-five feet high, tapering to a thickness of two feet at the top, from which depended *things*—I cannot call them leaves—for all the world resembling human ears. The whole was of a dead, drab colour.

Dreadful as was the appearance of the thing, it was not that which made me reel as I looked. It was writhing and contorting, twisting itself into all manner of grotesque shapes. And *eyes* were boring into me, freezing the current of my blood.

Something rustled in the grass. I looked down and saw an immense creeper snaking toward me. For the first time I observed that it was joined to the trunk of that frightful thing, and so near the ground that I had not seen it for the tall grass. With a cry of horror I turned to run.

The creeper leapt at me and fastened around my middle with horrible force. I felt something in me give way. Frantically, I struck and tore at the ghastly, sinuous girdle that encircled me, undulating like the tentacle of an octopus. Fruitless, fruitless! I was drawn relentlessly forward.

I screamed. In the trunk of the thing there had appeared a mighty red-lipped orifice. The tentacle tightened and I was lifted off my feet toward that orifice. . . .

A beautiful girl was bending over me when I opened my eyes. She spoke, in a musical voice: "Please do not move. One of your ribs is broken."

A tall, grey-haired man who had been standing in the background now came to my bedside.

"I am glad that I came in time, my boy. Otherwise . . ."

He was Professor Carter. He presented the girl as his daughter, Isobel.

Here one of the dark-skinned servants entered with some articles, which he deposited upon the centre table.

"I am going to set your rib," announced the professor. And forthwith he took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. When the job was finished to his satisfaction, I besought him to telephone to town for a taxicab.

"I shall certainly do no such thing," he said. "I insist that you remain our guest until you are recovered."

Isobel Carter proved a wonderful nurse during the three days that followed. Indeed, the moment I had first looked into her deep black eyes, I knew that I loved her. I should have liked to remain in

bed indefinitely with her to care for me, but was ashamed to do so. On the third morning I was moving cautiously about the house, she supporting my steps, although there was no need of it. The Professor joined us.

No mention had been made of my weird adventure in the grounds, but at my request he now told me how I had been saved from the hideous creature.

"Your first cry reached my ears as I was walking toward the house and I immediately dashed in its direction. You were about to be swallowed when I arrived. I gave a sharp command, and my travesty released you."

"It obeyed your command?" I exclaimed incredulously.

"Precisely. It acknowledges me as its master. For six months, its period of life so far, I have superintended its growth and ministered to its needs.

"But *what* is it?"

A dreamy look came into Carter's eyes.

"For many years my brother scientists have sought for the so-called 'missing link' between man and ape. For my part, I dare to believe that I have discovered the 'link' between the vegetable and animal kingdoms. The creature out there, however, has, to my mind, not as yet passed the initial stage of its development. Whether it will attain the power of locomotion remains to be seen."

He paused, gazing out of the window, then continued.

"Twenty years ago, in Rhodesia, I chanced upon a carnivorous plant that gave me my clue. Since then I have laboured unremittingly, crossing and

recrossing my specimens, and you have seen the result. It has cost me three-fourths of my fortune, and countless trips to Asia and Africa."

He indicated a vast pile of manuscript on the table.

"The life history, precedents included, of my travesty. It will form the basis of a work which, I do not doubt, will revolutionize science."

Glancing at the clock, he rose to his feet.

"It is feeding time. Do you care to accompany me?"

I assented, and we set out.

The thing remembered me, for the huge tentacle swept out in my direction, curling impotently in the empty air. I shuddered, and kept my distance.

A Malay appeared leading a calf. It was lowing piteously, for it had sensed danger.

The tentacle threshed about, endeavouring to clutch the animal, which lunged back, wild with terror. The man wrapped his arms about it and hurled it forward. It was seized. A loud cracking of bones broke the momentary silence, and was followed by an agonized cry. Six feet from the ground the great orifice gaped wide. The calf disappeared. A fleeting second and the mouth closed. There was no sign of its location; the trunk was smooth and unbroken.

A nausea had gripped me during the scene. The Professor and the Malay were apparently indifferent. They conversed briefly. Then, linking his arm in mine, Carter led the way back to the house. As we walked thither, I broached the subject of departure. He would not hear of it, insisting that I stay till Saturday.

While in his study I had noticed an elephant-gun in a corner. I asked him whether he had done any big-game hunting.

"That gun? Tala had me get it. He asserted that he could foretell tragedy in connection with the creature; that a day would come when I should lose control of it. I scouted the idea, but to humour him purchased the weapon, which stands there loaded in the event need of it arises. Still, it would assuredly break my heart if anything necessitated the slaying of my travesty."

At the door of his study he excused himself and went in. Isobel carried me off to the veranda hammock. As we talked it was inevitable that the subject of the plant-thing should come up, and a shadow crossed her face as we discussed it.

"Tala says that Father does not know how dangerous it is. He is right. But Father will not listen."

The next morning I again went with Professor Carter to the little clearing.

It was a sheep this time. The poor beast was paralysed with fright, and stood passive, waiting for death.

The tentacle shot forth, wavered a second, then encircled, not the sheep, but Professor Carter, who seemed stricken by surprise.

He ripped out an order: "Off!"

The tentacle only tightened. Agony settled upon Carter's face. I sprang forward to drag him back. The tentacle released its hold for one lightning flash, then seized us both. We strove in vain against the vice-like cable. The Malay, with a wild cry, turned and rushed down the path, shouting as he ran.

The thing was playing with us as a cat plays with mice it has caught. It could have crushed us effortlessly, but the tentacle tightened by degrees. In spite of all we could do, we felt that we were being dragged forward to where the frightful red mouth yawned. Our eyes bulged, and I could see that Carter's face was taking on a greenish tinge. I extended my free arm and our hands clasped. Then there was the roar of a gun at close quarters and the tentacle gave a spasmodic jerk that flung us twenty feet. We rose, staggering.

Tala stood by, the smoking elephant-gun in his hands, staring at the thing. Following his eyes we discerned a large, ragged hole in its trunk, from which a stream of *blood* was flowing and forming a great pool on the ground.

Even as we looked, the travesty went into the death-agonies. And as it writhed it emitted a sound that forever haunts me. Presently its struggles ceased. The Professor buried his face in his hands.

I had not noticed Isobel's presence. Now I turned and saw her beside me, gazing with horror-filled eyes at the terrible drooping form. I took her away from that tragic spot, for I knew that Professor Carter wished to be alone.

HIS FAMILY

C. FRANKLIN MILLER

THE elemental love of a man for his family will take queer turns at times, but for sheer horror none of the famous tragedies of history can equal the warped affection which forms the basis of the incident I am about to narrate. It happened in the heart of that vast uninhabited country drained by the upper Congo, some two hundred miles from civilization's nearest outpost.

As a member of the Denckla geographic expedition, I had spent nearly a year in the wild interior, collecting a mass of scientific data for the society we represented. While the task at hand had been a fascinating one, I could feel myself growing dull and sluggish, mentally as well as physically, under the devitalizing rays of the African sun.

My note-book recalls the date as June 14, 1890, when we emerged from the swamp-infested inland, and again set eyes on the sullen waters of the dominating Congo. The sight was a welcome one. To us it meant but a five days' journey to the comfort and contentment of a white man's home.

We pitched our tents on the angle of land formed by a tiny rivulet and the growing expanse of the master stream. The sun had dipped far down

behind the towering trees to the west by the time our camp chores were completed, and the comparative coolness of early evening had sprung up.

Wearied by the arduous tasks of the day, I indulged in a leisurely pipe and prepared to retire immediately. Upon entering my tent I discovered, with wondering eyes, a long, gaping rent in the canvas opposite—clean-cut and new. From outside there sounded the soft thud of flying feet. I plunged through the opening in time to see a dim figure disappear into the tangled undergrowth of the darkening jungle.

Investigation developed that a rifle, several boxes of cartridges and two scientific books, which we carried for reference, were missing. Apparently nothing else had been tampered with.

A guard was mounted on the encampment that night, but the mysterious marauder never returned.

Stretched out on my cot, I pondered over the puzzling occurrence for some time. That the theft had been perpetrated by a white man, I knew. The form which had scurried into the leafy cover of the jungle was not that of a dark-skinned native. This was a riddle in itself, for the men who penetrate any distance into the wilds of the world are men of purpose who find no time for petty thievery. But the nature of the loot was as much of a wonder as the race of the man. Apparently no food had been sought ; and why the books ? Why—the—books ? I could frame no satisfactory answer and fell asleep presently with that query weaving monotonously through my brain.

High noon of our third day in that locality found me some distance inland on a little hunting excursion

of my own. I had about decided to retrace my steps back to the camp when I brought up suddenly in astonishment. That this section of the dark continent should harbour any civilized inhabitants was beyond belief, but away to my left, cunningly hidden behind the dense foliage of the matted trees, stood a cabin.

There was no sign of human life about the place, not even the semblance of a pathway ; but the very existence of a permanent, man-made shack so far removed from any settlement was a mystery enough to stir the blood of any adventurous soul. I started forward slowly with the vague idea of unearthing some strange jungle secret and emerged presently upon a little clearing, from where I surveyed the place with doubtful eyes.

Few tools and very little skill had been utilized in the erection of that cabin. There were no windows; the wall logs were undaubed and irregular, some of them jutting far out at the corners, while the ill-fitting door sagging pathetically upon rope hinges gave to the whole a grotesque appearance.

But it was not so much the appearance of the place as the intangible atmosphere of horror enveloping it which held me. Instinctively I distrusted that abandoned silence which seemed to beckon so innocently. Some brooding evil lay hidden there waiting with cunning patience for the springing of a trap ; but like the venturesome fool I was, I approached and laid my weight cautiously against the door. To my surprise it resisted, and for a moment I speculated as to the wisdom of indulging my curiosity any further. That barred door indicated the presence of someone. Even as I

hesitated a man's soft-drawling voice sounded from within, holding me rigid with amazement.

"Ah'll paddle down to the settlement next week, honey, and see if Ah can't pick up some new books for you. Reckon daughter can attend you satisfactorily until Ah return. Now try to sleep," soothingly. "You'll feel better in a little while."

Women—living in this God-forsaken spot! And a man of breeding, if I were any judge! The whole thing was preposterous, but such was the evidence my ears had gathered.

Thinking that I could possibly be of some service in case of illness, I raised the butt-end of my rifle and rapped. A deep silence followed. For a moment I experienced that unpleasant sensation of being passed upon by hidden eyes, and then the door was slowly opened.

Involuntarily I recoiled a step, scarcely knowing what to expect. A tall, broad-shouldered man appeared. There was in his carriage a certain flash of dignity which could not be concealed by the tattered garments he wore. His hair was grey and fell in wild disorder to his shoulders, framing a countenance seamed by years of suffering. For a moment he regarded me with deep-set, weary eyes. Then—

"You are welcome, suh," he said quietly, in the same soft-toned drawl, and stood aside for me to enter. I did so, feeling vaguely that the whole occurrence was a fragment of some senseless dream.

The interior was fitfully illumined by the daylight which filtered in between the undaubed logs, revealing a picture of strange barrenness. Except for a few sawed-off logs evidently serving as chairs,

and a large upturned box in the centre, the room was bare of furnishings. Across one end of the structure was draped a long, black cloth, which no doubt concealed the women.

My strange host closed the door without barring it, and when I turned I found his eyes searching me with an unfathomable expression which was decidedly unpleasant.

"You'll pardon my intrusion," I said, a bit awkwardly. "I spied your cabin on my way back to camp and thought I could be of some service. My name is Brent."

"Glad to meet you, suh," he answered "Visitors are a rare luxury with us. Mah name is Warner—Colonel Warner of Kentucky."

There was a surprising power in his hand-clasp.

"Unfortunately the women are somewhat indisposed at present, but Ah'll tell them you called, Mr. Brent. Won't you be seated, suh?"

I sank down upon the nearest log, a highly perplexed man. The formality of it all would have been laughable were it not for the serious dignity of this surprising colonel. So far as he was concerned we might have met in the drawing-room of some Southern mansion. As for myself, I could not throw off the sense of tragedy which seemed to lurk beneath the surface. Visibly there was nothing to fear, but the events of the last few minutes were too unnatural to put me at ease.

Of a sudden my roving eyes settled on the familiar outlines of a pair of shabby-looking books resting on the box close by. I stared, and the colonel, evidently noticing my gaze, took up one of the volumes.

" An excellent discourse, suh," said he, proffering me the volume, " but highly technical. Have you ever read it ? "

I thumbed the well-known cover. On the fly-leaf, in my own handwriting, appeared my scrawly signature : " James W. Brent."

" One of the best treatises on the subject in existence," I declared.

" Decidedly ! Ah got it only a few days ago for Mrs. Warner. She loves books, but finds reading a hardship. Her sight is dim. So Ah read things aloud to her. We find that very interesting, suh ! "

With a sigh, which was half moan, he subsided upon a log near the opposite wall, and I returned the book to its companion. Undoubtedly it was my own, but I found it difficult to believe that this well-bred gentleman, however peculiar, had committed the theft.

I gazed at him curiously and found him staring vacantly into space with sagging jaw. Finally he spoke in a queer, detached manner.

" Colonel Warner ! It seems like ages since I've heard that name. . . . The mad colonel ! That's what they call me." Then suddenly : " Have you ever heard them tell of the mad colonel ? "

I had not.

" No matter ! " And he waved his hand in dismissal of the thought. " You would not feel so secure in my presence with their wild tales running through your brain. . . . Ah am not mad ! " In his tone was a shade of wonder. " Only the victim of a terrible vengeance. . . . Do you see those pictures, Mr. Brent ? "

I had overlooked them before—two small

photographs framed in black hanging on the wall behind me ; one of an elderly lady, beautiful beyond a doubt, the other of a captivating youngster.

" My family, Mr. Brent ! "

His eyes fairly glowed with the pleasure of the telling, but promptly recovered their weary expression.

" We were happy once—back in Kentucky. A rich family, and well-known. But disaster overtook us in the shape of a hopeless maniac—Andrew Lang."

For a moment he was silent, staring down at the floor with bent head, his grey hair falling about his face. I glanced around, trying to conjure up some excuse for leaving. I had no desire to probe into his family secrets ; besides, that tense atmosphere of horror that overhung the place was anything but reassuring. I wanted to be gone. Rather the wild things of the jungle than to be cooped up with—what ? I did not know. But I could sense some hidden terror, and involuntarily my eyes wandered to that crepe-like drapery which divided the cabin.

I started to speak, but his soft voice interrupted, ignoring me completely.

" Ah was telling you of Andrew Lang, the madman. Ah trusted him like a brother and thought he was grateful until Ah discovered his perfidy. Lies and soft-tongued entreaties were his stock-in-trade. It was Mrs. Warner he wanted, suh. Cunning, indeed, were his methods . . . . Ah—killed him ! "

I could scarcely repress a shudder. The whole thing was beginning to get on my nerves ; but I could not stay his soft-toned drawl.

" Insanity had been the family blight of Andrew Lang. All four of his sons were afflicted. For years they hounded me from place to place, vowing to avenge their father's death with cruel torture. But I felt justified. The honour of the Warner name—my wife's happiness—my little Helen . . ."

His voice trembled. Tears started to his eyes. Then he drew himself erect with military dignity.

" Legally Ah was a murderer, suh, and the law would not protect me from those four warped brains. I fled the country with my little family and took refuge here in the heart of the jungle, where I thought I would be safe ; but those cunning brains found me—at last."

His shoulders drooped and his form relaxed into the very picture of despair. When he again spoke, his voice was dull, expressionless.

" First one came—and then another, disguised ; but Ah knew them . . . And in self-defence Ah—killed them ! "

For a moment I thought the man was mad. His tale was fantastic enough. But one look at his forlorn figure seemed to reassure me ; sorrow and suffering were all that the picture held.

I was about to utter some words of sympathy when the door of the shack flew open and a harsh voice intruded. I started erect with quickened pulse. Framed in the door way was a man clad in the khaki of the border rangers. One hand was poised lightly on the automatic in his belt. His eyes burned with triumph as they rested on the bent figure of the colonel, who had scarcely moved.

" So we've got you at last," grimly.

" At last," echoed the colonel, dully.

"And a hell of a chase it was. Two others were not so successful. You have no idea what happened to them?"

It was more of an accusation than a question.

"Ah killed them—as Ah will you," was the colonel's toneless reply.

"Why damn your mad hide," exploded the stranger, wrathfully, "I'll—"

"Mad? Mad?"

The colonel was on his feet with wildly glaring eyes, his hands working spasmodically.

"You—call me—mad!"

Suddenly he leaped forward and one powerful arm shot out. Recoiling a step the stranger whipped out his automatic. Simultaneously I brought the butt of my rifle down on his arm. Something cracked; a low moan escaped his lips and his weapon clattered to the floor.

Then the colonel was upon him, his powerful hands clutched in a death grip on the stranger's throat. I tried to pull him off. It was useless. The stranger's face turned purple and his body sagged. Then the colonel's rage subsided and with a hissing intake of breath he let his victim slip through his hands into a lifeless heap on the floor.

A sickening nausea swept me at the hideous sight. I shuddered and turned away. The colonel seized my hand in his and I could feel him tremble.

"Thank you, suh," he whispered. "God knows what would have become of my family. . . . He was the—third!"

His voice faltered and my heart went out to him in pity in spite of the murder just committed. Then

with a sudden movement he turned and bent over the dead body of his enemy.

Grasping the limp form beneath the arm-pits he started to drag it across the rough boards of the cabin and presently disappeared behind that mysterious barrier of black without a backward glance. A gruesome object to lay before the eyes of that unseen family of his !

I studied that swaying curtain with puzzled eyes, trying to penetrate its secret, and gradually grew conscious of a thin stream of red slowly oozing from beneath its low-hanging folds. I stared, motionless, my brain beset with wild imaginings. Surely that slowly creeping line of red was—blood ! What thing of evil had I stumbled upon ? What horror did that table cloth conceal ?

I tiptoed across the floor and gently pulled back the curtain at one side. A weird sight met my eyes.

The colonel was kneeling before an upturned box, his body bent like a worshipper before a shrine. Beside him where he knelt, rested three shaggy, human heads, one still wet with blood, while a decapitated form in blood-stained khaki lay huddled in a far corner. I heard the colonel speak—a horribly elated whisper.

" You're safe, honey ! He'll never get you. He can't. We'll fool them all—all ! "

And he laughed.

I stared with something akin to fascination at the repulsive sight. Suddenly he turned, sensing my presence.

" Come in, suh," he cried. " Come in and meet the family—Mrs. Warner and little Helen ! "

I saw that his eyes were bulging and his face

working in a frenzy of maniacal emotion. With a cat-like movement he sprang to his feet, disclosing the idols of his worship—his family resting sphinx-like on the box before him. Two empty, grinning skulls !

A terrible weakness assailed me as I staggered away from that place of madness into the sanity of broad daylight.

Five days later, on arriving at the settlement down-stream, I learned that three rangers had been sent out after " the mad colonel " somewhere up the river and that none had returned.

I held my peace.

A HAND FROM THE DEEP

ROMEO POOLE

SOMEWHERE near midnight my room telephone rang, and according to well-formed habit I rolled out of bed and answered almost before I was fully awake.

"Ambulance trip for you, Marsh—Whitby Home."

That brought me wide awake, and hustling into trousers, shoes, shirt and white uniform coat I descended to the main office. Dr. Lang, the superintendent, met me at the foot of the stairs with a heavy overcoat.

"Here," he said, "put this on—it's a pretty chilly night. Here's your bandage kit; you may need it. Ambulance in the back drive. Explosion and fire out at the Whitby Home. Send back for help if necessary. Now use some speed."

I used some speed, and when I got into the ambulance the driver used some more. We tore up the street at a hazardous rate, the chauffeur giving himself over to the task of driving, while I turned the crank that ran the shrieking signal horn.

The so-called Whitby Home was an obscure little institution occupying a shabby ten-room brick building in a low-class residential district in the outskirts of the city. The place bore a rather evil reputation, and it was hinted that its owner and

operator, Dr. Whitby, was guilty of various illegal practices in connection with his hospital work. However, no complaint of any importance had ever been lodged against him, and consequently no investigation of his activities had ever taken place and the general opinion of his character remained unconfirmed.

For aught I knew, the rumours about Whitby might have been born of the natural resentment of all medical men toward a practitioner who declines to be governed by their standards and becomes, therefore, a "quack." For Whitby had belonged to no medical society; he was careless about collecting anything for his work; and he practised any kind of medical theory, old or new, that happened to appeal to him, totally disregarding the ethics of the profession. He had no general practice, and the inmates of his would-be sanitorium were usually people of little learning and nearly always the victims of disabling accidents. I must mention, however, that my gratification at the thought of investigating the Whitby Home and some of its curious inmates entirely overcame my resentment at losing most of a night's sleep.

In a matter of seconds we drew up as near the place as we could get, the Fire Department having the narrow street blocked. The building was almost completely gutted by the fire when we arrived, and, grabbing my first-aid kit, I ran up to the captain who was directing the fire-fighting to inquire about the victims.

"Only one alive," he panted. "Rest all killed in the explosion. Come over here."

The survivor, whose room had been on the

ground floor, had not been injured by the accident, although he had been stunned temporarily by the shock of the explosion. The firemen had wrapped him in a blanket salvaged from the burning house and laid him in a sheltered place to await the ambulance. Passing the mangled bodies of the dead, we found him sitting up, looking a little dazed at the excitement, but feeling cheerful and apparently comfortable. He was a common-looking little man of probably thirty years, a labourer of not very extensive intellect, but alert and sensible in answering our questions. He had been staying at the place on account of the amputation of his left arm a little above the elbow. I sat by his side on the return to the hospital, and questioned him regarding the cause of the fire.

"Gas, or gasoline explosion, I guess," he responded readily. "Fox, the fellow that did the odd work around the house, was in my room along about 10 o'clock, and sat there and talked to me awhile. Finally he said he smelt something like gasoline or escaping gas, that seemed to come down the stairs, and he went up to see to it. After a while I heard him open the door at the top of the stairway, and that's about all I knew till I come to, out there in the yard. Something must've blown the whole top of the house to pieces. I was lucky, for I was the only one that slept downstairs. Are any of the rest of 'em—alive?"

No, not a soul, I told him. The patient's face betrayed genuine regret at this.

"Too bad. Doc Whitby was a good fellow. I got this arm cut off in a smash-up over at the barrel-stave mill, and Doc Whitby just happened along

before I even got it wrapped up, and he took me in and took care of it ever since, and never asked for a dollar. I had a coupla weeks wages with me, and I turned that over to him, but he didn't seem very anxious to get it. Wanted me to wait and see what a nice job he'd do on that arm—some new scheme he had."

Arriving at the hospital I installed my patient in a ward bed, made out his record card in the name he gave me, Simon Glaze, and then proceeded to look after the dressing of his arm, which I found soaking wet. I removed this and applied iodoform gauze, dry, covering it with a linen bandage.

"Aren't you going to soak it up?" he asked.

"Soak it? No. That's no way to take care of a stump."

"Doc Whitby kept it wet all the time."

"It's a new one to me," I told him. "We always keep wounds like that clean and dry. You'll be all right with this dressing."

"Well, maybe," he said doubtfully as I left him.

The next morning I went in for a look at my patient, who appeared to have spent a rather bad night.

"Doc," he began eagerly, "couldn't you stretch a point and wet this bandage for me? I haven't slept a wink all night with that dry rag on it."

I wondered what kind of faith cure Whitby had been practising on Glaze, and I maintained my position that the wet bandage was not the proper treatment. Glaze stared at me with red, sleepless eyes, misery showing in every line of his face.

"Doc," he finally said, "I want to talk to the

regular top boss of this concern, and I want him pretty soon."

We had considerable argument over this, but ultimately I went and brought up Dr. Lang in compliance with Glaze's request. Glaze had been lying face down on his bed during my absence, and when Dr. Lang and I returned we opened the felted door with its silent latch, without a particle of noise and had stepped into the room before Glaze was aware of our approach. Dr. Lang started to speak and his heavy voice broke on the stillness of the room with quite a jar. The effect on the patient was most startling. He gathered his legs and his good arm under him like a flash and sprang backward, clear on to the next bed, which, fortunately for its occupant, was empty at the time, the patient being in the dressing room.

Lang gasped.

"Aha, a mental case, as I might have suspected."

He crossed quickly to where the patient lay, still crouched in the same posture, speechless, doubled up. The doctor laid a hand on him, spoke to him, turned him over on his back, all without evoking a word from Glaze, who lay with eyes half-closed like a man playing dead.

"Well, let's have a look at the arm, anyhow," said Lang, and he proceeded to uncover the unresisting man's stump.

"Bad-looking job," he commented "No infection, but just doesn't look right. I suppose Whitby was trying some wildcat scheme on him, and so long as he has no infection maybe we'd better continue it for a while just to keep him calmed down. Then we'll gradually break in on some

reliable modern treatment. Didn't you say he was perfectly rational last night?"

"He certainly was."

"Next time he has a lucid interval, just call me, will you, Marsh? No matter what I'm doing. This is an interesting case, and I'd like to know what the late Whitby has been doing to him."

Some time later in the day Glaze recovered his poise, and Dr. Lang talked to him at length, questioning him about the treatment administered by Dr. Whitby but the answers only increased our curiosity. Glaze admitted that he had been under chloroform a number of times since Whitby had first cared for his arm stump, which seemed rather unusual to us. Questioned as to the purpose of this, he said he didn't believe the arm had ever been touched when he was under the anesthetic as it was never sore afterwards. There was an injury in the roof of his mouth that bled a good deal, he said, and there were little sore spots on his back that were quite painful for a day or two.

"And then," he finished, "there was a good deal of time I can't remember at all. Guess I been kinda feverish or something, for there's long stretches of time go by that I can't remember anything. This morning was one of them.

"And say, Doctor, I wonder if you could fix it so I can have a bath pretty often—say every day, or twice a day. I don't want much hot water—just plain cold is good enough for me. Doc Whitby always let me bathe two or three times a day, and I just can't seem to get enough of it."

Dr. Lang was interested enough to assent to this, although he hardly expected to collect a cent from

the patient. He was retaining Glaze for the satisfaction of his private curiosity.

"That's the weirdest case I ever saw or heard of," said Dr. Lang to me later. "Call it intermittent insanity if you want to, but he hasn't a trace of fever, nor a sign of locomotor ataxia, both of which lunatics practically always have. In fact, when he is in those silent fits his temperature is actually *below normal*. And how he takes to water! Whatever is wrong with him, it isn't hydrophobia."

I prepared Glaze's bath for him several times, and he demanded water that was practically unheated, although the time was early winter and the temperature outside well below freezing.

Glaze was removed to a room by himself, with a bath attached, where his eccentricities would bother no one else, and during the next two weeks he showed very little change in symptoms. I was careful not to startle him unduly, but even under the most careful treatment he still showed that curious inclination to double up into a ball and go backward —always backward—away from any one who approached him. His talkative intervals grew shorter, and if allowed he would spend hours in his tub of cold water, hardly moving a muscle.

Making an examination of the arm-stump one morning I noted for the first time three or four little warty growths in the suture where the skin had been drawn together over the stump. As the patient was feeling apparently normal at the time, I held a hand mirror up to the stump so that he could see the warts, too, and told him they would probably have to be cut off. He looked intently at the reflection of the end of the stump for a few seconds and then

turned to me with a startled expression in his face and voice.

"Don't cut them off," he pleaded, and on the instant he doubled up again into a ball, rolling on the floor of the dressing room like a wooden thing.

When I told Dr. Lang of the incident his curiosity at Glaze's behaviour put a severe strain on the good doctor's self-control.

"If that man Whitby were alive to-day," he remarked with studied restraint, "I'd be inclined to put him on the operating table and persuade the truth out of him with a red-hot iron. It's some devilish work of his that makes a man act like a dried armadillo every time any one looks at him. And that subnormal temperature? Where does he get it?"

Two days later we took the somewhat unwilling Glaze into the operating room to care for his unhealthy stump. Dr. Lang, of course, superintended the work, and the actual cutting had been turned over to my fellow-interne, a young Irishman named Lancey with a flaming red head and a likable manner, whom everyone considered to be destined for a brilliant future. As I gradually whiffed the ether into the patient's nostrils Lancey was busy unwrapping the stump. When the cut-off member was exposed, Lancey's eyes rested for only a second on the bits of flesh he was expected to remove; than his whole face changed as if he had been struck with a club.

"Holy cats!" he gasped, his lips turning grey-white. "Cut out the ether, Marsh. I don't want to operate on *that*."

I stopped and turned toward Dr. Lang, who

was a little nonplussed at Lancey's sudden refusal to carry out his commission.

"Pardon my abruptness, Doctor," apologised Lancey to his superior, "but I'd like to have six or seven days' time before going ahead with this cutting."

"*You'd* like it?"

"Yes, Doctor. If you'll give me a week before you disturb this man's arm I think I can tell you something about the honourable Dr. Whitby's work that'll make your eyes open. But I've just got to have that much time."

"One week," ruminated the superintendent, slowly, "won't kill nor cure him, in his present condition. I presume we can wait that long. But aren't you forgetting that I am in charge here, and that this man is being kept here solely on my responsibility? Do you have to be so extremely reticent with your theories? I feel that I'm entitled to know something about what you think you've discovered."

"I know what Whitby has done," said Lancey simply. "And in a week I can tell you what he did it with. Can I have that much time?"

"Yes, take your week," exploded the doctor, with some irritation. "But I'm holding you strictly responsible for the condition of this patient."

"That's all right—that's what I want."

"And I still think you might give me an idea of what you're talking about."

"Take a look at that, then," pointing to the bared stump.

Dr. Lang scrutinized the growths. As he had not recently been reading on the subject that had

given Lancey his sudden inspiration, it is possible that he did not see anything definite on Glaze's arm ; also it is possible that in his dignified conservatism he doubted even his own eyesight. But as he retreated, dissatisfied and silent, I bent close and looked. What I saw took my breath away and made me wonder if I were really awake. Lancey hurried away, and I trundled the unconscious Glaze back to his bed.

During the next two days Glaze lost nearly all that was left of his normal human instincts and speech. He moved and obeyed mechanically when spoken to, but seemed to understand motion better than speech, so that it was often necessary for me to point to a thing in order to make him comprehend what I wanted. His mania for the cold bath increased, and if I went into his room quietly in the early morning I frequently found him doubled into the familiar ball, sleeping with his eyes half open.

Observing Glaze's eyes so much brought out another revelation. Upon first seeing the man I had noticed his bright, intelligent-looking eyes, which were rather prominent ; but now since his recent prolonged lapses into semi-consciousness, I noticed that his eyes were sunk deeper into his head and seemed to be losing their lustre. Now, this condition might be induced by anæmia or something of the sort, but Glaze was in the pink of physical condition and not in the least emaciated, and I was at a loss to explain the change in his eyes. He had certainly grown less talkative at the same time, and vaguely I wondered if something were influencing a part of his brain, causing it to shrink, and

thus by natural consequence causing his eyes to sink farther back in the bony structure. As I sat observing him it suddenly struck me that the crown of his head seemed to be less prominent than when I first saw him, and after a careful survey I was positive that the man's head was losing its prominent crown and sinking into a more brutish line.

Of course, any physician knows that a man's skull can change shape in the course of time, if something happens to develop a new portion of his brain, just as the bones in a coal-heaver's shoulders bend under his heavy loads ; but a change like that in one's skull would hardly be perceptible in less than two or three years, and the apparent alteration in the shape of Glaze's skull in the three weeks we had known him seemed like a preposterous dream of some kind. Not wishing further to upset my good superior, Dr. Lang, I kept still about this weird discovery until Lancey returned to the hospital that evening, he having been out by special permission all day. Late that night I brought Lancey up and told him about the patient's eyes and asked him what he could see in the shape of his head. While Glaze lay in his habitual stupor, Lancey felt his head and turned it right and left. Then he placed his hands behind him and said :

" It all fits together—perfectly. But, my God, where will it end ? "

I could only stare at my friend.

" I've got it, Marsh, I've got the whole story—up to date. And I don't know but that it would be a kind deed to chloroform this poor wretch and let him out of it. I never dreamed it would work so

fast. To-morrow, Marsh, I'll tell all of you what I have found out."

And Lancey went back to the laboratory.

I now studied Glaze's habits more closely than ever, for I did want to get some idea about the mysterious case, before Lancey had to tell me every detail as if I were a child. Glaze was not inactive all the time. He varied between his rolled-up playing-dead attitude and sudden snappy, erratic movements. He was beginning to snap at his food and devour it hastily, almost without chewing, and this habit caused him some little stomachic disturbance, as of course it would with anybody. In his frequent visits to the bath-tub he would dive for long periods beneath the surface of the water and come up half strangled, yet seeming to enjoy it all. And if anything surprised or startled him it was always backward that he retreated from it—backward and suddenly.

Finding time to visit Glaze along in the afternoon, I dropped into his room and found him sitting up in his chair, apparently his old, cheerful self. I spoke to him gently and without startling him, and he smiled and looked as if he would like to reply, but simply could not. Hoping to draw him out into one more conversation, I sat down beside him and continued talking to him about little things around the house with which he was familiar. Finally, unsuccessful in getting Glaze to talk, I playfully shook hands with him, preparing to leave. The hand that gripped mine nearly broke three of my fingers, and the smile left Glaze's face as he shut down on me with a grip of inhuman strength. Tugging at his hand with my own left, in an effort

to free my sadly pinched right member, I saw that his thumb reached clear across my own very large palm and had almost an inch to spare. How could I have escaped noticing that huge thumb before? Then I saw the nail. It bore a sharp ridge, like the gable roof of a house, down its centre, and it occupied the entire end joint of that monstrous thumb. This certainly had not been the case when I had held Glaze's right hand a few days previously while administering chloroform to him. When I finally extricated my right hand Glaze kept opening and shutting that huge pincer with a motion that reminded me of the jaws of a hungry alligator.

What was this superhuman influence that caused a man's firmest tissues to alter their shape completely within a few hours? And what was it that that ghastly, gripping claw resembled?

I left the room with cold chills running up my spine.

The next morning Lancey arranged to explain to Dr. Lang, two or three other doctors who had become interested, and myself, regarding his findings about the mysterious patient, for which purpose they gathered in Dr. Lang's back office at 10.30 o'clock.

You may be assured that it was a highly interested little group that gathered in that room considerably before 10.30, Dr. Lang himself being almost rabidly impatient.

"Well, shoot, Lancey," he said, before the door had closed behind the last man. And Lancey shot.

"There's just one man in the room I think, who saw and understood what was growing on the end of our patient's arm a week ago to-day. At that

time it was four perfectly good little fingers and a model thumb ! "

This statement was greeted with voiceless gasps.

" It's something different now—in fact, I hardly know what to call it in its present form, but we'll go up and look at it presently. Anyhow it is now perfectly plain that what Whitby tried to do, and partially succeeded in doing, was to modify the regenerative process in his patient so that a new forearm would grow in place of the lost one.

" The theory is nothing very new. As early as 1906 it was observed that when a limb is amputated at the middle of a bone, the bone starts to grow out again, but increases only about one-fiftieth of an inch in length before it is halted by some other influence. You know also, of course, about the little warts of so-called " proud flesh " that apparently try to replace the original muscular tissue in case of injuries, but which are misshapen or misplaced. What Whitby was trying to get at, as I see it, was to so control these misdirected efforts of nature as to produce a new and perfect limb.

" The human body is already able to repair damaged bones by rebuilding small particles of the bony tissue ; it is also able to replace muscle, nerve and even finger nail tissues, although in somewhat imperfect forms. Whitby was trying to induce it to build a lost member in perfect form.

" Seeking this result, his studies naturally took him to observing the water animals that have this power of regeneration. A crab, for instance, when it gets a limb broken, promptly bites off the rest of the limb, and a new one grows in its place. The same is true of the lobster family, down to the

tiny crawdad, no larger than a cricket. Specimens of these little creatures are frequently found with one limb far smaller than the others as a result of such occurrences.

"It seems that Whitby has been experimenting for years with the ductless and other glands of shellfish in pursuance of this theory of regeneration, and we have upstairs the living proof that he was able to prepare a glandular extract that changes the bodily cell-structure as well as influencing the building-up processes of nature; but it appears that he never succeeded in isolating the one influence from the other, both being present in his preparation.

"I have found that Whitby bought the little crawdads, which are really dwarf lobsters, from children around his neighbourhood, and that his purchases ran into tens of thousands of these little creatures, and I also find that he bought live lobsters in a quantity that his dining table would never have warranted.

"In short, this patient, Simon Glaze, has had his body so saturated with the glandular extracts from lobsters that he has actually developed regenerative powers, and the bits of proud flesh on his arm-stump which you saw only a week ago became quite well-developed fingers. At that time, of course, they were getting natural human material for their reconstruction. All that has changed now, and as a result of the other influence of his medication he is now coming more and more every day to resemble a gigantic shellfish, in both body and mind—if a shellfish can be credited with a mind.

"You remember what he told about a wound in the top of his mouth? That was the easiest access

to the region of his pituitary gland, a seat of powerful influence over any structural change in a man's body. Other injections were administered along his spinal column, and I firmly believe that Whitby was successful in providing the man with something that he has used since Whitby's death in promoting the change, not understanding the real results."

I objected a moment to state that Glaze had positively had possession of nothing he had brought from the Whitby home.

At that Dr. Lang leaped to his feet, suppressing an oath.

"I've got it!" he ejaculated, his steel-blue eyes snapping. "This infernal lunatic Whitby was afraid somebody would take his patient away from him before he got through his nice little experiments. So he just lodged bodies of oil soluble extracts along his spinal column where they would continue to be picked up in the lymph. In this way he has gone on poisoning and wrecking this poor wretch of a labourer after he himself is dead and in—wherever such people belong! We'll go up now and have an X-ray made and see if anything can be done."

The unfinished lecture broke up and Lancey, Lang and I went up to Glaze's room immediately. As we waited for the elevator Lancey finished explaining to Dr. Lang.

"That nice little set of fingers has now turned to an almost perfect lobster claw, only two fingers of the original five having developed, both with scissor-like claws. His good right hand is to-day nearer a lobster claw than anything else. His speech is gone. His temperature is 93 degrees instead of a normal of 98. His backward leaps when startled

are the behaviour of a crawfish. And the occipital bones of his head are shrinking day by day. Above all, note his fondness for water, especially on his stump. A crab could not grow a new limb except in a wet place."

We hurried into Glaze's room and on into the bathroom beyond, where he spent so much time. In the tubful of cold water we found Glaze's nude body, doubled and curled up, face far down under the water—dead.

"Poor devil," said Lancey, as we extracted the body and laid it upon the bed. "His lobster brain taught him that the only safe place for him was under water, but he lacked the lobster's breathing apparatus. Well, it's better this way, after all."

THE TORTOISE-SHELL CAT

GREYE LA SPINA

Extract from a letter from Althea Benedict, Pine Valley Academy for Young Ladies, to Mrs. Wordsworth Benedict, New York City:

IN SPITE of your care to reserve a room for me, Miss Annette Lee called me into her office yesterday and begged me to share it with a new girl.

It seems that Vida is the only child of a very old friend of hers, Felix di Monserreau, a rich Louisiana planter. Miss Lee says she thinks I may have a good influence over my new room-mate, but she managed to evade my tactful inquiry as to what Vida's vices might be. She did seem awfully disturbed. She said that she appreciated my nice attitude; and if I found the companionship disturbed me, would I report it to her immediately? She was so agitated she just couldn't look me in the face. I can't imagine what can be the matter with Vida.

So far, my new room-mate appears to be rather nice. Her father has been most generous and our room is the envy of all the other girls. I would have written you earlier, mother, but we've been getting our new things settled.

Vida wants everything to go with her particular

style of beauty! She confessed that she was perfectly miserable if she didn't have a background that suited her, and that she knew I wouldn't mind —particularly as she was willing to pay for the decorations. So she has the room decorated in the most stunning fashion, in shades of orange and dull green, with heaps and heaps of down-cushions. She says she loves to lie around on a pile of cushions, like a cat.

I wish you could see her. She's really a type of girl to attract attention anywhere with her dead-white skin, her dark red lips, her black hair and her eyes——. Her eyes are quite the queerest I've ever seen. They are narrow, long, slumbrous, with drooping lids through which she looks at one in her peculiar way. The iris is a kind of pale golden-brown that gives the impression of warm yellow. When dusk comes, I've seen the pupil glowing with some strange iridescence, the iris a narrow yellow rim about it; for all the world, it makes me think of a cat's eye.

Don't forget to tell Cousin Edgar to send me the necklace he promised to bring me from Egypt. I've told the girls about it, and they're dying to see it.

YOUR ALTHEA.

The same to the same:

. . . Studies are going forward nicely. Nothing new, except a couple of rather queer things about my room-mate. I thought I'd better write you first, before saying anything to Miss Lee about it. Perhaps I'm only imagining things, anyway.

Vida is certainly a very odd girl, mother. I am beginning to believe that she can see in the dark, with those strange eyes of hers. What makes me think so—you know how I love to change furniture around every little while? The other day I altered the position of everything in the room. Vida wasn't there, and before she came back the "lights-out" bell rang. I meant to stay awake and tell her not to fall over the table that was in front of her bed, but when she did come I was so drowsy that I didn't get a chance to speak to her before she had reached her bed.

And, mother, she threaded her way among those things just as if she could see them perfectly; not a single moment of hesitation. It gave me the most eery feeling. I hid my head under the quilt, for I felt as if she were watching me in the dark. I know you'll laugh when you read this, but I didn't feel like laughing. And I still have an unpleasant feeling about it, for how could Vida walk so rapidly among those things, not one of which was in the same position she had seen them in last, unless she could actually see in the dark?

Last night another odd thing happened. There must have been crumbs in our waste-basket, for we heard a mouse rattling around in it. Just before I could switch on the light, I heard Vida bound across the room from her bed. When the light was on, she stood by the waste-basket with that mouse in her hands, and, I can tell you, it was a dead mouse! She looked so strange that I squeaked at her, "Vida!" She jumped, dropped the dead thing and scuttled back to bed. She seemed quite cross because I had put on the light, and I think

she cried afterward in the dark, although I can't be sure of it.

Mother, does it seem uncanny to you? I wonder if this night-sight is what Miss Annette referred to? I hate to say anything, for after all, what's the harm in it?

. . . When is Cousin Edgar going to send that necklace?

The same to the same:

. . . Something happened that I cannot help connecting with Vida. Yet I don't like to go to Miss Annette with it. I'm sure she will smile and tell me that I have an exceptionally lively imagination.

Vida and Natalie Cunningham had a dispute the other day about something or other, and Natalie locked it up and when she found Vida was right, she was sarcastic about it—Natalie, I mean. Vida just looked at her with those strange golden eyes glowing, bit her lip, and remained silent.

When we were alone afterward, Vida said to me, "Do you know, Althea, I'm afraid something unpleasant is going to happen to Natalie?"

I must have looked surprised, for she went on hastily:

"There's some kind of invisible guardian watching over me, Althea, that seems to know whenever anyone is unkind to me. For years I've observed that punishment is visited on everyone who crosses me or troubles me in any way. It has made me almost afraid of having a dispute with anyone, for if I permit myself—my real, inner-self—to grow

disturbed, something always happens to the person at the root of the trouble."

Of course, I hooted at her forebodings. I told her she was superstitious and silly. But, mother, that night Natalie Cunningham lost her favourite ring, a stunning emerald. It was stolen right off her dressing-table five minutes after Natalie turned off her light. She got up again to unlock the door for her room-mate, put on the light, and—the ring wasn't where she'd left it.

The door was still locked ; the window was open but it was a third-story window, as most of the dormitory windows in our building are, and there is no balcony under it.

Mysterious, wasn't it ? Our floor monitor, Miss Poore, declared that Natalie must have dropped her ring on the floor, but Natalie has hunted and hunted. The ring certainly isn't in her room. Who took it ? How ? It frightened Natalie so that she is afraid to be alone in her room without a light.

The odd thing about it is the way that Vida looked at me when the girls told us about it. She actually wants me to believe that her " invisible guardian " stole the ring to punish Natalie for having been sarcastic to her. Did you ever ?

I wonder if poor Vida is—well, just a bit flighty, mother ?

How about that necklace ?

The same to the same :

. . . I'm so excited that I can't write coherently. All the school is in an uproar over what took place last night. I am more disturbed

than the rest, for I am beginning to have a suspicion that Vida is right when she says that unpleasant things happen to people who cross her. It makes me nervous, for fear she may get provoked at me for something. I don't know whether or not I ought to report the whole thing to Miss Annette ; I'm afraid she'll think I'm romancing. Won't you please write me and tell me what to do ?

Yesterday morning Vida's old coloured mammy, Jinny, who is in Pine Valley in order to be near her charge, came up for Vida's laundry. Miss Poore came in while Vida was putting her soiled things together, and offered to help sort them over.

Mammy Jinny gave a kind of convulsive shiver. She looked up at Vida, staring hard at her for a moment. Vida stared back in a queer, fixed way. Then my room-mate's eyes flashed yellow fire. She told Miss Poore in a kind of fury that she'd better mind her own business and not stick her old-maid nose into other people's private concerns.

Miss Poore was wild. (You can't blame her. It was really nasty of Vida.) She took Vida by the shoulders and shook her hard. Vida didn't resist, but she looked at the floor monitor with such an expression of malice that Miss Poore actually stepped back in dismay.

" I'm sorry for you, Miss Poore," said Vida to her. " I'm afraid you are going to suffer severely for laying your hands on me. I'd save you if I could—but I can't."

Miss Poore went out of the room without answering. Vida gave the laundry to Mammy Jinny, who insisted upon taking laundry-bag and all. After the old coloured woman had gone, Vida

flung herself on her bed and cried for an hour. She said she was crying because she was sorry for Miss Poore. I failed at the time to see any significance in her remark, until after last night—.

About two oclock this morning, the whole floor was wakened by the most terrible screams coming from Miss Poore's room. I sprang out of bed and rushed into the hall where I met the other girls, all pouring out of their rooms. We rushed to Miss Poore's room and she finally got her door open to let us in.

Mother, she was a sight! Face, hands, arms, were all covered with blood from bites and scratches. She was hysterical, and no wonder. She declared that some kind of wild animal had jumped in at her window and attacked her in the dark. The queer thing is, how did that creature—if there was one—get into her room and then out again before we opened the hall door? Her window was open, but it is a third-story one and there is no tree near by from which an animal could have sprung into her room.

She is in such a condition this morning that Miss Annette told us in chapel she would have to leave the school to recover from the nervous shock incident to the attack. The mystery of it is the only topic of conversation to-day, as you can imagine. And now for the odd part of it.

When I got back to my room, there lay Vida, apparently sound asleep. She hadn't been disturbed by all that racket. Some sleeper! I woke her and told her.

Mother, she lay awake the rest of the night, crying and carrying on terribly, declaring it all her

fault, although she couldn't help it. Her statement was rather confusing. She insisted it was her "invisible guardian" who had attacked Miss Poore, but she begged me not to tell anyone. Her advice was superfluous ; if I went to Miss Annette with such a statement, she'd think either Vida was crazy or I was simple.

I tried to sleep, but I can tell you I left the light on. And I wasn't the only one ; all the girls had lights in their rooms the rest of the night.

The coincidences are strange, aren't they, mother ? Natalie displeases Vida and has her emerald ring mysteriously stolen. Miss Poore displeases Vida and gets scratched and bitten. But even a coincidence can't explain why a wild-cat should bite Miss Poore on Vida's behalf, can it ?

Do please write me soon and tell me what I ought to do about informing Miss Annette.

The same to the same :

I took your advice and told Miss Annette. She said she must trust my discretion not to let the other girls know anything she told me, and then admitted that Vida has been followed by this reputation in every school she's been in, until her father couldn't enter her in some schools. Something unpleasant always happens to any person who displeases Vida di Monserreau. And although she disclaims having done anything, yet she declares it is done for her.

Miss Annette asked me if I wanted to have my room to myself. I thought that Vida really hadn't done anything to me, and she had certainly made our room the nicest in school. I decided to let her

stay on, and Miss Annette thanked me so heartily that I was actually embarrassed.

. . . Why didn't you tell me Cousin Edgar was coming down? I couldn't imagine who it was when I was called to the reception room to see a gentleman. Imagine my surprise!

He gave me the chain, mother, and it is perfectly precious! Have you seen it? It's tiny carved cats with their tails in their mouths, and the pendant is a great jade cat with topaz eyes. The girls are wild over it. and Vida particularly is simply crazy about it. She asked me if Cousin Edgar couldn't get her one like it.

Cousin Edgar said a rather funny thing. He clasped the chain about my neck and declared that I must promise not to take it off without his permission. Now, why do you suppose he did that? When I asked him, he just shrugged his shoulders and said something about your having shown him my letters. What have my letters to do with my promising not to take off the cat-chain?

Yesterday he came over to take me driving. When he came into the reception room, he thrust out his chin in that odd way of his and said abruptly: "There's a cat in the room. Thought Miss Annette didn't allow pet animals."

I knew there couldn't be one, but he insisted and began to look about the room. And then—the oddest thing, mother! We came upon Vida di Monserreau, asleep in a big armchair by the fireplace. She had crouched on her knees, with her hands out on the arm of the chair and her chin on her outstretched hands, for all the world like a comfortable pussy-cat.

I said to Cousin Edgar : " Here's your cat," and laughed.

He looked at Vida closely. Then he said softly to me, " Althea, you are speaking more to the point than is your wont." (You know how he loves to tease me, mother.) " Introduce me to the pussy," said he.

I woke Vida. She was terribly embarrassed to have been seen in such an unconventional pose, but she told me afterward that she liked Cousin Edgar more than any other man she'd ever met. I think he liked her, too, although, of course, he didn't say much to me about it.

Vida asked him, almost at once, if he hadn't got another cat-chain like mine. She'd taken a tremendous fancy to it, she said.

" Perhaps you can prevail upon Althea to give you hers. If you can, I'll get her something else to take its place."

At this suggestion of his, Vida turned imploring eyes upon me. Mother, I was disturbed. I thought of what had happened to Natalie and to Miss Poore, and I wondered if something horrible would happen to me if I refused to give Vida my chain. So I just put it to her point-blank.

" What will happen to me if I don't give my chain to you, Vida ? "

" Nothing to you, Althea, darling. I could never be really angry at you," she whispered.

" Then please don't ask me to give up my chain," I begged.

I looked back as I went from the room with Cousin Edgar, and her eyes were on me in the most wistful way. Poor Vida !

. . . I wonder what the attraction is? Cousin Edgar is remaining here for an indefinite visit, he says. I do hope he hasn't fallen in love with Alma Henning: I simply cannot bear that girl. I suppose he won't ask my advice, though, if he has fallen in love with one of the girls. Belle Bragg is wild over him, and Natalie thinks him scrumptious.

He has old Peter with him and is stopping at the little hotel in Pine Valley.

The same to the same:

. . . I suppose I ought to tell you some things I've hardly dared write before because they are so—well, so extraordinary. I've been afraid you might think something the matter with my brain, because I'd been studying too hard. Cousin Edgar says it is in good condition and my head straight on my shoulders, and to write you the whole thing, exactly what I thought about it.

Mother, there *is* something uncanny about Vida di Monserreau. I told you how cat-like she was at times, and how she loves sitting in the dark, or prowling about the room in the dark.

The other day I came into the room ten minutes before lights-out. The room was empty when I turned on the light. But as I went to my desk, a great tortoise-shell cat was stretching itself lazily in the armchair where Vida loves to sit, near the window.

Like a flash Miss Poore's experience passed through my mind and I started for the door. As I got to the hall, I turned around, and—mother, believe me or not—there wasn't a sign of a cat. But sitting in the armchair, staring at me with those queer yellow eyes of hers, was Vida di Monserreau.

I sat down on a chair near the door and breathed hard for a moment. Then I said, "My gracious, Vida, how you startled me! I didn't see you when I came in. What happened to the cat?"

"Cat?" says she, yawning. "What cat?" She stretched her arms lazily and settled herself comfortably on the cushions.

I can tell you I felt queer. My eyes had played me a very strange trick, making me see a striped black-and-yellow cat where Vida was sitting. I felt it best to say no more to her for fear she might think me out of my mind. But the more I think about it, the more I am convinced that there was a cat.

And if I did see a cat, stretching and yawning in the armchair, where, if you please, was Vida when I was looking at the cat? And where did the animal get to? (I looked everywhere before I'd go to bed, although I didn't tell Vida what for. I pretended I'd mislaid my gym. slippers that were all the time in my locker. I could feel her yellow eyes on me while I peeped under the beds and around.)

When I happened to mention the incident to Cousin Edgar, he told me not to forget that I'd promised not to remove the chain he'd given me. He said something about its being a talisman to ward off evil influences.

Now, mother, don't write and tell me not to study so hard! Cousin Edgar doesn't think I'm crazy or delirious, so I guess you needn't.

The same to the same:

. . . This morning Cousin Edgar called me on the telephone to ask if anything had been stolen

from one of the girls last night. There had. Grace Dreene had lost a locket and chain. Cousin Edgar asked if the locket had her initials on it in chip diamonds ! How did he know ? I'll tell you.

Last night he was sleepless, so he took a walk up here. The moon was shining directly on my side of the dormitory and he distinctly saw a great tortoise-shell cat come out of what he thought was my room.

There is a very narrow ledge around the building, under the windows, about three inches wide. The cat walked along that ledge until it reached Grace's window, where it jumped in. After a moment it came out with something glittering in its mouth !

Cousin Edgar hissed, "Scat !" The cat hesitated, startled, and the thing went flashing from its mouth to the ground. Cousin Edgar watched it go back to my window, then he picked up the article. It was Grace's locket and chain. The cat had stolen it from Grace's room ! Did you ever hear of anything so queer, mother ? I've read of monkeys and jackdaws—but a cat !

Cousin Edgar mailed the chain to Grace. Fancy the astonishment of the girls when the stolen thing came back through the mail !

But what do you make of it ? The cat came out of, and went back into my room ! The things I do think are so extraordinary that I'm afraid to say them, even to myself.

From Captain Edgar Benedict's notebook :

After having found out all I could from Althea about the strange facts in this most interesting case, I determined to follow the only clue that presented

itself, *i.e.*, the old, coloured mammy. It seems that she called regularly every Tuesday, so I made it a point to linger near the academy on a Tuesday morning, and was rewarded by seeing the old woman appear bright and early for her young mistress's laundry.

She is a queer character. Far from being the decrepit old creature I had been led to expect by Althea's description, she is a tall, handsome mulatto woman with flashing eyes that hold a strange magnetism in their direct, unblinking gaze. Her face is deeply lined with wrinkles that to my opinion have been etched by the character of her thoughts rather than by the hand of time. She carries herself humbly when in the presence of academy people, but I have seen her, once out of sight of the school, straighten up that gaunt form and throw her head back proudly, altering her dragging walk into a brisk and lively stride.

She carried the young lady's fresh laundry into the academy and in half an hour came out laden with the soiled laundry, which she had in an embroidered laundry-bag. Once out of the sight of the school, she broke into a rapid, swinging walk, and I had much ado to keep her in sight. She reached Pine Valley and made for the negro quarters, where she entered a house that I noted carefully.

As I wanted very much to get a personal impression, I knocked at her door, and inquired if she could do my laundry work. She stared at me, pride in those black eyes of hers. Then she said very curtly that she did washing for one person only, and shut the door in my face. There is a fierce, implacable atmosphere about that old black woman.

I would dislike tremendously to arouse her hatred. . . . Just got back from a night-visit to Mammy Jinny's cabin. Fortunately, when I got there, she had left a full inch of space between the window-frame and the lower edge of the window-shade. Through it I got a fine view of the old witch—for witch she certainly is, and somehow involved in the mysterious happenings at the academy.

It is not the first time I have watched a witch's incantations. But I have never before had such a strong personal interest in them.

The old negress pulled out the laundry from the bag, and with it tumbled a flashing emerald ring ! That must have been the ring of Natalie Cunningham. How did it get into Vida di Monserreau's soiled laundry, unless put there by Vida herself ? Is Vida an accomplice or an innocent victim ?

Mammy Jinny now drew from her bosom a stocking, and shook out of it as fine a collection of rings, brooches, bracelets, chains, as I've ever seen outside a jeweller's shop. She laid the emerald ring with them and sat staring at her plunder. After a while, she pushed it back into its hiding-place. Then she began to pace the dirt floor of her squalid cabin.

As she walked, she muttered. Sometimes she wrung her hands. Fragments of her words drifted to my ears, as I listened.

" My baby Vida—my little missy ! Forgive me, missy ! But you must pay for your father's crime. I cannot forgive him ! "

All at once she flung herself down before the

hearth, for all the world like a great cat and began to stare unblinkingly into the smouldering embers. By my watch, she remained in that posture absolutely motionless for fully two hours, during which I honestly wished I were elsewhere; there was something about her tense attitude that conveyed a baleful significance to my intuition. I knew that she was projecting her mental powers to accomplish her black purposes, like the evil old witch she was. It was hardly an agreeable situation for me, but I dared not move until she herself began to stir.

I have an idea that the witch, the tortoise-shell cat, and the odd Vida are more closely connected than might seem credible. I must take Althea somewhat into my confidence.

. . . My plan worked perfectly. Vida was very happy to possess the cat-chain and easily agreed not to take it off. Last night I kept watch over the old negress, and Althea—at my request—watched Vida. Vida slept peacefully through the very hours when I watched Mammy Jinny sweating and working her incantations in vain.

. . . I am on the right track. Althea tells me that Mammy Jinny came into the academy and ordered Vida to take off the cat-chain. Vida refused with what seemed natural indignation. Mammy Jinny told her the chain was "bad voodoo." Vida stood firm. The old negress was so furious that when she left, she forgot to bow herself, and strode away, full height, much to Vida's astonishment.

. . . Althea has been carrying out my further directions with a cleverness and tact that does her credit. She snipped one of the links in the chain when Vida wasn't looking, and Vida has asked me

to have it repaired, as my cousin suggested. To-night Vida will be without the protection of the chain. I have instructed Althea as to her part, and I shall myself watch the old witch.

. . . All last night Mammy Jinny worked her spells. They were successful this time. Althea has told me what happened.

Althea saw the cat steal from Vida's bed to the window, and return with a stolen bracelet in its mouth. It dropped the article into Vida's laundry-bag. Then, as Althea expressed it, the cat sprang into Vida's bed, and—there lay Vida, peacefully sleeping! No wonder Althea couldn't close her eyes the rest of the night.

When one of the girl's chums came in to say that a bracelet was missing, Althea had it ready to return. She said she had picked it up in the hall.

I am going to put a stop to the whole business. It is voodoo, pure and simple, with a taint of the devil that is unpleasant, to say the least. Whatever the old negress's intentions, she must not attempt to carry them out by means of an innocent young white girl who has somehow fallen under her dominant will-power. If I cannot put a quick stop to it, I shall tell Vida di Monserreau exactly what she has to fear and provide her with a talisman.

Last night was certainly a thrilling one from start to finish. I sent old Peter to remain outside Mammy Jinny's cabin, for I wanted a full report of her actions. I myself, with Miss Annette's kind co-operation, hung a stout rope-ladder from Althea's window while the two inmates of the room were in the gymnasium, and covered the top with pillows to conceal it from prying eyes.

At about one-thirty a.m. the great cat came out of Althea's window—left open for this purpose—and went out upon the narrow ledge. It made me hold my breath. (What if it had fallen? The thought makes me shudder yet.) It disappeared within another open window, and I went quickly under the window and called to Althea that it was the fifth window. She closed hers at once and went to Belle Bragg's room, where the cat had gone in.

Both girls saw it go out of the window. Then Belle looked at her dressing-table and found her wrist-watch missing. Althea said she thought one of the girls had borrowed it and would bring it back in the morning. Then Belle closed her window—a vain precaution—and Althea returned to her own room.

Meantime, I had mounted the ladder quietly until I was directly under Althea's window, where I braced myself strongly for what I had in mind would follow.

The cat found the window closed. It beat with its forepaws at the pane in a pitiful manner.

I reached up and tossed the repaired cat-chain about its neck. Although I had rather anticipated what followed, it made me gasp, for it was the limp, unconscious body of Vida di Monserreau that I supported in my arms!

Althea opened the window and between us we got the poor girl on to her bed. I warned Althea to be silent, and was off to find old Peter and get his report.

I was thoroughly provoked when I found he was not on watch outside the cabin as I had expected

him to be. Then I peered under the window-shade. What I saw was my old black Peter, squatting on the floor before the hearth, his arm about that old witch and her head resting on his shoulder !

I *was* furious ! I gave a thundering rap at the door. Peter let me in. But the old scoundrel, instead of seeming ashamed and guilty, met me with a broad grin that showed his white teeth from ear to ear. To my further astonishment, Mammy Jinny rose to her full height with a grin that matched his.

It took my breath away. I demanded an explanation. Between them, it was mighty hard to find out the truth, for it was a long story that went back to the young girlhood of the old negress.

She and Peter were slaves, owned by Vida's grandfather. When a valuable ring was missing, the old man charged Peter with the theft, and sold him into a distant state where he could never hope to see his wife again. Jinny knew the facts but what good would it have done her to have told them ? She might have received a whipping. She knew that her young master had given the ring to a white girl whom he was courting on the sly.

Jinny appealed to " young marse." He laughed in her face. She determined then to be revenged. Concealing her hatred, she demanded and received the care of Vida, when " young marse's " wife died in child-birth.

From that time on, Mammy Jinny worked out her plans, using her knowledge of voodoo, until she had so bent the child's will to hers that Vida was absolutely responsive to the old negress's thoughts.

How she performed the apparent metamorphosis I had seen, she would not tell, however, but only looked at me defiantly out of her proud eyes.

Mammy's idea of revenge seems to have been to fasten the disgrace of theft upon Vida di Monserreau thus shaming "young marse." Her methods of accomplishing her end are, like all methods of black magic, better left undisclosed to the general public.

As old Peter has long owed me loyalty, since I saved his life years ago, I had little difficulty in persuading him to take his wife to Jamaica, from which place they were originally bought, and where Peter in later years returned, in hope of meeting Jinny there once more. They will be out of Vida's life henceforth.

This does not mean that Vida is to go unprotected. I shall take care of that, with the permission of her father. But I do not believe that old Jinny will ever again crouch in invocation to the Evil Powers to bring the tortoise-shell cat into materialization at Vida's expense.

THE CASE OF THE RUSSIAN STEVEDORE

HENRY W. WHITEHILL

IN MAKING this public statement of the facts, as I know them, in the matter of the death of Dr. Dinwoodie, I am actuated only by a desire to set at rest the many rumours which have been current since his horrible murder. The sad event was in itself sufficiently mysterious, but the wild and exaggerated speculations to which it gave rise are absurd.

My testimony at the coroner's inquest was so garbled by the newspapers that I hardly recognized it, and each reporter added his guess at the solution of the mystery to make it even more puzzling. It is to correct the many misstatements contained in the published versions of my testimony that I have prepared this brief résumé of the facts known to me. I include the queer incident of the Russian stevedore in the hope that it may suggest a clue to the mystery to some mind more analytical than mine. While I am morally certain it was his form I saw and his voice I heard, I may be mistaken. I confess that I can see no reasonable theory which will connect him with the doctor's death except the agitation shown by each at mention of the other. It is certain that in some way they were linked with each other

long ago, but what the connection was I have no idea. And if the Russian was responsible for his death—how? And why?

Dr. Augustus Dinwoodie, as everyone who reads must know, was probably the most famous surgeon in the world at the time of his sudden retirement. His wonderful work in plastic surgery—the surgery of replacing bones, of reconstructing tissues and, in some cases, entire organs—made him, even before the war, undoubtedly the most talked-of man in his profession. No one can forget the furore created when he grafted an entire new cranium upon an idiot who had suffered from congenital malformation of the skull. The war gave him his opportunity. That American surgical wizard who replaced features, made new faces, even replaced parts of missing limbs, in the reconstruction hospitals in France has become almost a legendary figure.

About eighteen months ago, while still in the prime of life to all appearances, Dr. Dinwoodie was attacked by a mysterious ailment which neither he nor his many professional friends seemed able to diagnose. His bodily health seemed unaffected, but a strange nervous fearfulness beset him. He suddenly withdrew from his medical practice and secluded himself from almost everybody. He was haunted by a desire to be away from other people, to be alone, to seek out far places, distant from men and civilization, a desire so intense that it amounted nearly to insanity. Of all his friends, I think I was the only one he cared to have about him. And that is why he came with me to my shooting camp up in the Maine woods.

Even there, miles away from the nearest human

habitation, with no person about save the old guide and me, the fear was still upon him. I cannot describe just how he acted. The only way I can express it is that he acted as I imagine a man would act who had committed a great crime and feared discovery and pursuit. He appeared to be continually on the lookout for someone in our rambles in the quiet forest, his ear strained to hear an approaching footstep, his eyes upon every tree or hollow, as if he half expected an accuser to step forth and confront him. The least unexpected noise startled him beyond measure. And once, when I stepped into his bedroom to awaken him, I saw that he slept with a big automatic pistol within reach at his bedside.

In every other respect he appeared perfectly healthy-minded. He was the most brilliant conversationalist I ever met, and his fund of experience and anecdote was extraordinarily wide. Many a night I sat until the heralds of daybreak surprised us, a fascinated listener while the doctor talked. But of the cause of his fear he never spoke.

The Russian came into the matter in this wise: Some five weeks or so after we had gone up to my Maine place I was called back to New York by a peremptory telegram to help straighten out a tangle that had arisen about one of our steamboats. It had been chartered by a group of foreigners for some purpose or other—I forget the exact details—which appeared to be perfectly legal and ethical, so far as the papers showed, but just before she sailed the boat was seized by the government as a filibuster. The boat and my troubles with the government have nothing to do with Dinwoodie's story except

that I went down to the dock as she was unloading and saw the Russian.

I was watching the stevedores unloading when my attention was drawn to four men who were carrying a big case which, it turned out, was loaded with rifles. To be more exact, I was attracted by one of the four ; for while three of them grunted perspiringly at one end of the case, the fourth easily held up the other. I was talking to Clancy, the wharf boss, at the time I pointed out the man with a question.

" A half-crazy Roossian, he is, I guess," replied Clancy, " at least his name sounds Roossian to me. An' he's as strong as anny four other dockwallopers of the bunch. I think he's a nut—an idjit or somethin' of the kind."

" What makes you think so ? " I asked.

" Well he don't seem able to talk much," was the answer. " About all he can say in English so you you can understand is his name, Gurul, or somethin' that sounds like it. He came up an' asked for a job a few days ago an' I put him to work. The boys didn't like the funny way he talked, so they started to kid him. Big Red Rafferty, over there, used to be the bully of the dock an' he started in to haze this Roossian fer the fun of it. The nut growled at him once or twice an' when Rafferty wouldn't let him alone he piled into him. It took eight of us an' a club to pull him off an' keep him from tearin' Red in two. Since then they let him alone. I'll call him over so you can hear the funny way he talks, sir."

The Russian (I call him that because Clancy did, not that I was sure of his nationality) came over in response to his wave. He was short and squat,

considerably below medium height, and he had the oddest shaped body I ever saw on a man, all trunk, one might say. His legs were so short they ended about where Clancy's knees were, and they caused him to walk with a peculiarly awkward rolling waddle. But his arms made up for the brevity of his legs. They hung from a pair of enormously wide shoulders and were so long they almost touched the planks of the wharf as he rolled over to us.

When he came nearer I saw the most repulsively ugly face I can ever remember looking upon. His nose was wide and flat and divided a pair of tiny, pig-like eyes set as close together as the nose would allow. His jaws bulged noticeably, and when he opened his mouth he displayed a set of large, powerful, yellow teeth, which sat in his jaws with a conspicuous slant forward. The lips were thin and tightly drawn over the teeth.

But it was not his features alone that repelled me ; it was his skin. It is rather difficult for me to describe it to you. It looked soft, pink, and without a trace of the tan which comes from work in the open air. Except for the light shade it looked like nothing more than the soft yet rough skin that covers a newly-healed wound, in other words, a freshly formed scar faded nearly white.

" What is your name ? " I asked.

He glared at me sullenly with his pig eyes and growled. " Me Abe Goril."

I wish I could picture that voice to you. The sound caused a thrill of horror to shake me. It brought to mind vague impressions of indescribable evil. It exuded foulness in its very tones. It was hoarse ; it was guttural ; but it was more. I

remember reading one of Poe's stories in which he speaks of a voice as being "glutinous." That is as near as I can come to expressing how that voice impressed me. I suppose it sounds rather foolish when I say it sounded like a thick, *gummy* growl; but I know of no other word which fits it.

"Are you a Russian?" I asked, as soon as I recovered my composure.

He glowered at me and uttered (I will not call it said), "No un'stan'. Me Abe Goril."

And that was about the sum of our conversation. Most of my questions he did not seem to grasp at all, and I could not understand the greater part of his replies. After a few futile attempts to elicit information, I decided that Clancy was right: the man was evidently not far from an idiot. I waved him back to his work. As he started to waddle away I said to Clancy, "What a queer specimen I wish Doctor Dinwoodie could see him."

A throaty growl of rage brought me about instantly. The Russian had stopped at my words and was facing me with a snarl of fury on his lips. I was astounded at the change in his face. I hope I may never again see such a picture of hatred and malice as gleamed upon those repulsive features as he took a quick step toward me and barked, "Where doctor? I want see."

"Git out o' this," shouted Clancy as I gave back shuddering. "Git back to your work."

The Russian hesitated and then slowly shambled away. But as long as I remained on the dock I could see him unobtrusively watching me.

Of course, I wondered a good deal about the Russian (as I called him in my mind) and at the

emotion he displayed when I mentioned a doctor. But when I returned to the shooting lodge a few days later a greater surprise met me. I told Dinwoodie about the strange character as part of the recital of the incidents of my trip. He uttered a gasp of horror when I described the stevedore and mentioned his name. I shall never forget the unutterable terror that flashed into his face. He became so ghastly and faint for a moment I thought he was going to collapse. Before I could spring to his side he had recovered himself and waved me back to my seat. He asked me several questions about the Russian and made me repeat every word of our conversation.

There was something about Dinwoodie's manner that kept me from asking him anything in return. I told him everything I could remember. He told me nothing. But the fear that hovered about him seemed intensified tenfold. He shivered at every sound and his hands trembled when he lifted food to his mouth. In fact, I doubt that he ate a mouthful of supper after my recital. And when darkness came he went from window to window to see that all were fastened, and personally inspected the locks on all the doors. Then he abruptly bade me good-night and retired to his room. I went to bed wondering what lay between the famous Dr. Dinwoodie and the Russian dock hand that could affect each so strangely at the mention of the other.

I regret to say that my curiosity was never satisfied. I am inexpressibly sorry now that I did not insist upon some explanation from my friend. If I had I might have been in a position to prevent the tragedy of last week, or at least to guess at the

solution of the mystery. But next morning Dinwoodie, bearing every evidence of a sleepless night, told me he was going to leave. And in spite of my entreaties he did go that afternoon. The guide drove him to the nearest railway station and, so far as I was concerned, he disappeared from sight.

For more than a year I heard nothing from him, and when I inquired for him on my return to the city, no one knew where he had gone.

This brings me to the happenings of last week. A party of us who are interested in water power sites in these mountains came up to this little out-of-the-way resort together.

You may imagine my surprise and delight when almost the first person I ran into at the hotel was Dr. Dinwoodie. Of course, we were more than glad to see each other again. After the greetings were over he told me that he had been a resident in the hotel for several months and had benefited greatly from the mountain air. His room was on the third floor adjoining mine overlooking the lake. We sat late that night talking over old times, but neither of us mentioned the Russian.

The next three days I was too busy to spend any time with him, but we promised ourselves some good old fishing trips (the lake and surrounding region is noted by a few wise anglers) in the trout streams on the mountain-side.

We arrived at the hotel on Monday. It was Thursday evening that our business was finished and the company formed. We, the members of the company, had a little supper that night in honour of the event, and I am afraid that we forgot all about the prohibition laws.

About 11 o'clock I went out on the veranda for a breath of fresh air. My head was spinning rather dizzily as I wandered to the side of the veranda and looked at the moonlit waters of the lake.

While I stood there a man went by and turned down the path that leads to the rear of the hotel on the side away from the lake. I got just a glimpse of him in the half darkness when he passed through the light that shone from the dining-room windows, but I was struck about something oddly familiar in his awkward, shambling gait. Had I been perfectly sober I might have recognized him. As it was, I wondered vaguely who he could be, but soon dismissed him from my thoughts and went up to my room. I am quite sure my head had no more than touched the pillow before I was fast asleep.

It seemed to me that I had been asleep but a few minutes when I was suddenly awakened by the sound of voices in the room next to me. I was only half awake at first : the heavy, dazed awakening of a person who has been drinking ; and I lay for some time wondering what had disturbed me. Then I heard them again. I knew the tones ; the thick, guttural, rolling tones unlike any other I had ever heard ; but for the life of me I could not place them. I tried lazily to clear my mind, but could not arouse myself sufficiently to do so.

Then I heard Dr. Dinwoodie speak. Even in my dazed condition I could recognize the entreaty in his voice. He appeared to be vehemently pleading with someone. I heard him repeat several times, " But I made a man of you. You were a beast and I made a man of you." I am

quite sure those were the words, because I wondered sleepily what he could mean.

Then I heard the first voice again. There was a continual rumbling of sound, but I caught only a word or two: "pain," spoken several times; then: "knife," and twice: "kill," the latter in an indescribable, shrill, yet guttural tone, which was almost a scream. It rasped my sleepy nerves and brought me to a sitting posture, shivering with repulsion.

In a flash I was wide awake. It was the unforgettable voice of the Russian stevedore. The shambling figure I had seen in the night from the porch below was the same I had watched waddling across the dock in New York.

At the same instant an appalling, blood-curdling shriek burst from the doctor's room. It was Dinwoodie's voice, but it had lost all semblance of human utterance; it was just stark terror and horror and dismay translated into tone. I sprang from my bed and rushed into the corridor. Other heads came out of opened doorways, and several men in night clothes, as was I, joined me before Dinwoodie's door. I tried the knob. The door was locked. From within the horrid screams, mingled with the sounds of furniture being smashed and bodies thrashing about in a struggle, came to us together with what sounded like the infuriated snarls of a wild animal. Suddenly the sounds of the struggle ceased and we heard a strange noise like a fist pounding upon a muffled bass drum, followed by a harsh, rumbling roar in that gummy voice I have tried to describe to you. Then dead silence.

By this time the hotel was awake. Several of us

threw ourselves against the door and broke it in. The room looked as if a hurricane had swept through it. The furniture was smashed to bits and scattered in all directions. The floor, walls, even the ceiling, were sickeningly bespattered with blood. In the midst of the wreckage lay the pieces of Dr. Augustus Dinwoodie. I mean just what I say : pieces. He was literally torn to tatters, every limb wrenched from the trunk and the whole body horribly dismembered beyond description. You will remember that at the inquest the physicians said I was wrong in suggesting the Russian committed the murder because no human strength could possibly have accomplished what we saw.

Otherwise the room was empty. The side window was wide open, but outside it is a sheer drop of forty-five feet to the stony shore of the lake, with only a flimsy lightning rod on that side of the building. No human being could have escaped that way. And no one came out through the only door, which led into the hallway. We found the bloody imprint of an enormous hand upon the window sill. And that was all.

THE LEOPARD'S TRAIL

W. CHISWELL COLLINS

LIFE in the West African bush can be either wildly exciting or deadly monotonous. Jim Chisholm had complained to his friend Hodgins the first night he arrived down in Duala from his lonely bush station in northern Nigeria that his tour had been the latter.

"Not even a d——d uprising. Natives all as peaceful as lambs," he grumbled, "so I thought I'd get in a little shooting before I went home and trekked down here. I've heard so many of your wonderful yarns about this being the finest hunting-ground in the world."

He grinned over at his host, who was noted for his yarning.

"Have any luck?" Hodgins asked.

Chisholm puffed at his cigarette for a moment and stared moodily out into the depths of the African night, but did not answer for some time.

"I had a rather exciting trip," he began at length, with a wry little smile, "but I didn't get a shot. To tell the truth, I had an idea I was being hunted myself."

"What do you mean?"

Hodgins pulled himself up sharply from the depths of his camp-chair and looked curiously over at his guest.

"Well, as I told you, I started down country with the intention of doing some hunting. I had the usual string of carriers and my boy, Adamou, (you remember him, don't you ?), but, say ! we had no sooner crossed the French border into the Cameroons than the fun commenced. The first night we camped at Nsanakang, in an old native hut just along the Tie Tie Bridge—you know the old spot where we met the Huns in 1916. Just as I was turning in for the night a native suddenly came slinking in out of the darkness, naked as the day he was born, and carrying a note, wedged in a cleft stick, proper native style. He squatted down on the floor while I took and read it. It was a warning telling me to turn back and not attempt to cross the Cameroons, and was signed with—what do you think ?—the Leopard's claw, roughly sketched in blood ! "

Hodgins whistled in dismay.

"Got the Leopard Society on your trail, eh ? "

Chisholm nodded.

"So I concluded. The note was written in good English, native-clerk style, but when I demanded to know from the carrier who had sent him he pretended not to know English, Hausa or Yoruba. But I know the native too well. My ten years here haven't left me altogether a fool, Hodgy. I had seen at the first glance that my friend was no bushman. He had the dark ridge around his neck, showing he had been used to wearing a collar, and the soles of his feet were pink and torn—he was used to boots. And when he whined, I saw a gold-filling in his tooth ! So I threatened to thrash him, and that soon brought the English out

of him. However, he insisted he did not know who had sent him. He said he had met a man on the bush trail, who had paid him to deliver the note ; and when I asked him why he was posing as a bushman he excused himself by saying the man asked him to deliver the note that way. Well, I couldn't get anything out of him, so I had the carriers come in and tie the chap up, intending to hand him over to the police at the next station, along with the note. But the next morning he was gone ! And the carriers, of course, knew nothing.

"Poor old Adamou was terribly concerned and begged me to turn back, but I was out for the adventure of the thing, so I went on. You know that country through there, between Nsanakang and Ossidinge—bush so dense that we didn't see sunlight all day, and steaming like an oven. We heard several herds of elephant trumpeting but didn't see any and arrived at Ossidinge that next night. I put up with Dupré, the agent of the factory there. He was mighty pleased to see me, too, and opened a case of Plymouth gin in honour of the occasion. We had quite a merry evening. I told him about the note, and he seemed to get quite upset over it. He said that the whole country was a hot-bed of the Leopards : natives disappearing every night, mangled bodies being found in the morning, and the Government too d——d frightened to tackle it. There are too many influential men in it. The only man who had courage enough to tackle it or start ferreting was poor old Cheveneaux, of the police. It seems he got a long list of names of members, including a number of his own officials, his clerk and house-boy. But before

he had a chance to act he was found mauled himself one morning. Since then the police have steered clear of the thing.

"Dupré asked me if I had any enemies, but for the life of me I couldn't think of a soul who had any grudge against me. Dupré warned me not to go on through the bush, but I said I was so far in then that there wasn't much use turning back. Well, we talked late on into the night. I guess it was about two when we turned in. I was dead tired and asleep within five minutes. His bungalow is one of those modern, corrugated, iron-roofed ones, with grass mats hung inside as ceilings—and hot as the blazes. Perhaps it was the heat—I don't know what it was—but suddenly I found myself wide-awake, listening to something rustling along overhead on the mat ceiling. I thought it might be a black *mamba*, at first (you know how they often creep in there), so I slid noiselessly out from under the mosquito-net, with my revolver in my hand, and turned up the hurricane-lamp. And just in time to see a streak of silver flash through the air! Then the mats bulged violently and suddenly and I knew it was no snake up there. I got off three rounds, but, evidently, I missed, for the next moment I heard someone jump on to the lower roof next door and heard bare feet padding away. Then Dupré and the boys rushed in. We both had rather a shock when we saw that a broad, flat-bladed knife was buried in to the hilt right in my pillow, where a moment before my head had been. And so accurately had the weapon been thrown that the rent in the mosquito-net was barely perceptible."

"Good Lord!" Hodgins exclaimed.

"Yes, and when we examined the thing we found the Leopard's claw scratched on it. Dupré was in an awful funk about it and I confess that I felt a bit the same way myself. I knew then that the beggars meant business, and I knew more so the next morning. Dupré and I spent the rest of the night over whiskies and sodas, but just at sunrise his house-boys came rushing in to say that poor old Adamou's body had just been found outside the compound, mauled by some ferocious beast, covered with blood and bits of yellow fur, and the entrails missing."

Chisholm's voice broke for a moment.

"Poor old Adamou! He had been a faithful old scout. I felt wild about it and Dupré was wilder. He insisted that I seek police protection, but my fighting-blood was up. The Leopards were on my trail; but why? I racked my brain to think of anyone I had ever offended, but even yet I can think of nobody, unless it was something that happened in the war that I have forgotten. Anyhow, I made up my mind to see the thing through, and so I started off again that same day with a new boy that Dupré hunted out for me."

"Then?" Hodgins demanded eagerly, as Chisholm ceased abruptly.

"Nothing! That was all there was to it. Evidently I had just struck the belt. They made it hot for me, but I came on the rest of the way and no one molested me, though I confess I didn't sleep much and I didn't delay to do any hunting."

For the next hour or so the two men sat discussing this strange adventure, till Hodgins suddenly leaned nearer and said in a low tone: "I suppose you are not looking for any more excitement?"

In an instant Chisholm was all attention, but, before his host proceeded, he rose silently and stepped outside. The next moment there was an oath, then a cry.

"What are you doing out here?" Hodgins shouted irritably and lugged his house-boy to where the ray of light lit up his black face.

"I wait here to see if the master call for more drinks," the boy whined.

"You lie. You were listening! Now get off! If I want you I'll call you," Hodgins said, as he shoved him off into the darkness.

"I knew someone was hanging around listening," he went on with a grin as he came back to his chair, "but I guess he was interested in you. Niya always remembers you since the war. He was quite excited when your letter came saying you were coming. Well—."

He settled himself close to Chisholm and went on with his story.

"I've struck a bit of luck!" he remarked, in a mysterious undertone.

"Yes?" His friend's tone was cautious. Ten years on the Coast leaves a man rather cautious with "luck" stories. "What is it this time? A gold-mine?"

"No!" Hodgins quite ignored the irony. "Not a mine but something better. Gold specie! The stuff itself! I know where there is a pile of it!"

"Native yarns, Hodgy?"

"Yes, native yarns if you like, but perfectly sound this time," Hodgins answered stoutly. "You went all through the Cameroon campaign, didn't you? And you were here in Duala when it

was captured, and the Huns evacuated. Now, didn't it ever strike you queer that although Duala was the headquarters of the German treasury, there was never any gold specie found there? Yet it is a known fact they could not have taken it away with them."

Chisholm did remember, for it had been a much-discussed subject at the time, but now he said warily, "Yes, but wasn't it assumed the Germans managed to smuggle it up country, somehow?"

"They didn't, though!" Hodgins said, with a grin.

"They didn't!"

"No! You remember when the Huns knew they would have to evacuate they thought there might be a chance of their escaping out to sea on some of those old cargo-boats that were lying here in the harbour. They actually started out in them too, then got caught like rats in a trap, for the H.M.S. *Cumberland* came in and shelled them all as they were trying to steam out. Now, I happen to know that the Huns had piled all their gold specie—five hundred thousand gold marks—in boxes, and had put them aboard the old cargo *Bolango*. When the *Cumberland* began firing, they immediately put the boxes back into a surf-boat and sent it ashore again in charge of three Hun officers. It was never seen again, nor those men."

Chisholm was more than interested now.

"But I happen to know what became of it," Hodgins went on eagerly. "I've got an old native here who knows all about it and knows where those officers hid it. Mika Dodawa is his name. He's been a trader here for years, and he had quite a business before the war. He was one of the first

to be taken prisoner when the Huns came in here, because he was a British subject. Originally he came from Nigeria. He was a clever old chap, speaks good English, and I suppose they thought he was a spy. Anyhow, they commandeered all his goods and made him do carrier work. When the fun began he was detailed off to help load the *Bolango*. He was on her when the shelling began and, by a stroke of luck, he was the one native sent along to help those three Hun officers hide the gold. They went in the surf-boat up one of the creeks here, landed the gold and buried it. Then the four of them waited till dark and put off again, intending to sail down the creek, slip past the *Cumberland* out to open sea, and try to escape down to Fernando Po. They planned to keep old Mika along with them till nearing the island, and then throw him overboard so he could tell no tales about the gold ; but, fortunately, Mika speaks German as well as English, and he knew all they were saying. However, as they were stealing down the creek a shell suddenly came whizzing along. The Huns' white caps had given them away. Mika didn't wait for the next. He threw himself overboard and swam ashore just in time, for the second shell cut the canoe right in two and the others were lost. He found he had landed in dense bush. He was afraid to go back to Duala, not knowing who were in possession there, so he wandered around ; and the next day he fell in with a party of German runners going up country. He was at once commandeered for service again, and before long found himself away up in Nigeria. He didn't get back here till after the armistice. Then, of course, all his trade was gone."

"But does he still keep his secret?"

"Yes, but since his terrible adventures he has naturally steered clear of anything that might get him mixed up with the Government. The old chap likes me and owes me a little. I advanced him enough to open up a new agency—of course it will be to my own benefit, too, for he is a shrewd trader. But out of gratitude he has let me in on the secret."

"You don't mean——?"

"Yes, the old chap told me the whole yarn to-day. And he has offered to sell the secret. He wants five hundred pounds!"

Chisholm looked rather dubious.

"Are you sure the man's straight?"

"I'd stake my life on him! Of course, he expects to make his pile out of it, too, but he's too old to attempt the thing himself, and besides, he doesn't trust his own people. One-third the loot and the five hundred pounds, that is what he asks. Now what do you say?"

"I'm on!" Chisholm said promptly, "if only for the fun of the thing."

Early the next morning they started off to clinch the bargain with the old native.

Mika Dodawa had already established a flourishing business on the money lent him by Hodgins. Chisholm noted this and commented on it as they made their way down the marine to where a large new sign,

MIKA DODAWA
General Negociant

was displayed over a pretentious whitewashed building.

"Evidently prospering," Hodgins remarked. "Come on! We'll go right in!"

Mika's store was a typical coast one: perfume, soaps, cotton goods, sardines, silks, cheap fancy biscuits, hurricane-lamps, all cluttered up in a heterogeneous mass.

Mika himself was in behind the counter. He was a little, thin, shrewd-faced man, not too dark, and with Semitic features. His manners were markedly French, bordering on the suave. He wore English clothes and the usual dirty collar and cuffs.

He bowed low as they entered, evidently taking them for customers, but the next instant a look of pleased bewilderment crossed his face. He slid out from behind the counter and came toward them, hand outstretched.

"It's not you, Mr. Hodgins, surely?" he cried, in the most perfect English Chisholm had ever heard a native use. (He learned later that the old man had been educated in England, and spoke French and German just as fluently.)

"God is merciful!" he went on, his voice trembling with eagerness. "I have waited long for this day. See how, by your goodness, I have prospered! The money you lent me has already increased a hundredfold! But, come."

He led the way into a little back-room and ordered the native clerk who had been sitting in there to go forward and tend the shop. Then he made haste with his own hands to pour them out a whisky and soda.

"I did not know you were coming. I had almost given up hope," he said; then glancing at Chisholm significantly, he added, "though that little matter

of which I spoke to you yesterday still remains hidden within my bosom."

"My friend here knows all about it," Hodgins put in hastily. "I could not raise the five hundred by myself and, as you suggested, I asked my friend to come in with us on it."

"Of course!" The old man's eyes narrowed slightly. "But I presume our original agreement still holds good?"

"Yes," Hodgins said, a little impatiently. "You get one-third the loot and another five hundred pounds down."

"Cash down!" he put in eagerly.

They had already anticipated this and had the cash ready. Hodgins took off his web belt and counted out a roll of crisp notes. The old man watched with glistening eyes. He clutched at them with trembling fingers when they were passed to him, and shoved them far down into his breast-pocket.

"And the receipt?" asked Chisholm, carelessly.

"Oh!" said the old man in surprise. "You understand the necessity of caution, sir. With the French Government here it would be so easy to arouse suspicion, and if any writing should fall into their hands they would ferret it out to the end."

"That's all right," Chisholm said, easily, "the French Government won't get hold of any of my papers. I want the receipt; otherwise, I back out. What if there should be no loot? I want my money refunded."

"Of course! Of course!" Mika said, soothingly, and at once turned and wrote out a receipt for the money, adding, at Chisholm's dictation:

"To be refunded in the event of the failure of the venture."

He was smiling as he handed the paper over, then said, in a business-like tone, "Now, when can you gentlemen start?"

"To-day!" they both said promptly.

"Good!"

Old Mika came closer to them and went on in a whisper, "I will send my boy to lead you to the canoe at noon. The spot lies three hours' journey up the creek and you will know it thus. You will pass three villages on the right, hidden back in the mangroves; and four miles beyond the last village you will come to a great swamp, three miles in length and bare of trees or shrubs. Beyond that lies a dense bush where you will see, rising high above all others, a great white cottonwood tree. You cannot mistake it. I dare not go along with you, as they know an old man does not go shooting with the white men. Take your guns, and the officials will think you go but for a day's sport. Wait for me under the cottonwood tree and I will come when darkness falls, with tools and trusty canoemen."

The two men readily agreed to the plan and were relieved to know everything was in readiness for them. Accordingly, they returned to their bungalow, changed into bush kit and started out after old Mika's boy when he arrived an hour or so later.

"You no take me 'long to shoot," Niya said, in deep chagrin, as he saw the two men start off.

There was a peculiar gleam in his dark eyes as he spoke—a rather challenging one at the strange boy who was usurping his place.

"Not this time," Hodgins said.

"You no go for Dead Creek. Him be bad place for white man go shoot!" he called out, anxiously. "No be good bird there and plenty fever!"

But the two men went on without heeding.

"How did the beggar know we were going up Dead Creek? I didn't know myself," Hodgins said suddenly. "But perhaps this boy was talking to him." And he promptly forgot the incident.

An hour later, in bush-kit again, they found themselves sailing down the creek, well supplied with food and drinks provided from Mika Dodawa's store.

The creek was one of those isolated backwaters that surround Duala, one of the least attractive, too —a veritable cesspool for odours, a grey, stinking stretch of ugliness, infested with crocodiles. Dense, low, impenetrable mangroves lined either bank. Beyond the three villages no signs of habitation were visible, although so near the sea. Long before they reached the great, sinister-looking swamp, they saw the cottonwood tree, standing like a gaunt, bare skeleton, arms outstretched against the sky. The bush ended abruptly again some little distance beyond, running off into a swamp. It was, as the men then surmised, in reality a small island, surrounded on three sides by snake-infested swamp, and on the fourth by a swiftly-rushing river. Certainly a choice spot on which to hide treasure.

They alighted and sent the canoe off as Mika had directed, then proceeded inland along a fairly well-worn but well-concealed path, till they were under the cottonwood tree. The rest of the day

they dozed and smoked, amused themselves watching the little grey-faced monkeys mocking them from the trees, and the egrets flashing like streaks of silver in through the green, and listening to the myriads of parrots screaming at each other. The day was long, for they were both suffering from the excitement that precedes the fulfilment of a great quest.

It did not get dark till eight o'clock, and by that time they were both chilled to the bone. Heavy, foul mists were creeping up from the swamps and a chill breeze was sweeping in from the sea.

"Hope he'll come soon!" Hodgins said, as a blood-curdling roar of a leopard rolled through the bush. "That's too near to be pleasant!"

"And we dare not even light a fire!" Chisholm shivered.

The next moment they were relieved to hear the soft dip of paddles, the abrupt grating of a canoe running up on the sand, then low, hushed voices. They hurried out to the water's edge.

"That you, Mika?" Hodgins called out.

"Yes, sir!"

In the gloom they could just discern the old man's figure standing on the bank. Another dark and naked one was removing tools from the canoe and placing them upon the ground. Mika gave hurried orders in some native tongue and the canoemen paddled off silently into the darkness.

Mika turned, handed them each a spade, and led the way off through the bush, remarking: "We must hurry! We have a good night's work ahead of us!"

He led on past the cottonwood tree into dense

bush. There was no path now. They were pushing through bushes and thorns that under ordinary circumstances would have brought forth more than one oath, but in their excitement they felt nothing. Suddenly the cry of a leopard rolled again through the bush, this time even closer than before.

"I hope you brought your guns!" Mika said rather nervously. "This bush, being uninhabited, is the choice haunt of many beasts of prey!"

"We're all right," Hodgins said confidently.

"Ah! Here we are!" Mika exclaimed.

He lit a match and held it up to the trunk of a palm. The two men just barely caught a glimpse of some rough mark on it, when the light flickered out.

"Yes, here we are!" Mika said, in a voice trembling with eagerness. "Now, after four long years, I am about to see the fulfilment of my desire. Beneath you, gentlemen, some four feet down, lies the treasure!"

They commenced digging at once. It was a strange scene: the velvety blackness of the tropical night, the still denser gloom of the great forest around them, the three dark figures bent low over their spades. They spoke little, but old Mika stopped often to rest.

They had made a pit some three feet deep when Chisholm suddenly heard a muffled cry. He looked up in alarm, but for the moment could discern nothing distinctly. Then gradually he made out the outline of a monstrous, ferocious-looking animal, standing erect, pawing in the air. He saw Hodgins pitch forward heavily into the pit—saw old

Mika scrambling away on all fours toward the bush.

Instinctively he felt for his revolver. Then he was conscious of a terrific blow on the back of his head. He knew no more.

When he awoke he could remember nothing at first. He felt faint and weak. His eyes smarted. His head swam and felt too big for his body. He was conscious of a strangely repressed feeling. The air seemed filled with great yellow and black spots. Then things began to clear.

He discovered that he was bound tightly to a pillar. Thick strands of fibre were wound around his body, pinioning his arms close to his sides. Another lot bound his legs and ankles.

He looked dazedly around him. He was in a huge circular building, the like of which he had never before seen in all his wanderings in Africa. It was evidently a temple of some kind. Massive leopard-skins covered the entire walls and ceiling, which was tent-shaped and held up by two highly-polished mahogany tree-trunks. The floor was also covered with skins. Great ivory tusks, perfect in form and colour, ribbed the walls at intervals, and at the base of each flickered small oil lights, casting strange shadows around the room. On one side a great leopard-skin swayed softly in the wind, and Chisholm surmised that this was the door, but there appeared to be no other opening. Opposite him was a clay fire-place on which smoked and sputtered a small flame. Beside this, on a pile of skins, a grotesque, black, naked figure squatted. He might have been a statue, so inhumanly ugly and immovable he sat. The whites of his eyes

gleamed out startlingly, diabolically. As he saw Chisholm staring, his mouth leered open, revealing two long, hideous white fangs in an otherwise toothless cavern. He leaned forward, and monotonously, rhythmically, began to beat a tomtom. Then he began a weird, nasal chant.

"Ar—i—ana—dum! dum! dum!—ar—dum! dum!"

It nauseated Chisholm. He looked wildly about him ; then his gaze fell upon Hodgins, only a yard or so away, tied to another polished pillar, and still unconscious. Hodgins' head hung limply to one side, his bare body (for he was stripped to the waist) covered with mud and blood.

After a time (an eternity it seemed to Chisholm) Hodgins stirred and opened his eyes, but for a moment he acted as dazed as Chisholm had acted. Finally he seemed to recognize Chisholm. He gave a sickly grin.

"The real thing this time!" he muttered hoarsely.

"And no chance of escape!" Chisholm added, gloomily.

The old devil in the corner had ceased thumping his drum as they commenced talking, and he now rose and crept from the room. Outside they heard again the weird leopard cry, but now they understood.

"Old Two Fang's giving the signal!" Hodgins said grimly.

There was a confused, suppressed murmur at the door, as from a gathering mob. Then the great leopard-skin was lifted and a long line of the most terrifying creatures they had ever beheld entered in single file.

Their black bodies were naked except for a massive leopard-skin fastened across the chest and over the right shoulder. Over their heads and foreheads, too, were fastened the upper portion of leopards' heads, the ears standing stiffly erect, the bushy eyebrows hanging heavy over their gleaming bloodshot eyes. On their hands, fastened in an ingenious manner, were leopards' claws, dripping with blood as if fresh from an orgy.

Old Two Fang stood at the door, monotonously thumping his drum as they filed in, silent as ghosts. There were more than fifty of them. The room seemed overflowing as they all squatted in a semi-circle around their two victims. The room was stiflingly hot and reeked of perspiration, a peculiar incense and (but perhaps this was only fancy) warm blood.

After they were all seated, the tallest Leopard, who had entered first and was evidently their leader, stepped out in front of the two white men. He raised his hand and the tomtom ceased. The room was deathly still. A hundred yellow-fringed, dark, savage eyes glared at the two victims. Old Two Fang moved silently forward with a large Yoruba stool, plated with gold. He placed this in front of the leader. Next he brought forward a great golden goblet and placed it upon the stool ; then with a low salaam he backed away to the door.

If a real leopard had suddenly opened its mouth and spoken, neither Chisholm nor Hodgins could have been more surprised than when, the next moment, the great savage before them began in flawless English : " Gentlemen, I suppose you are wondering why you are thus honoured ? "

Neither of them attempted to answer, but both were conscious of a sickly feeling, such as a fly must experience as it watches a spider creep nearer and nearer, playfully side-stepping as it comes.

He laughed, then went on lightly : "You are about to participate in the noblest, the most wonderful rite the world has ever known. You are to be highly honoured. Your blood is to be mingled with that of many martyrs who have been chosen to lay the foundation for the great new African Empire. You are now in the hands of the noble Leopard Society, which is gradually reaching out its tentacles over the whole world. Wherever the despised black man has been ground down under the tyrannical heel of the white, there are we. We are the worshippers of blood. We live by blood. Why ? Because blood is life, brains, power ! On blood has every empire of the world been built ! France, Russia, England, America, and now, last and greatest of all, Africa, which will soon dominate the world ! The white man shows us the way. We have profited by his mistakes. Our lands, our slaves, were wrested from us in blood. Now we claim them back. And for every inch of soil taken, for every drop of blood shed, every blow, every insult, every sneer, we take payment—*in blood !*"

"You forget," Chisholm said quietly, "what is the policy of the British Government. For every white man's life ruthlessly taken, England demands the lives of a whole village !"

The native clenched his fists then, and lost his smooth manner. Turning toward his satellites he broke out into what seemed a torrent of abuse toward the prisoners. A low, ominous growl answered his

remarks, and they moved as if eager to spring up, but in a moment the leader had cooled down again and turned, smiling.

"Do not trouble, my friends. England cannot punish what she does not know. Two lonely men go off into the bush, hunting or—what was it? prospecting for tin! They disappear! Where? Ah! There are a million swamps, rushing rivers, quicksands, which they may have inadvertently fallen into! They may, perchance, have fallen prey to the wild beasts of the forest—leopards, for instance. Anyhow, they are gone. England will send out a scout or two, but she has no time to search the great bush. They are gone. Alas! The Government will wire home condolences—then will forget!"

His mocking words were only too true, as both men realized. They did not attempt to answer.

"Do not grieve, my dear sirs," he went on. "You came to seek gold; instead, you are chosen to be a sacrifice to the Leopard god, the god by whose power the new and emancipated nation of Africa shall arise. What greater honour could you wish than to join the 'noble army of martyrs' you sing about? Ah, yes, my friends! You see I know your estimable Christian hymns. Do I not sing them every Sunday in the mission church?"

"But why choose us?" Hodgins put in, thickly.

"Why? Ah, my friend, *you* were chosen because you were foolish enough to offend the great high-priest of the Leopard Society. Your friend here was in reality the chosen victim. He persisted in coming on to us, although warned by the way.

Then we knew that, indeed, our god must desire his blood. As for you, well, if you consort with fools you must share their fate. And a double-sacrifice is always acceptable."

"You lie!" Chisholm said, hotly. "I never harmed anyone in your d——d society."

But a grotesque, wrinkled, old brown figure had suddenly arisen from the ground and now came forward, pointing a long, skinny finger toward them, accusingly.

"No?" he jeered. "You did not know that I was a high-priest of the Leopard Society. I was simply poor old Mika Dodawa, the trader. Ha, ha! And you paid me five hundred pounds to bring you to your punishment. You never wronged me, eh?"

His voice, trembling with rage, now rose shrilly.

"No? You don't remember Mika Dodawa, perhaps. But you do remember Yosadmu, the German spy, whom you captured here, in 1916, and had shot, when you and your d——d troops marched in here. Well, he was my son! And since then I have been waiting—waiting!"

Chisholm stared incredulously. He remembered distinctly Yosadmu, one of the trickiest of spies, who had served the Allies and Huns in turn and whose death had been a good riddance to all.

"Yes, your blood will taste sweet to me!" the old man went on, gloatingly. "Clever white man, who calls us 'monkey' and 'bushman!' Now we shall see what your blood and brains look like, if they are any different from ours after all!"

He was clawing now in front of them with his sharp old talons as if to rip their eyes out, but at a

word from the leader he quieted down. The leader then, from the inside of his leopardskin, drew out, to the amazement of the captives, a surgeon's scalpel. A look of satisfaction crossed his face as he saw their amazement.

"Yes!" he said, answering their unspoken question, and giving a hideous grin. "It is a surgeon's scalpel. Very latest design. From New York. You see we work scientifically, as our lords, the white men, have taught us. Do not fear I shall be clumsy or bungling in the operation. I was supposed to be a fairly clever surgeon, the best of my year in London University College. You may even have heard of me—Dr. Joseph Brown, one-time House-surgeon-assistant at St. Bede's, London, at present Assistant-surgeon of the Duala Government Hospital. Otherwise, Olowole Dodi, chief of the Leopard Society!"

They watched him with horror-filled eyes as he stepped nearer. In a most professional manner he took a piece of charcoal from his secret pocket and marked a long straight line across the lower chest of each of the prisoners.

"This is the spot!" he said, casually. "The pancreas. We really do not ask much, do we?"

He lifted up the golden goblet. Chisholm saw him approach, saw the glitter of the scalpel, but it was his ear he touched. He was conscious of a sharp pain, like the prick of a needle. He could hear the drip, drip of blood falling into the goblet. He saw the chief move off toward Hodgins—he was feeling faint—he closed his eyes. When he opened them a minute later, the Leopard was standing holding the goblet high above his head and

was calling out what seemed to be a battle-cry. Then he drained the cup dry.

In an instant the mob was on its feet, clawing, pushing, roaring savage, intoxicated with the lust for blood. Old Two Fang at the door beat his tomtom violently. The room was in an uproar. Dancing, swaying, chanting, they swept round and round, growing madder every minute, till the leader suddenly called a halt. They lined up in order, then, and swaying, undulating, they passed out through the door. The chief was last, and as he went he bowed low.

"One hour, gentlemen, to confess your sins and send any messages home to England—which, of course, will not be sent!"

A wave of fresh air had swept in under the door-skin as it was lifted, reviving them somewhat. Chisholm and Hodgins looked at each other. Both were ghastly pale, both with dripping ear-lobes! They did not attempt to speak, for both felt the hopelessness of the situation.

Outside the door, old Two Fang continued his monotonous drumming. It seemed to be hammering against their brains. Farther off, now louder, now fainter, came the weird, passionate chant of the Leopards, evidently working themselves up into a frenzy for the culminating sacrifice.

Chisholm was gazing critically now at Hodgins' bindings. Suddenly he began straining wildly, frantically at his own. He felt something give a little around his ankles, and redoubled his efforts. But he was weak from the blow and loss of blood, and after a time he had to desist.

Hodgins had been watching the struggle eagerly.

"Try again, Chisholm," he said. "You've loosened your ankles a little!"

Chisholm strained at his legs again, and this time he found he could move his feet freely, but, try as he would, the rope became no looser.

"No use!" he muttered. "It won't come any looser!"

He let his head sink upon his chest and stared moodily down at his heavy marching boots. He was trying to realize that death was near, but only silly, trivial thoughts would come, little fragments of happy days, a bit of the Strand, a lunch at Simpson's, those boots, the day he had bought them in Bond Street—nine pounds he had paid for them and when he had demurred, the clerk, a funny dapper little man, had said, "They will last you a lifetime, sir"—and now——.

The shrieks and wails of the Leopards were rising still higher. Chisholm gave a sickly grin over at his companion. But Hodgins was staring as if mesmerized, at something on the floor. Chisholm's eyes followed.

A dark, woolly head was slowly, painfully pushing through an incredibly narrow aperture between the skins and the floor; then came the long, paint-smeared body, absolutely devoid of covering, stopping listening every moment, bloodshot eyes fixed fearfully on the door as if expecting every moment to see someone rush in.

The two victims watched, half fearfully, half hopefully. Then both gave a gasp of astonishment as finally, fully in, the native shot to his feet and darted toward them.

"Niya!" Hodgins said, feebly, for in spite of the

grotesque disguise he at once recognized the boy who had served him so long. But the boy did not pause or even look at them. He seized the bloody scalpel which still lay on the stool and began deftly, quickly, slashing at their bindings. It was only when the two men both stood free that he spoke.

"I save you, massa! I be Leopard but I no harm you! I tell you it no be good to come for here. I send Mr. Chisholm here a note all way up country to tell him no come for here, but—."

He ceased abruptly and looked around in terror. Outside, the frenzied wails had suddenly ceased, and an ominous silence descended.

"They come, massa, one time!" Niya whispered frantically, and even as he spoke the great leopard-skin moved slightly. As quick as lightning the boy leaped across and took up a position alongside the door. The next moment old Two Fang crept silently in. As he glanced over at the pillars and saw the two victims standing free, he let his tom-tom fall to the ground and opened his mouth to yell. The next moment a blow from behind sent him reeling to the floor.

Then Niya bent, lifted a corner of the great skin, and peeped out.

"No good, massa!" he called out excitedly; "they come one time!"

His bloodshot eyes roamed wildly around the room, up at the great domed ceiling, down at the tiny aperture through which he had crawled, then over at the tiny fireplace.

Outside, a solemn, weird chanting had begun, accompanied by slow, measured beats on the tom-tom, coming closer and closer each moment.

Hodgins and Chisholm looked at each other. Fate was surely playing strange tricks to bring release but not escape. But Niya was frantically tearing the great skins down from the wall. Then he turned and threw them toward the white men, and at once they understood his plan. In a moment they were decked up quite as fantastically as any Leopard, the dirt and blood effectually carrying out the disguise of their faces. Then Niya ran to the fireplace, pulled out a handful of dried grass from the roof and set it alight. In an instant the whole place was a blinding, suffocating mass of smoke. That was the last they ever saw of the boy.

Chisholm felt Hodgins grasp his hand, and together they made a dash for the door. A lurid red flame shot up, accompanied by a terrified wail and a savage roar from the frenzied crowd outside. Then a group of them burst in to save the gold and ivory, but in the general confusion it was easy enough for the two white men to dash out.

The air outside was dense with smoke. The old dried timbers of the temple were shooting off like rockets. The crowd of Leopards was rocking, swaying, wailing like madmen; the glare from the flames making them appear more diabolical than ever. But Hodgins and Chisholm were not waiting to see spectacular sights. Hand in hand they fled, like two hunted animals, till they reached the kindly bush; nor did they stop till they could no longer see the red glare on the trees, nor hear the blood-curdling wails of the Leopards.

For the rest of the night they wandered on, waiting wearily for daylight. Then, just as the first, faint grey light began to steal down through

the trees, they stumbled upon a fresh horror. They found themselves in a large circular clearing, walled in by a solid rampart of great ivory tusks. In the centre was an altar, also built of tusks, and on this lay the mangled, bloody form of a native. Masses of blood-stained yellow fur lay all around.

Shuddering they stumbled out and crept back into the bush again. Then suddenly they found themselves at the river's edge. Chisholm pushed through the mangroves and looked downstream to see if there was any chance of escape. But he turned quickly and crouched low.

"Hide, Hodgy, hide! Here they come," he whispered, and Hodgins ducked down beside him.

The next moment a long line of canoes glided swiftly by. They were manned by dull, naked canoemen and a crowd of natives, some wearing English clothes. In one, immaculately dressed and looking decidedly handsome and respectable, was Dr. Joseph Brown. Beside him, suave and dapper as ever, was Mika Dodawa! They appeared to be having an interesting conversation.

Long after the Leopards had passed, the two white men still crouched low in the bushes, fearful lest other Leopards might still be prowling about. Then suddenly came the most welcome sound of their lives—the chug-chug-chug of a motor-boat.

"The Government survey-launch!" Hodgins called out gladly, and they rose to their feet.

At five o'clock that afternoon, old Mika Dodawa was standing behind his counter, smooth and smiling as usual, when the door opened and Chisholm and Hodgins, in immaculate white, stepped in, followed by the Commissioner of Police.

The old man clutched at the counter, while his eyes bulged as if he were seeing ghosts.

"It's all right, Mika!" Hodgins grinned. "We're not ghosts! And we're all here—all except the tips of our ears!"

But the old man did not answer. Only, as the police led him out, he was heard to mutter something to himself about "the will of Allah!"

Note.—The Leopard Society of the West Coast of Africa is not of fictitious origin. Within the last ten years a series of murders so startling and gruesome, even in a country where the gruesome abounds, roused the British Government to action. Upon investigation it was discovered that the murders were committed by a powerful secret organization known as the Leopard Society. Its power extended down the whole coast, but concentrated especially in Sierra Leone. The victims, usually natives, but in one or two cases white men, were always found in a terribly mauled condition, as if by a monster leopard. Bits of leopard-fur always littered the killing ground. The most puzzling feature of the case was that in every instance the abdomen had been ripped open, the pancreas removed, and the body drained of blood. In 1915 *the Government succeeded in capturing a number of the members. Among them were several highly educated, English-speaking, influential natives. Some had even held civil appointments. These all paid the full penalty of the law in* 1916. *The records of the trial may be seen in the crime annals of Sierra Leone. Owing to the difficulty of getting either the prisoners or witnesses to testify, however, little real information was gained concerning the Society itself beyond the fact that the Leopards disguised themselves in skins, mauled their victims with leopard claws and actually drank the blood. Some hold the theory that it is a "Black Hand Society" used for purposes of revenge. The more popular and logical conclusion, however, is that it is a fanatical religious sect, which has existed from primeval days and which practices cannibalism as a religious rite. Whichever theory is correct, it is a known fact that in the heart of the West African bush this society still flourishes and remains the most sinister mystery of that still mysterious country.*

THE LAST TRIP

ARCHIE BINNS

THE driver congratulated himself on having only one more trip to make that night. It was nearly 11.30 when he brought the long-backed car up to the bus station on Pacific Street and let his passengers out. When he got back to Lewis he would turn in for the night. And it was high time.

A group of men stood waiting at the edge of the curb, and almost as soon as the bus had been emptied it was full again. Butler looked around. Eight men occupied the eight places in the tonneau.

"One more for the emergency seat, and we're off," he thought. And while he was thinking it, the ninth man came to the curb and took the seat beside him.

"That's the way to get passengers," he told himself as he took up the fares. "Just the right number and no waiting." It was something that had never happened before in his long experience as a driver.

In less than a minute after arriving, he was jockeying the long-backed bus out through the traffic. He climbed the H Street hill, gathered speed on the lever and slipped into the overdrive without disturbing the clutch.

It was a dark, windless night and there was

nothing to see but the pool of headlights on the road. In the darkened tonneau eight passengers sat like shadows without speaking, nodding slightly with the motion of the car. Beside the driver the ninth man looked steadily and silently into the darkness. Butler was annoyed.

"Anyone would say that I was driving them to a funeral," he thought.

The light of the last house slipped by and they rushed on between the dark walls of scrub pines that bordered the road. And no one had spoken a word.

"What a gang of passengers!" he breathed to himself.

Suddenly the buzzer vibrated through the silence. And for some reason the man at the wheel started.

"Driver, I want to get out here," a voice called from the darkness of the tonneau.

Obediently he put his feet on the pedals and brought the bus to a full stop with the hand brake. A man climbed out and disappeared into the blackness.

"The devil," the driver thought as he started on; "I never saw a cross-road here!"

Again the big car whined along in the overdrive. And not a word had been spoken except by the man who had got out. A nice party!

Three minutes later the buzzer broke through the silence.

"Driver."

Again his feet reached for the pedals.

"I want to get out here."

The car came to a stop, a man got out, closed the door; and they rolled on.

"Is there any place for that man to go?" Butler wondered. "Anyway, it was too dark for him to see where we were."

A small car, travelling rapidly, hummed by. And in some way it gave him a feeling of relief. He glanced back. In the moment of light he saw six remaining passengers in the tonneau, sitting like so many shadows, nodding slightly with the motion of the bus. When the other car had passed, the night and the road seemed darker and uglier than before.

Hardly a minute later he started again at the harsh noise of the buzzer.

"Driver, I want to get out here."

The same voice, and the same blackness of scrub pines. As the man got out, the driver put his head into the darkness and looked about. There might or might not have been some trail through the woods. He could not see.

He used the throttle a little more.

"It may be some game that they are up to," he told himself. "But if they want to rob me, why do they get out before they have their money's worth out of their fares?"

Now the bus was fairly swallowing up the road.

"Half-an-hour more of this and we're—"

B-r-r-! The buzzer again.

"Driver, I want to get out here!"

Butler did not put out his head to look this time. It seemed safer not to. Besides, he knew that there was no crossroad of any kind. Out of the corner of his eye he glanced at the man beside him in the emergency seat.

"Is he in this, too?" the driver wondered. "Why can't he say something?"

But the fellow was still looking out into the darkness, without ever having moved his head.

"What a cursed, black road," he muttered inside his chest. When the buzzer growled again he started violently because he had been listening tensely.

"Driver, I want to get out here," he mimicked to himself. And his skin prickled all over when the words were repeated, in exactly the same tone, from the darkened tonneau.

The fifth man got out. Butler drove on and did not look around. Without being fully conscious of it, he was driving faster than he had ever driven before. The lightened car rocked as it plunged on over the road.

"Why is it that the fewer there are, the more scared I am?" he wondered.

He listened intently for the buzzer, nearly starting out of his seat at the first harsh vibration.

"Driver, I want to get out here."

And the sixth man disappeared into the blackness of the pines, where there was neither house nor trail. The two remaining men in the back of the car were silent as shadows. In the emergency seat the other man had never moved nor turned his head.

"I wish we could meet some more cars," the driver thought. He put on the brakes as the buzzer snarled again.

"Driver, I want to get out here."

The repeated sound of the buzzer and the voice was maddening. Again he stopped between the

ugly walls of the darkness, letting the seventh passenger out.

" Seven from nine makes two," he told himself as the bus lunged on. " If they start anything, I might be able to handle the two of them. If only the one beside me would turn around, or get out, or say something ! "

And the long car shot rocking through the darkness, with only the driver and the one shadow in the great tonneau, and the man who was looking intently into the blackness of pines and the night. Butler gripped the wheel and felt his hair prickling on his head. The one in the back was moving about. Perhaps he was reaching for the—

B-r-r-r—!

The buzzer seemed attached to his nerves, racking them with its harsh vibrations.

" Driver, I want to get out here."

It was spoken in the same tone that the others had used. But each time it was repeated it became more hateful and uncanny.

He let the eighth man out.

" Good night."

" What ! " the driver exclaimed. The two words had startled him unbelievably.

The door had no sooner closed on the empty tonneau than the car was in motion again. Why had he started so when the man said " good night " ? Passengers often did that. But spoken by the last of the eight, the words seemed to have a strange meaning.

" Eight from nine makes one," he reassured himself, slipping into the overdrive again. " But who is the one, and what is he up to ? "

As if in answer, the man in the emergency seat took a deep breath, like a sigh, and turned from studying the darkness. It was a face that the driver had never seen before, smooth and pale, with dark, luminous eyes. The man folded his arms over his breast and spoke for the first time.

"How far is it to the Woodland Cemetery?"

Butler started violently and pressed the throttle.

"Five miles." Then he added, "We're having a nice ride, aren't we?"

The passenger laughed.

"Ha, ha! You are driving fast, Mr. Butler."

He flinched at the weird sound of the laughter mingled with the rush of the car; and the mention of his name made him tremble, because he felt that he must do or say something. "Well, better introduce yourself, since we are riding together."

"If you wish," was the cool reply. "My name is Death."

"I didn't quite get it."

"Death!"

The bus driver put his feet on the pedals.

"This has gone far enough to suit me," he thought.

"Better not," the man beside him remarked. "Do you see anything under my elbow!"

In the dim light that was shed from the instrument board he made out the muzzle of an automatic pistol, protruding slightly from under folded arms.

"As you like," he agreed. "Where were we? Your name is Death, I believe. I suppose that is why you are going to the cemetery."

"Exactly, that is why we are going to the cemetery."

The driver felt a horrible chill coming over him.

"*We?* I didn't know I was invited."

"You were invited when I planned this ride."

"So you planned it, eh, with the others getting out along the road?"

"Exactly, so that we could go alone."

The passenger began tapping on the foot-boards with his feet, keeping time with the swaying car. Butler tightened his grip on the wheel, shivering and snarling like an animal in a cage.

"If you are Mister Death, then it's the cemetery for you. But you might tell me what's the idea of taking me along. By God!" he burst out; "if you carried a scythe, as you are supposed to, instead of that pistol, I would take a chance on seeing if we both went there!"

"Death has tricked people before," the passenger observed coolly. "And hadn't you better think a minute and see if there isn't a reason for your going there?"

"What the devil are you driving at? What have I done?"

"You should remember."

"Remember what?"

The driver's heart pounded so that he could hear it above the roar of the motor; and the car that raced over the road seemed to be standing still in the horrible darkness.

"So you don't remember?"

"No. What is it?"

"How far is it to the cemetery now?"

"About three miles. Why?"

"And still you don't remember?"

"No. Who the devil are you?"

"You have forgotten!" the passenger cried, his eyes shining like those of a cat. "God, I wish I could forget! And you don't even remember!"

"But what is it I don't remember?"

"Listen. When you were a bus driver here in 1918, did you once crowd a woman's car into a ditch?"

"What is that to you?"

"So you did?"

"Yes," the driver admitted sullenly. "What is that to you?"

"What happened to the woman?"

"The car turned over and she died. But who —what was she to you?"

"Everything!"

The passenger stared with mad intentness. Then he continued.

"I would have died long ago if it hadn't been for her. I was blown up and shot to pieces. But I wouldn't die. Then, when I was ready to come home, I heard that you had killed her."

"But it wasn't my fault! I had to keep on schedule. That day—"

He turned his face away from the wild, unnatural light in the man's eyes. Before him there rose the scene that he had never let himself think of since the day it happened; the crowded bus tearing over the road to make up time, the grey roadster pushed to the edge of the ditch by the heavier vehicle, the gasp of the passengers, followed by a shriek that went up and up, as the small car turned over and crumpled, the bus sliding to a stop with smoking brakes, the white-faced passengers crowding round, the delicate, drooping face of the girl, and the blood—blood all

over her white dress! The driver pressed the throttle as far down as it would go, trying to get away from the fearful picture.

"So you killed us both. It was too much to stand. They brought back what was left of me, and put me away. I waited my chance until to-night, when I came to find you."

Still the picture floated before his eyes, while the shrieking pierced him through. And this madman or ghost was making him remember every detail.

"How far is it to the cemetery now?"

"A mile," Butler said between chattering teeth.

"Good, we shall be in time!"

The bus lumbered swiftly down the hill, through the valley, and roared up the other slope, with the passenger beating time to its rhythm. As he neared the crest, the driver saw a faint light in the sky. Soon they would be on the open flat, in sight of the cemetery—

"Quick, how far is it now?"

"A quarter of a mile."

His staring eyes were ready to burst and the hair bristled on his head. The drooping face, the blood all over the white dress, and the shrieking, filled his eyes and ears.

"If I can only get past without stopping," he repeated to himself.

The black iron fence came in sight; the dim gravestones flitted by like ghosts. Just ahead, at the bend in the highway, the dark gateway of the cemetery rose against the sky. If he kept on the road at that turn, he would be safe in sight of the lights of the town.

Butler winced fearfully as the car rocked over an

unevenness of the road. The dark arch of the gateway seemed to draw his eyes toward it, like a magnet.

"We are here!" the passenger cried, rising in his seat.

The wheel twisted in the driver's hands, and the long-backed car careened and banked sharply. Then it plunged toward the cemetery, where the white gravestones stood waiting, row after row, like ghosts, to welcome his arrival.

One side of the stone entrance leapt up before the car. And at the moment of the crash that sounded to the sky, there was a wild, triumphant burst of laughter, either from the mad passenger —or the dead who were waiting.

THE PURPLE CINCTURE

H. THOMPSON RICH

IT WAS a day in midsummer, I remember. I had been tramping over the densely wooded and desolate hillside the greater part of the morning, getting with each mile farther and farther from the tawdry haunts of man and nearer and nearer the rugged heart of nature.

Finally (it must have been after noontime) I paused and made a light lunch of the sandwiches and cold coffee I had brought with me from town, sitting on the edge of a great slab of granite rock, swept clean and smooth by ages of winds and rains and snows.

All about me was a veritable garden of great projecting rocks, jagged and broken, flat and polished, needlelike, giant flowers of earth in a thousand different forms.

Here and there a short, dwarfed pine or spruce tree struggled for a footing amid its rocky friends, and the resistless undergrowth surged up through every crack and crevice, while energetic mosses and lichens clutched at the granite walls and crept bravely up. One had a feeling of awe, as if in the presence of elemental, eternal forces. Here, I thought, if anywhere, one might commune with the voiceless void.

Suddenly my eyes chanced to fall upon a fissure

in the rock to the left, and I sprang up with a low exclamation. What I had beheld was to all appearance a human skeleton !

Advancing reluctantly, yet with that insistent inquisitiveness which surrounds the dead, I bent, and peered into the fissure. As I looked, a cry excaped me. The object I beheld was indeed a skeleton—but what a skeleton ! The head, the left hand, and the foot were entirely missing, nor was there any sign of them at first sight.

Thoroughly fascinated by the morbid spectacle, I began to search for the missing members, and was finally awarded by unearthing the head some twenty feet away, where it lay half buried in the soft loam and decayed vegetation and sifted shale. But a painstaking and minute hunt failed to reveal the missing hand and foot.

I was successful, however, in finding immeasurably more important—a manuscript. This I found by the side of the mangled skeleton.

It consisted of several pages of closely written material, in a small pocket notebook, which fact, in connection with the partial shelter afforded by the crevice where the body lay, doubtless accounts for its preservation through the years that have passed since its owner met his hideous fate.

Picking up the notebook with nervous fingers, I opened it and turned the damp and musty pages through, reading it at first hastily, then slower and more carefully, then with a feverish concentration —as the awful significance of the words was riveted into my brain.

The writing was in a man's cramped agitated hand, and I give it to you just as I read it, with the

exception of the names and places, and a few paragraphs of vital scientific data—all but a few words at the very beginning and end, where the manuscript had been moulded into illegibility by the gradual action of the weather. Here follows :

"———as strange. I had a sense of apprehension from the start, a vague, indescribable feeling of doubt, of dread, as if someone, something, were urging me out, away, into these sullen hills.

"I might have known. The law of retribution is as positive as the law of gravity. I know that now. Oh, irony !

"But I was so sure. No one knew. No one could know. She, my wife, least of all, until the end. And the neighbours, her friends, never. She had merely pined away. No one dreamed I had poisoned her. Even when she died, there was no thought of autopsy. She had long been failing. And had I not been most concerned ? None in the little town of———, but who sympathized with me And I mourned. Oh, I mourned ! So it was that she paid the price of her infamy. Ah, but revenge never was sweeter !

"And he ? Oh, but I despised him—even as I had formerly admired him, even as I had once loved my wife—so I despised him. And despising him, I killed him—killed him, but with a poison far more subtle than that I had used to destroy my wife —killed him with a poison in effect so hideous, so harrowing, that I can scarcely think of it without sickening even as I write.

"The poison I inculcated into his veins was a germ poison—a disease I, a physician of no small repute, had discovered and bred—a disease I had

found existed only in a particular and very rare species of virulent purple and orange-banded spider —the genus —— [Here follow in the original manuscript seven paragraphs of elaborate scientific data, of no particular interest to the average reader, but of incalculable import to the scientific world. These paragraphs I have omitted from this account for very significant reasons, but I hold them open to scientific examination at any time, and will welcome investigation by reputable parties]—a disease which was responsible for the extreme rarity of this particular species.

" By careful investigation I was able to learn the exact manifestations and workings of the disease— which by their frightful ravages upon the system of the unfortunate victim fairly appalled me.

" By segregating and breeding diseased members of this particular species of spider, I was able to produce the disease in the young in its most virulent form. You can well imagine the care I used in handling these spiders, to prevent infection. Briefly, the symptoms are as follows : The spider about to be stricken apparently first experiences a peculiar numbness of the first left foreleg, to judge from its inability to use or move the affected member. A day or so later the leg, which in a healthy condition is a dull brown, turns a pale, sickening shade of yellow, which deepens rapidly until it has taken on a flaming orange hue. Then, in a few hours, a deep, vicious-looking blue cincture, or band, appears just at the first joint of the affected member. This cincture rapidly deepens to purple, which seems somehow to sear its way into the flesh and through the bone, so that in a surprisingly

short time the whole leg is severed at the joint where the cincture has been.

"The spider then appears to regain its normal condition of health, which it maintains for about a week; then once again the hideous disease manifests itself, this time in the left feeler, or antenna, which in turn becomes yellow, then orange, whereupon the same blue cincture appears and deepens to purple; then, in about the same period of time as in the case of the leg, the antenna drops off, seared as if by some hellish flame.

"Once again the spider appears to regain its health—then in about a week the whole *head* of the stricken insect turns slowly yellow, then orange—then the cincture appears—and as a last manifestation, the head is seared off in flaming agony—and the spider dies in horrible convulsions.

"That briefly, is the process—as I was able to note after weeks and months of tireless research and observation.

"So what more perfect punishment for the man who stole from me my wife, while pretending to be my friend?

"Loving her as I did, I had not the heart to kill her in this hideous way: so I put her to death with a painless and insidious poison.

"But for —— I had no mercy. In fact, I gloated as I worked over my vile and diseased spiders, breeding them together until I was convinced that I had the germs of the disease in its most virulent form. Even then I was not sure what their effect would be on a human being—but that much, at least, I must hazard.

"So having finally made all my preparations, I

invited him to my house and placed one of the diseased spiders upon his forehead one night as he slept.

"It must have bitten him, for he awoke with a cry, and I had barely time to close his door and get back to my room before I heard him rise and turn on the light.

"Then he called me, and I came to him, burning with a fiendish satisfaction. 'Something has bitten me, horribly,' he said. 'I feel as if I were going to be ill.'

"I managed to reassure him by telling him that it was very likely nothing but one of our uncommonly large mosquitoes, and he returned to bed.

"But he did not sleep. All night I heard him moaning and tossing. And in the morning he was very pale.

"'I do not know what is the matter with me,' he said, and I thought he looked at me queerly, 'but I feel as if a little rest would do me good. I feel choked. I think I will pack up my knapsack and go off to the hills for the week end. Want to come?'

"I longed to go with him, to see the dread disease work, but I feared its deadly contagion, and was anxious to get him away before I myself became contaminated. So I said no—and he left.

"That was the last I ever saw of him—but once.

"He went away, as he had promised, and he seemed apparently well—all except the curious little inflamed spot on his forehead, whose significance I knew so well.

"He went away—and he failed to come back.

Days passed, and there came no word from him. People began inquiring. It was odd that he should have left no address. His business suffered.

"Weeks went by—and no word. Search parties were sent out. The river was dragged. The morgues of near-by cities were searched. And all the while I laughed. For who would think of turning to those far-off hills?

"And yet as the days went by, I found myself turning to them again—wondering, wondering, wondering. I grew nervous, agitated. I got so I couldn't sleep.

Finally, on a day in late summer (it was the 8th of August—date I shall never forget!) I packed a few things and set off. In search of him? God knows. I tried to tell myself not—but at any rate I found myself strangely, magnetically drawn to those distant sombre hills—and thither I went.

"It was one of those gorgeous mornings that only August can produce, and the exhilarating air would have lifted my spirits, but instead I walked along depressed, and the knapsack strapped to my shoulder served only to intensify the feeling.

"In spite of all I could do, I found my mind reverting to the hideous revenge I had wreaked on my wife and her lover, and for the first time repentance stole in upon me.

"I walked along slowly, and it was well toward noon before I left the beaten road and started at random off over the hills, following a narrow and little used path.

"Progress now became doubly slow and painful, leading often up steep inclines and hard descents, with the aspect momentarily becoming more and

more rugged, as I left the lower hills and climbed toward the mountain.

"By this time, however, I had got a kind of exhilaration sought in vain during the earlier hours of the morning, and climbed on and on, glad to free body and mind thus of the poison of brooding and lassitude. I would return to the town at night and take supper at one of the small inns that abounded thereabouts. This would give me some hours yet before I turned back. For the time being, the thought of searching for —— was forgotten. I had freed my mind of him entirely.

"Presently the path I had been following branched, and the right half narrowed into an all but obliterated trail, leading up a laborious slope. Forcing my way over dry, snapping underbrush and under low hanging spruce boughs, occasionally starting an indignant partridge from its hidden nest, often put to a wide detour to avoid some hazardous gully cut deep by centuries of spring and autumn freshets, I at last emerged upon a small, circular clearing, evidently the work of some lone wood-chopper.

"Here I sat down, tired by the climb, and refreshed myself with a sandwich from my knapsack. Then I pushed on to the summit, pausing frequently to examine some uncommon species of insect life with which the hills abounded.

"So much was I enjoying myself and such scant notice of the time did I take, that sunset came upon me unawares and I found myself, with darkness settling in on all sides with a startling rapidity, still on the summit of the mountain, with a good three mile descent before me. Indeed, the prospect was not altogether a cheering one and I reproached

myself for my heedlessness. But I had found a species of spider for which I had searched in vain for months, so, somewhat reassured by its precious body in a pill-box in my pocket, I started down.

"In spite of my best speed, however, night shut in on me before I had made one quarter of the return, leaving me to grope the rest of the way in utter darkness, with not even the light of a dim star to go by. Vague fear awoke within me, but I shielded my eyes and stumbled to the bottom, sliding, falling, clutching here and there at some projecting tree-limb to check my headlong descent. Finally, torn and dishevelled and shaking, I emerged upon the clearing. Pausing only for breath, I plunged on into the dark. Fear was growing—growing—that peculiar fear of the dark which is the heritage of those who have taken human life.

"What was that? Something lay gleaming queerly ahead, with a dull phosphorescent glow. I stooped and picked it up—and flung it from me shuddering. It was the skeleton of a human foot!

"I groped on, my every heartbeat choking at my throat. Of a sudden I came forcefully against a barrier of rock. I tried to feel my way around it, to get beyond it, but could not. It seemed continuous, a solid wall that would not let me by. Had I fallen into a trap in the darkness? Terrified, I turned—and there lay something else gleaming with that same weird phosphorescent glow! Sick with terror and dread, half fearing what it might be, I sprang on it and picked it up—*picked it up*—the rotting hand of a human being! With a stifled gasp, I flung it from me, reeled, tripped through some vines, and fell swooning.

"When I came to myself, I struck a match and looked about me. Its feeble flame revealed a pair of damp, rocky walls, low and vaulted. I was in some sort of cavern.

"Later on I crept out, collected an armful of sticks, brought them back, and soon had a fire started. By its light I observed that the rear of the cave was still in darkness, and judging that it must extend back indefinitely, I gave my attention to my immediate surroundings—when, with a shock I saw, directly in front of me, a granite slab. On it lay several loose sheets of manuscript, scrawled wildly on odd scraps of paper.

"With a prophetic dread I bent forward and gathered the loose sheets together. Holding them near the fire, I peered closer. Then I think a cry must have escaped me. The writing was in ——'s hand, curiously scrawled and scraggly, but still recognizable.

"So fate had brought me to my victim!

"For the rest, there is little more to say. I am doomed as I deserve, even as he was doomed. His words speak all that can be spoken. They follow:

APRIL 4TH—*I had meant to spend only the week-end in these hills, yet here I am, after two weeks—still here, and suffering the pains of hell. What has come over me I cannot imagine. And yet—can I not? I am not so sure! Perhaps—perhaps —— has in some devilish way managed to poison me. He is insanely jealous. He thinks there was something between his wife and me. Verily I believe he harassed her to death on the subject. And, having thus brought her to her grave, he wishes to send me there.*

Perhaps he will succeed—if it is true that in some fiendish way he has got some of his germs into my blood. That bite at his house that evening. I am not so sure. It was a most unusual bite. It seemed upon the instant to sour all my blood.

And yet if he accomplishes my death, how vain it will be—for as God is my witness I swear I never harmed his wife. We were the best of friends, nothing more. And she loved him with a wholeness, a passion that any but a man maddened by groundless jealousy must at once have seen.

How he has wrecked his life! A mind so brilliant—and yet, with her dead, a closed room.

However, I may be wrong. I will wait. By the symptoms I will know. I write this down for I must do something.

APRIL 5TH—*It is he now, his hellish work. I am sure of it. To-day my left leg, which for two weeks has felt positively numb, turned a sickening yellow, from the ankle down, which began at once to deepen, until it now flames orange. And oh! the pain is hellish! Yes, I am sure it is ——'s work. But I will still withhold judgment.*

APRIL 6TH—*To-day a deep, virulent blue cincture has appeared just at the ankle of the affected leg. What a hellish contrast to the orange!*

It is ——. I am sure, now. Oh, what a fiend!

APRIL 7TH—*The cincture has deepened to purple, and seems to cut into the very flesh. It seems sometimes as if the pain would drive me mad.*

APRIL 8TH—*My flaming foot* dropped off *to-night, seared at the ankle by the purple cincture, and I flung it*

outside the cave. I wonder. Perhaps I may yet live to return to the world. Ah, I will be avenged for this!

MAY 23RD—*I am cursed*, cursed! *To-day, just as I was beginning to believe the hellish thing had left me, it returned, this time in my left hand. Oh, I can see it all: to-morrow and the next day and the next*, for just two weeks, *my hand will be numb; then will come that frightful yellow; then the orange; then—then the purple cincture!*

Curse the man who discovered this hellish disease—and turned it into me! I could tear him limb from limb. Oh, I pray to return! I would go now, yet I fear my malady is of a vilely contagious nature. I have not the heart to menace a whole community, perhaps a whole nation, perhaps humanity itself—merely to avenge myself on one man.

JUNE 6TH—*I was right! This morning I awoke with my hand that death-yellow. Oh, it is too regular, too certain—too cruelly certain!*

JUNE 9TH—*Thank God! My hand is gone—out there where my foot went. It happened to-night. Perhaps I may yet return! Perhaps I may yet be avenged. I wonder.*

JULY 21ST—Doomed! *That fearful numbness again—this time in my head. I cannot think—I cannot write—I can scarcely breathe. Oh, the pain the pain—.*

"Here it ended in a sputter of ink. Trembling in every limb, filled with a horror and anguish and remorse no man can know, spellbound by the

awful tale those few sheets told, I sat there motionless.

"So I had been wrong. Oh, my jealousy, my insane jealousy! As I sat there, all desire of life suddenly left me, and I thrilled with joy at the remembrance of the hand and foot I had come upon, outside the cave. They were his. I had touched them. I was contaminated with the dread disease.

"What was that? I listened, straining every nerve. From the back of the cavern had come a sound.

"Five minutes passed—ten—fifteen (I was oblivious of time)—but it was not repeated. Slightly I relaxed my aching nerves and tried to think. Already I fancied I could feel the fearful poison of the diseased spider working in my veins.

"Suddenly the significance of that last entry in ——'s diary burst upon me, and I sat shivering as under a sudden deluge of icy water. '*July 21st.*' Two weeks more would make it *August 5th*, and three days more would bring it to—*August 8th!*

"'Great God!' I cried aloud, 'to-night is the night!'

"'*Yes, to-night is the night!*' echoed a sepulchral voice from the cavern's inner darkness.

"In an agony of dread I looked, and the blood within me paled to water at the sight that met my gaze. Something—*something with but a single hand and foot*—emerged from the shadows of the back of the cavern and began to come forward, leaning heavily upon a rough staff for support.

"'Stay back—*stay back!* For the love of God!'" I shrieked. But the terrible thing came on and on, and the awful eyes fastened themselves upon my person and suddenly recognized me—and it smiled a hideous smile.

"When it drew nearer, I could see that all above the shoulders flamed orange, while around the neck a livid purple cincture seemed actually to be searing its way into the flesh.

"'This is your revenge,' it spoke. 'And this is mine,' raising the hellish stump of its mutilated left arm and panting heavily at me. 'My suffering is over—but yours is all to come. And to the bodily pains of hell will be added the mental tortures of hopeless remorse—knowing your wife was innocent. With that I curse you.'

"Even as it spoke, the eyes rolled out of sight behind horrible lids, the tongue protruded itself in flaming agony, and the whole head, suddenly severed at the neck, thudded the cavern floor.

"I came to my feet with a mad cry, that, shattering the silence beyond the deepest shadows, swelled up in a thousand echoes, from the wail of a soul in torment to the screech of a crucified demon. Then I rushed headlong out.

"For the rest——."

The last page was illegible, as the first had been, worn and corroded by the slow action of years of decay.

I put the notebook slowly in my pocket and sat there thinking, sickened and awed by the astounding manuscript.

Again I went over to the skeleton there in the fissure. Now I understood why the hand and foot were missing, and why I had found the head many feet from the body.

There it lay, mute evidence that the retribution was complete.

Thomas De La Rue & Co., Ltd., London.