



**THE
THIRD CRY
TO
LEGBA
AND OTHER INVOCATIONS**

The Selected Stories
of
Manly Wade Wellman
Volume 1

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THE JOHN THUNSTONE &
LEE COBBETT STORIES

Edited by John Pelan

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Manly Wade Wellman
Volume 1

The Third Cry to Legba and Other Invocations:
The Selected Stories of Manly Wade Wellman, Volume I

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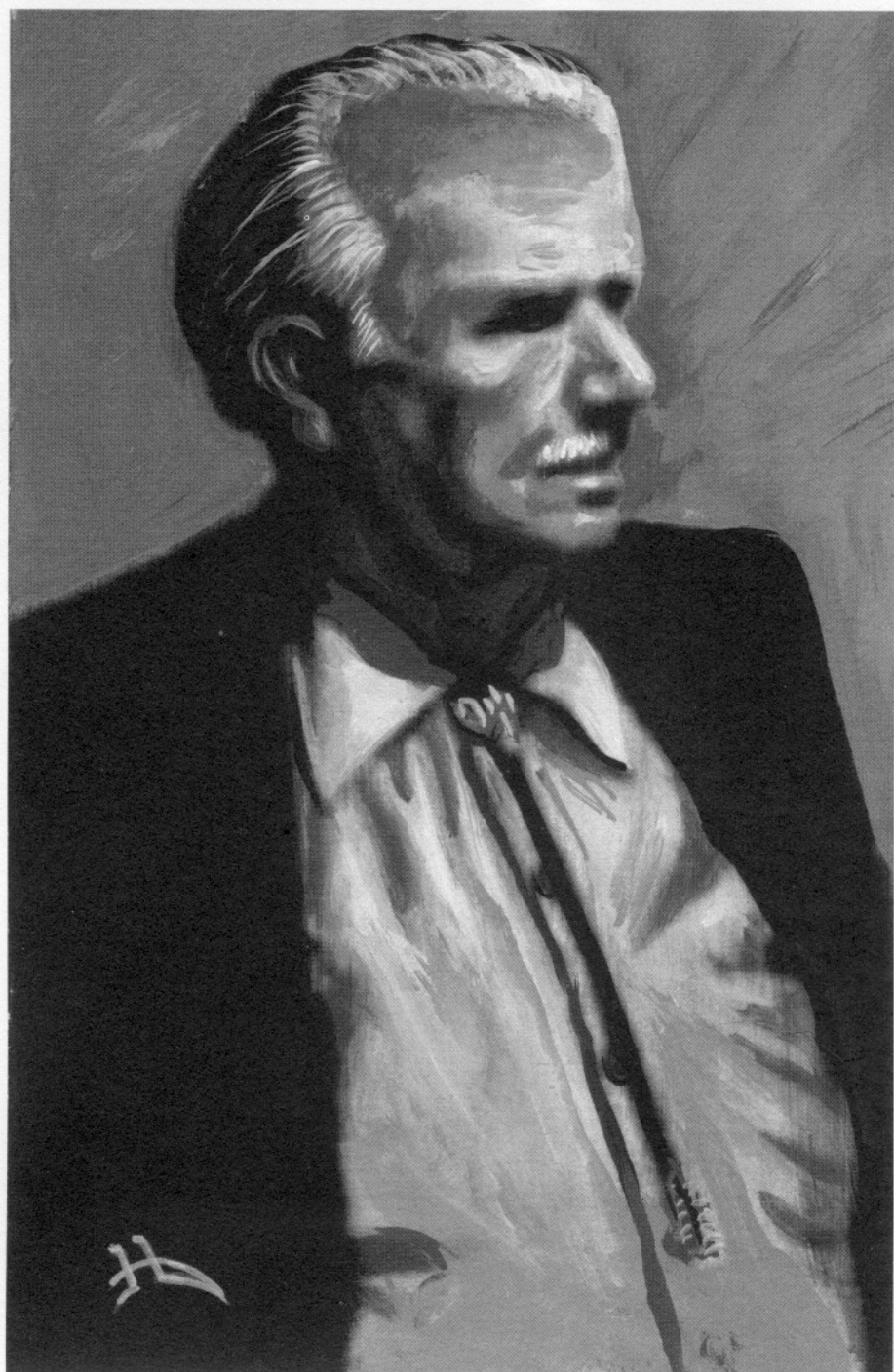
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A Giant up in the Mountains

by John Pelan

THE BOOK YOU HOLD in your hands is a dream, or rather, part of a dream. That the supernatural fiction of Manly Wade Wellman would be reissued after all these years didn't seem to be a very likely occurrence in these days of interminable series of books dealing with truculent elves or movie tie-in novels with multiple dustjackets. Its publication may in fact be a benchmark in the renaissance of horror fiction that seems to be occurring. That I would be fortunate enough to be involved with such a project seemed completely out of the realm of probability. In real life, as in Wellman's stories, odd things, sometimes fortuitous things happen...

In the 1940s, *Weird Tales* was fighting sagging sales and war-time paper shortages; Lovecraft, Whitehead, and Howard had all passed away. The war effort claimed Donald Wandrei and effectively ended his writing career. Clark Ashton Smith had refocused his energies on art and poetry, leaving the world of pulp fiction behind. The one time star of *Weird Tales*, Seabury Quinn appeared only sporadically. Newer voices, like those of Ray Bradbury and Henry Kuttner, helped keep the magazine going along with steady contributions from Robert Bloch and August Derleth. What *Weird Tales* really needed was a prolific writer that could seize the readers' imaginations and would be prolific enough to fill the rather large shoes of their earlier mainstays.

That's what they got with Manly Wade Wellman. A regular contributor to the magazine since the 1930s, Wellman exploded during the forties with a barrage of stories that have come to be considered classics today. The decade saw his first Silver John story, the first Judge Pursivant tale, and in 1943, in the titular story of this volume, he introduced John Thunstone. A writer's writer, Wellman kept up a steady stream of material for *Weird Tales* as well as finding time to script issues of the *Captain Marvel* comic book.

The occult detective is a tradition dating back to the early years of this century, with characters such as Algernon Blackwood's John Silence and Wm. Hope Hodgson's Carnacki striving against the forces of darkness.

Manly Wade Wellman's John Thunstone was cut of a slightly different cloth from these earlier ghostbusters. Thunstone was a man of action as well as an investigator. This is a man, larger than life, who strides boldly into encounters with the unknown brandishing a sword or grimoire as the occasion warrants. A man as likely to utilize concentration techniques learned from "an old coon-hunter" as astral projection taught by a Tibetan lama.

Wellman succeeded in taking the archetype of the occult detective and fusing it with the more raucous tone of adventurous pulp fiction. There's been a lot of similar work done since, novels by John Blackburn and Dennis Wheatley come to mind, but no one has ever done it quite as well as did Manly Wade Wellman. Thunstone fought against voodoo, malign spirits, and of course, the Shonokins, Wellman's atavistic people of the darkness that strike a chord of familiarity with readers: Lovecraft's degenerate and inbred townspeople of Innsmouth and the inhabitants of Herbert Gorman's *A Place Called Dagon*. Wellman's work acknowledges the existence of the Mythos stories while never allowing itself to be co-opted by the Lovecraftian imitators, always remaining uniquely apart. The *Necronomicon* come in for a mention, but it's more of a nod to Lovecraft on Wellman's part than any attempt to tie his uniquely regional tales in with those of the Lovecraft Circle.

Thunstone needed a larger-than-life opponent; mere dabblers in darkness and malign spectres were not sufficient to test his mettle. He needed an adversary of equal stature. Wellman gave him one in the person of Rowley Thorne. Characters of a completely evil nature are hard to construct convincingly out of a whole cloth. For the character of Thorne, Wellman used Aleister Crowley as a template. Indeed, there was a bit of concern that the depiction was so close to the character of the real-life Crowley that a lawsuit for libel might be a possibility. Wellman calmed his editor by pointing out the quite logical argument that such a notorious individual as Crowley would have a difficult time bringing a suit for the actions of a fictitious character that were certainly no worse than many of the things that he'd claimed in print to have actually done!

The Thunstone stories appeared on a regular basis throughout the war-time years and beyond. The evil sorcerer Rowley Thorne returns in several tales, each time to be thwarted by Thunstone. Worthy adversaries, the two men are still waging their larger-than-life battle in the 1985 novel *The School of Darkness* some forty years after their first appearance. Readers enthusiastically received Wellman's contributions (both the pseudonymous tales as by Gans T. Field and those under his own byline). However, the profusion of other media in the post-war years took a toll on the pulps and *Weird Tales* was no exception. Wellman shifted into other types of writing, continuing to write scripts for the burgeoning comic book industry and non-supernatural regional works.

In 1951, with the pulp era was drawing to a close, with the profusion of comic books, television and other brighter, flashier diversions, audiences dwindled and finally in 1951, "The Last Grave of Lill Warren" appeared and no more was heard of John Thunstone for a time. Shortly thereafter *Weird Tales* itself folded, leaving only the *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* as a possible home for "unusual stories."

The decade of the 1950s saw Wellman focus his energies on the Silver John stories for *F & SF* and dozens of books and articles on a wide variety of subjects. A writer's writer, Wellman produced scores of articles, comic-book scripts, and books, both fiction and nonfiction. As a passionate student of Southern history, Wellman wrote a number of books that are considered regional classics today.

The John the Balladeer tales continued to appear sporadically in *F & SF* until finally, in 1963, the venerable small press Arkham House announced the publication of *Who Fears the Devil?*, a collection that gathered all of his John stories together in one volume. Although Ballantine picked up the book for mass-market publication, it could not have been considered a tremendous success. Seven years later, the book was still in print when a thirteen-year-old boy in Seattle received his first Arkham House catalog and, recognizing the name of the author of "The Desrick on Yandro" (published in one of those wonderful Alfred Hitchcock compilations edited by Robert Arthur), sent in his hard-earned \$4.00 for the book.

Having only read the one story previously, I was profoundly impacted by an entire Wellman collection. The author's remarkable sense of place lent an air of authenticity to the stories that was lacking in much of the material I was reading at the time. I've been a Wellman devotee ever since. As I was later to discover, Wellman's stories contained such authenticity due to his living among the people that he wrote about so well.

Let's revisit the very early 1970s, if you will... Arkham House books were (for the most part) under \$10.00. Still in print were works by Blackwood, Dunsany, and Whitehead. Magazine fiction in the horror genre was limited to the occasional piece in *F & SF*. But there were the fanzines, (or as they're now called, the "small press magazines"). *Whispers* and *Weirdbook* debuted then, to be followed shortly by *Fantasy Tales*. Imagine the delight of a teenage aficionado of weird fiction discovering that not only was one of the legendary *Weird Tales* writers still alive, he was still writing top-notch weird fiction!

I was astounded to see a new Manly Wade Wellman story in the pages of *Whispers*, complete with artwork by the incomparable Lee Brown Coye. In my youthful naiveté, I'd assumed that Wellman, like Smith, Lovecraft, and Howard, was long since deceased or at least retired from active writing. Happily, I was mistaken. The years that followed saw a renaissance for Wellman. The publication of two huge omnibus volumes by Karl Edward

Wagner's Carcosa House were enthusiastically received by collectors and libraries. The two books, *Worse Things Waiting* and *Lonely Vigils*, are exquisite examples of what the small press can and should be: profusely illustrated tomes that successfully capture the feel of the old pulps. These books are sought after today by collectors and command huge prices on the rare occasion that they are offered for sale. Doubleday went on to launch a series of novels continuing the adventures of John the Balladeer and John Thunstone. The Wellman boom was in full swing and the author continued to churn out quality tales to the delight of a new generation of readers.

Among the new stories were the chronicles of Lee Cobbett, a marked contrast to the larger-than-life Thunstone. Cobbett was pretty much Everyman with a knack for stumbling across supernatural occurrences and being compelled to heroic action to persevere (not unlike the Civil War soldiers that Wellman was fond of writing about).

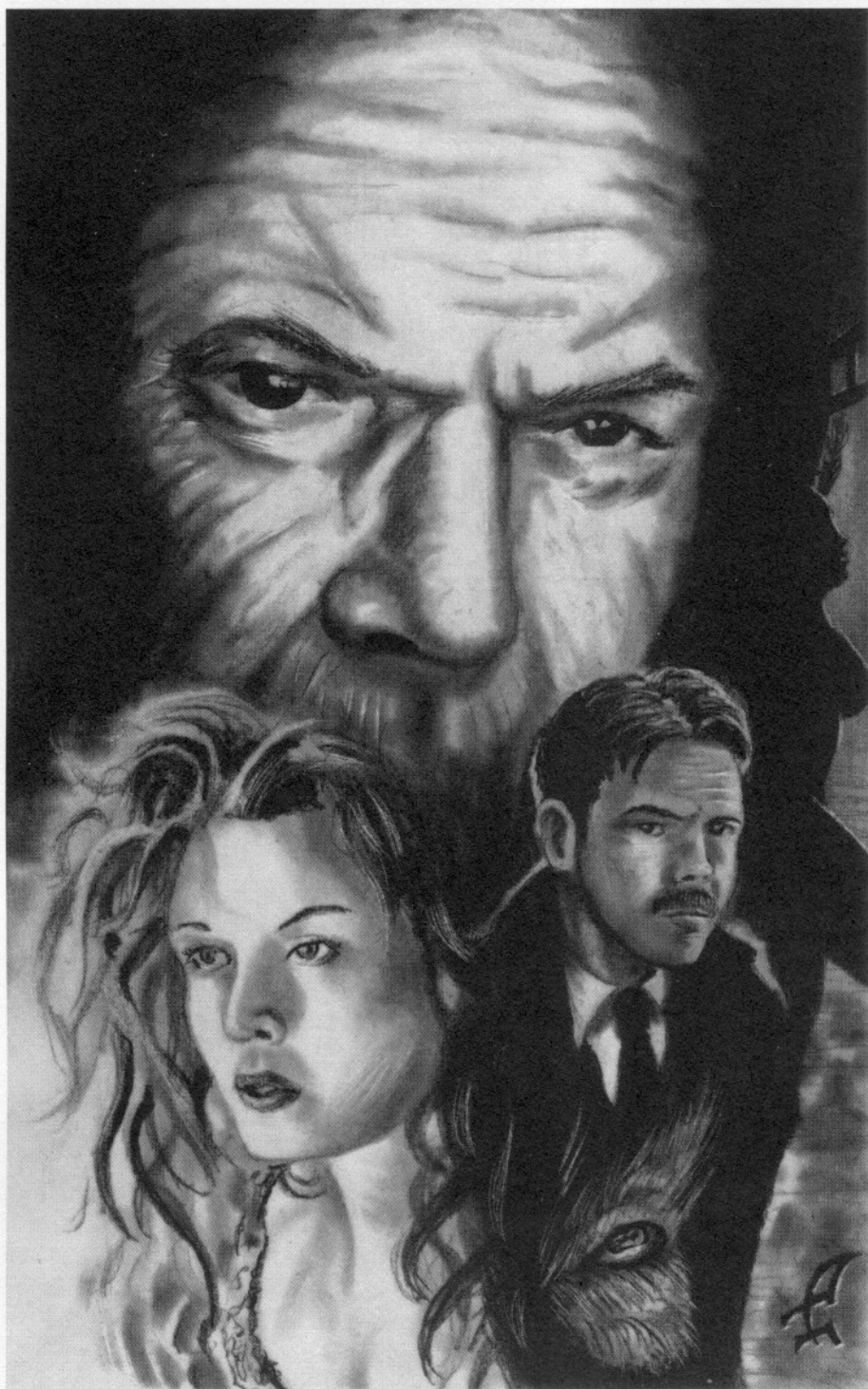
As examples of the ordinary man confronted by the extraordinary, the Cobbett stories are excellent. It seems that Wellman was beginning to follow a thematic approach in the Cobbett stories reminiscent of the work of Algernon Blackwood wherein manifestations of the force of nature raise up in defense against man's encroachments and humans survive by luck rather than guile or skill. It would have been most interesting to see where the cycle of Lee Cobbett stories would have ultimately wound up. Most of the tales were collected in the impossibly rare volume *The Valley So Low*. The stories are few in number and the Everyman character of Cobbett makes such an excellent counterpoint to the larger-than-life Thunstone that we have included them here in this present volume.

It's not often that a character will so capture the imagination of readers (and the author) that his exploits will be chronicled over a period of forty years. John Thunstone is one of those rare literary creations like Wellman's better-known John the Balladeer that remains a compelling figure even today. I can only imagine that there would have been more Thunstone stories and certainly more Lee Cobbett stories had Wellman not passed away at eighty-three, an age far too young for such an energetic storyteller. The legacy of stories that he left is a rich one indeed. When I was first asked to assemble a "Best of " volume, I eagerly agreed and then almost immediately regretted the choice. After all, I'd have to leave out so many fine stories to get the book anywhere near a manageable size... As I made and discarded list after list of stories that simply *must* be included, it became evident that a series of books would be called for. The publishers at Night Shade Books agreed and enthusiastically welcomed the idea of a series that would preserve all the weird fiction of this remarkable writer.

For those of you that are familiar with Wellman's stories, be assured that this is just the first of a series; for those of you making the author's

acquaintance for the first time, I hope you find the same magic here that I did so many years ago.

John Pelan
Seattle, 1999



The Third Cry to Legba

Suddenly I was aware of great shapes moving in the rain, and heard the sound of voices that were not of my city nor yet of any that I ever knew.

— Lord Dunsany, *The Madness of Andelsprutz*

THE GLARE AND THE clatter died at the same instant throughout the Club Samedi. Even the buzzing crowd-noise suspended in expectation. Behind the orchestra sounded a gong. Once. Twice. Thrice... The master of ceremonies intoned: "Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

The gong chimed on to twelve, and stopped. A clarinetist piped certain minor notes. A mixed quartet began to croon: "*Thro mahnda... ibro mahnda...*"

A spotlight, dim and brownish, bored through the smoky air. Into it paced a black-robed figure, bowed face hidden under cascading black locks. To the center of the dance floor moved the silent, slow shape. "*Thro mahnda...*" breathed the quartet.

A sudden explosive gesture. The robe swirled away, the head lifted. There stood a woman, a long-limbed dancer figure, clad as scantily as night clubs permit. Her face was lovely, tense, rapt. Her eyes burned out of slant sockets. The clarinet squealed louder, a tom-tom slogged into rhythm. The dance began, grotesque, nimble, quickening.

The dancer's flower-mouth spewed out words, soft and solemn:

*"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor —
Zandor Legba, immole'-bai!"*

Louder sang the dancer called Illyria, and louder grew the quartet's "*Thro mahnda, ibro mahnda...*"

Illyria spun her body. Her flying hair strained outwards in a bushy umbrella. Her arms writhed like snakes, seeming to glide caressingly over her body. Her bare, rouged toes clapped out a pattern of sound in time with the drum beat. She sang always: "*Zandor Legba. immole'-bai!*"

And suddenly she froze into a strange, updrawn statue, face lifted, hair back, arms out. At the same instant all the music hushed. A tuxedoed attendant stole into the spotlight's brown glow, holding out a fluttering

something — a rooster, speckled black and white. Greedily Illyria seized it, her long, strong hands clutching. The sickening crackle of broken bones was audible. She dropped the rooster, which flopped spasmodically. The attendant seized it and backed away. Illyria snatched her cloak and sped out of sight. Lights came up, the orchestra played a gay flourish.

"You've just seen an authentic voodoo dance-ritual," blatted the master of ceremonies into his microphone. "Never done before, except in a real meeting of the cult — but it'll be done tomorrow midnight, and the midnight following, and every midnight after that..."

John Thunstone's table was well back from ringside. He was a man almost too big to be reassuring, and most of his clothes had to be tailored especially for him. His hands and eyes were sensitive, his big nose had been twice broken, his black hair and mustache showed a little streaking of gray. He sat as relaxed as a big contented cat, and sipped his highball. His eyes gazed somehow hopefully at his companion.

She was as blonde as John Thunstone was dark, of medium height and of figure both full and fine. Above her dark velvet gown her bare shoulders and arms were creamy white. Her large, level eyes shone bluer than the sapphires at her ears and throat. Her lips smiled without parting, in the manner associated with the Mona Lisa and the Empress Josephine. "Was it what you expected, John?" she asked gently.

He rocked his big, close-combed head in what might have been yes or no. "It gave the impression of authenticity," he temporized. "Not that I'm well grounded in voodoo."

"You always were sunk deep in occultism and magic," she rallied him. "Deeper than you'd admit to anyone. Even to me."

He looked at her sidelong. "And you were piqued, eh? Enough to go abroad because you thought I wasn't telling you all I should of my studies — to go abroad and marry Count Monteseco —"

"Which is past, and not particularly nice to bring up."

He sipped again. "I never meant to snub you, Sharon. Not then or now. But the little I know of magic spells danger. And I don't want to let anyone in for it. Least of all you. I hope you don't still condemn me."

Her small hand crept across to touch his big one. "I'm with you tonight. Isn't that enough?"

He looked as if it wasn't, and listened to the dance music. Then: "No, I'm not well grounded in voodoo. Don't understand it at all. Neither, I suspect, do the voodoo worshipers themselves. After all what is voodoo? African jungle worship, or modified European witchcraft, or both — or neither?" His eyes seemed to study something unseen to any but himself. "Did you hear the words of that ritual?"

"French, or French patois, weren't they?" suggested the lady he called Sharon. "That quartet sang something like *'ibro mabnda'*. Mightn't they

mean '*heureux monde*' — happy world?"

"Or perhaps '*ira au monde*' — roughly meaning, 'it shall happen to the world.'"

"Which I call ingenious interpretation," said a voice beside the table, a voice soft, deep and gently amused.

Thunstone shot up out of his chair with that abrupt transition from relaxed ease to ready action which sometimes irritates his friends. He faced someone as tall as himself, and broader, almost deformedly deep of chest. Above European-cut dress clothes and jeweled studs not in the best of taste rode a huge high-craniumed head, either bald or shaven, with a grand hooked nose and eyes as gray and cold as frozen milk.

"I am also an enthusiast for voodoo," said the newcomer silkily. "May I introduce myself? Rowley Thorne."

He offered a big, over-manicured hand. Thunstone took it.

"I'm John Thunstone. Countess, may I present Mr. Thorne? The Countess Montesecco."

Rowley Thorne gracefully kissed her fingers. Without waiting to be invited, he sat down in a chair between them. "Waiter! Champagne, I think, is best traditional usage for cementing of new friendships."

The champagne was brought. Rowley Thorne toasted them, and his gray eyes narrowed over the glass. "I was sitting almost back of you, and heard your wonderings about this Illyria and her dance. I can help a little, I have traveled in Haiti. Yes, the ritual is authentic, an invocation of Legba."

"Legba?" echoed the Countess. "A voodoo god?"

"One of them. Damballa is more important, and Erzulie perhaps more picturesque. But Legba is the great necessity. He's keeper of the Gate — must be invoked to open the way between worshiper and other-world, to permit prayers to mightier gods. It's like speaking a password. Impressive, that bit with the fowl. Other voodoo sacrifices are killed by cutting the throat. Legba's sacrifices die of a broken neck."

The Countess shivered, and Thunstone saw. "Suppose we change the subject," he said.

"Suppose we don't," she rejoined warmly. "Mr. Thorne is willing to talk of magic, though you aren't. And I'm fascinated. Tell us more about Legba, Mr. Thorne."

"He's said to be a shaggy or furry creature with red eyes. He's also called Baron Cimmiterre — master of the graveyard, and Baron Carrefours — master of crossroads. The prayer to him for opening the gate is always preliminary to a prayer elsewhere."

The Countess' blue eyes were bluer. "And what can Legba, Baron Cimmiterre, Baron Carrefours, do for a worshiper?"

"He can but open the gate," said Rowley Thorne. "Hark, music — Latin American. Will the Countess honor me?"

Thunstone rose and bowed them away from the table, but did not sit down again. As the Countess danced off with Rowley Thorne, he swiftly skirted the outer fringe of tables, spoke earnestly to the head waiter, offering some bills. The head waiter led him to a side passage indicating a row of dressing room doors. "Number two, sir," he said and Thunstone knocked.

"Who is it?" asked a woman's voice from within.

"Press," said Thunstone. "After a feature story."

The door opened. Illyria smiled there, hastily wrapped in a robe of flowered silk. "Come in, Mr. —"

"Thunstone."

He entered. She gave him a cordial hand, and sat down by her dressing table. "What paper, Mr. Thunstone?"

"I write for magazines and syndicates," he said truthfully. She accepted a cigarette from his case, and he went on: "I'm interested in your voodoo dance."

She chuckled. "Oh, that. I was in Martinique a year ago. My doctor said I had to have fresh salt air and warm weather. Martinique was cheap, and I was broke — don't print that, though. Say I was fascinated enough to join the voodoo cult. Because I was."

"Many white people in it?" asked Thunstone.

"Quite a few. But I think I was the only practical one. I knew I could make a sensation with voodoo stuff. And haven't I? Before this season's up, I'll be signed for a revue. After that, maybe stardom."

Thunstone looked at a bright print on the wall. "Isn't that a saint's picture — John the Baptist?"

"It is and it isn't." Illyria smiled at his blank look. "The voodoo people want pictures of their gods, to use for idols. The best they can do is regular holy pictures. For Damballa they use St. Patrick — because of the snakes. And John the Baptist is the hairiest, so they take him for Legba. That print was given me by the *houngon*, the medicine man you can call him, when he got real pictures."

"Real pictures?" echoed Thunstone.

"Some artist was making them, someone on Haiti. The Legba one would scare a top sergeant." She shrugged her shoulders out of the robe in a mock shudder. "The artist's name was Thorne."

Thunstone stared. "Rowley Thorne?"

"Maybe. Rowley or Roland or something. I never met him, he stayed close to the big shots in Haiti. Now, what publicity pictures will you want?"

"Later," he said. "May I call again? Thanks."

He returned to his table, just as the Countess and Rowley Thorne finished their dance.

"Jealous?" smiled the Countess Monteseco in the homeward taxi. "Miffed because I found Mr. Thorne attractive?"

"Should I be?" Thunstone smiled back. "He was informative about voodoo."

"Wasn't he, though? No mock-mysterious puttings off on his part. He wants to explain all the things you've held out on me." Her smile grew wistful. "Men usually like to talk to me, about themselves and their interests. You're different from them all."

"Different, I hope, from Rowley Thorne."

"Which sounds as if you know more about him than you admitted. Here's my apartment house. Come upstairs and tell me about him."

"I'll come up," said Thunstone, "but I'll not talk about Rowley Thorne. Because he's part of the magic that the world had better not know about."

True to his stated policy, Thunstone did not ask the Countess to go back with him to the Club Samedi on the following night. But as he entered, after 11 o'clock, he wished he had. For she sat at a choice table, well forward to the floor show, with Rowley Thorne.

The lights seemed to blur, and the torch singer at the microphone — loud though she was — faded into the back of his consciousness; but he was sure he betrayed nothing of being startled or disappointed as he moved between the tables and Rowley Thorne stood up with a gentle smile of greeting.

"Mr. Thunstone, I was a guest at your table last night. Sit at mine tonight. Sharon said that she was sure you would come."

Sharon, he had said. They were at first names, she and Rowley Thorne. He looked down at her and said, "It's so nice to see you again. Thanks, Thorne. But it's my turn to buy a drink, eh? Waiter, the lady will have an old-fashioned. You like champagne, Mr. Thorne?"

"Champagne cocktail," ordered Thorne.

"Scotch and water," added Thunstone. As the waiter moved away, he said to Thorne, "This will become one of my favorite night spots."

"Illyria is a great drawing card," purred the other, his gray eyes estimating the throng of guests. "Not long now until her midnight act. Ever study the importance of midnight in occult ceremonies, Thunstone? It's exactly midway between sunset and sunrise. Allows the supernatural force to split the dark hours halfway — half for the summoning of courage and strength to come forth, half to do whatever is in hand to do."

"That's the kind of thing John always refuses to explain to me," interjected the Countess.

"You know why," he smiled to her. Then, to Thorne: "Last night you borrowed my lady for a dance. May I borrow yours?"

The singer had finished, the orchestra played. Thunstone and the Countess glided away together. Her bright hair came up to his chin. She gave him a quick, appraising flash of blue eyes.

"I really came here to meet you," she said. "You wouldn't invite me, so —"

"So you asked Rowley Thorne to oblige?"

"Hardly. He telephoned me. Enterprising gentleman, to find my address and so on. We had dinner, a theater, and lots of fascinating talk. About your forbidden subject. Why don't you approve of him, John?"

"Haven't I said that I wouldn't talk about him?"

"And I suppose you won't, even to show me that I shouldn't go out with him any more. You're pretty stern in your policy. Or is it too strong a word, policy? Shouldn't I say prejudice or obsession?"

"I'm afraid," he said slowly, "that I'm a very old-fashioned dancer."

"Which means that you dance only to please me. I'm really flattered, John."

Their dancing continued in silence. When they returned to the table, their drinks waited. Rowley Thorne was charming, exhibiting a strange ring with a cabinet setting, which he said had once held poison for a Borgia; and he had begun a good-humored discussion of thought transference, when the lights and sounds ceased as abruptly as before. The gong tolled, the master of ceremonies spoke: "Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

She was there, in the brown spotlight, throwing off her robe to dance and chant. "*Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor —* "

Thunstone felt a sudden light touch on his hand. Sharon, the Countess Montesecco, wanted to hold hands in the dark. For reasons of his own, he drew his fingers away, straining his eyes to pierce the gloom. Because something was there with Illyria, who should be alone in the center of the dance floor — it wasn't time yet for the man with the speckled rooster —

*"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor —
Zandor Legba, immole'-hai!"*

That old trick, taught him long ago by a Pennsylvania Dutch coon hunter — Thunstone closed his eyes tightly for a moment, then opened them wide. The darkness paled ever so slightly, to a sort of bluish dusk, and he saw it, saw the stir of motion above Illyria's tossing head. Branches of a tree, with long trailing leaves or moss — branches, or their shadow, here in the Club Samedi, far from any natural growth of any kind — and along the branch lay and quivered something, a definite hulk of substance that moved and lived within arm's reach of the dancer...

"— immole'-hai!"

The speckled rooster was in her hands. She caught it by the neck, forced its head back and around. *Crrrrrack!*

Overhead something seemed to sag down for a moment, like a strand

of fabric, or a tentacle, or an arm. Next moment Illyria was gone, the attendant with the dead rooster was gone, the lights were blinding, and — no branch showed waving from the ceiling.

"Tomorrow midnight will see Illyria repeat the voodoo-dance," the announcer was shouting, "and the midnight after that.."

Thunstone got up. "Good-night," he said, and bowed toward Sharon. "This is all I came to see."

"Must you go so soon?" she pleaded, and he nodded that he must, "Goodnight, Thorne. I'll see you again. Later."

He put money in the waiter's hand and strolled away to the cloak-room. Retrieving his hat, he turned to go. Rowley Thorne was there beside him.

"You said you'd see me later," said Thorne. "Why not see me now, Thunstone? You know, I know all about you. You're an exhaustive researcher into certain things, to destroy them. I'm surprised that you don't know me."

"I do know all about you, Thorne, or as much as I want to know. I just didn't let on. You were kicked out of two European universities for pursuits the faculties abhorred. The police of France, England and India have all issued you standing dares to set foot on their territory. You'd be a known international crook if it wasn't for the fact that you steal or swindle only enough to support you in luxury for your activity in the very thing I've been fighting."

Rowley Thorne bowed. "You being what you are, I wouldn't want any other estimate of myself from you. We've been on opposite sides for years, and now we're face to face. One of us will be hurt."

"I'm sure of that," said Thunstone. "Good-night, Thorne."

Thorne did not move from his way. The gray eyes were pale as moonlight. "I don't think, Thunstone, that you can afford to play tricks with me. For I haven't any vulnerable point. And you have, sitting at my table yonder."

Thunstone returned his stare. Where Thorne's gray eyes narrowed, Thunstone's widened a trifle.

"The Countess is charming," Thorne almost crooned. "You've thought so for years, haven't you? And yet you let her get away from you. Another man got her. Perhaps that will happen again."

"The future will tell," Thunstone replied. "I recognize her appeal to you, Thorne. Money, isn't it? She's rich."

"I'll need money for what I intend to do, for which the ground work is two-thirds complete." Thorne stepped aside and bowed. "I mustn't detain you longer, Thunstone. Good-night. Sleep well. Maybe I'll send you a dream."

Thunstone left the Club Samedi, but he did not sleep. He visited three

people, all of them among his friends and all of them owing him favors.

First of these was a high official of the New York police. The man argued vehemently but futilely against what Thunstone demanded, and finally agreed. "I don't know what the charge can be," he mourned lamely.

"Find one, and thanks."

Thunstone's next stop was in Harlem. He entered the modest but comfortable home of a smiling brown man who wore the round collar and high waistcoat of a preacher, and who shook Thunstone's hand warmly. They talked for a while, and the brown man's smile vanished. He took books from a shelf. The first of these was gaily striped in red and blue.

"*Tell My Horse*, by Zora Neale Hurston," said the brown man. "She's a Barnard graduate, a Guggenheim fellow, an anthropologist, and an open-minded truth seeker. She traveled a year in the West Indies, and wrote this book. Lippincott published it in 1938." His sepia-tinted finger found a place for Thunstone. "Read right there."

Thunstone noted the page number, 171. He began to read aloud: "...for Legba is never honored alone. He opens the gate so that the other gods come to their worshipers."

"Exactly," nodded the brown man, and leafed backward in the book. "Now. Read again."

Thunstone did so: "The way to all things is his hands. Therefore he is the first god in all Haiti in point of service." The book fell shut, and the two men looked at each other above it.

"I'm thinking of an old legend, almost an outworn one," said Thunstone. "It's about a sorcerer's apprentice, who raised devils without thinking of the consequences. What's that next book?"

"It's by Montague Summers, the greatest authority on witchcraft." Brown hands opened it. "Here's the reference. He says that those who attend the ceremonies of evil without protesting or trying to stop them become, by acquiescence, participants in the cult. That would hardly include you — you attend to learn how to fight such things. The others, whether deliberately sympathetic or just unknowing, become cult-members."

"I hope not all," said Thunstone, thinking of fair hair and sapphire eyes. "And the third book there?"

"It's by Joseph J. Williams. Like Summers, he's a priest, a Jesuit. As a resident of Jamaica, he studied and wrote of voodoo and obeah. He mentions the missionary-effort of the cult to spread, and how the worshipers hope to transplant their evil spirits to other lands."

Thunstone frowned in thought. After a moment he said: "Legba, then, is to be invoked in conjunction with a prayer to some other spirit. But here he's invoked alone. Twice.

"A third time in succession — that's pretty familiar magical routine. He may give attention, and do something else beside open gates."

"Exactly." The dark man's head nodded slowly. "And, in a new place, a new power to profit — evil profit — will be placed in the hands of certain cult-founders. Your acquaintance, Rowley Thorne, won't have overlooked the chance. It is best that the ritual be somehow prevented this coming midnight."

"I think I've attended to that," said Thunstone. "And I half guessed these other matters. But I'm grateful for your agreement. I take your word on voodoo-fighting as better than any other man's. Well, I shan't keep you up any later."

"Heaven protect you," said the brown man in farewell.

Thunstone grinned. "Heaven's supposed to protect all fools."

"Yes, and all fighters for the right. Good-by."

His third call was to a small shop in a big building in mid-town. It was open, and a single person, a little grizzled old fellow, in charge. He greeted Thunstone warmly.

"I want," said Thunstone, "protection."

"For yourself?"

"Not for myself. A woman."

"Come into the back room." Thunstone followed the proprietor into a musty workshop. From a table the little man took a black velvet case and opened it.

"Silver," he pronounced. "Sovereign defense against evil."

"And set with sapphires," added Thunstone. "So much the better for my purpose."

"Observe, Mr. Thunstone, the pattern of the brooch. An interweaving of crosses. That flower, too —"

"A blossom of St. John's wort," said Thunstone. He peered at the brooch. "How old is it?"

The grizzled head shook. "Who can say? Yet the man I got it from says that it's a good thousand years old, and that it was designed and made by St. Dunstan." Shrewd old eyes twinkled at Thunstone. "Dunstan sounds like Thunstone, eh? He was like you, he was. A gentleman born and bred, who studied black magic — and caught Satan's nose in a pair of red-hot pin-cers!"

"How much?" asked Thunstone.

"To you, nothing. Not a cent. No, sir, don't argue. I owe you my life and more. Where shall I send it?"

"I'll give you the address, and a message."

Thunstone took out one of his cards, and wrote on the back:

Sharon —

I know you love sapphires. Won't you wear this for me, and take lunch with me today?

John.

"It'll reach her early in the morning," promised the jeweler. Thunstone thanked him and departed.

The dark hours, ascribed by Rowley Thorne to supernatural agencies, had gone, and the sun was three-quarters up when Thunstone sought his bed.

Sharon, Countess Montesecco, was charming in tailored blue as she met Thunstone in the lobby of the restaurant. Her one piece of jewelry was the sapphire and silver brooch.

"Why so glum, John?" she asked as they sought their table. "Cross? Because I gave a date to Rowley?"

"First names with you, too," he murmured. "No, Sharon, not cross. I haven't a right to be, have I?"

"Rowley said that you and he quarreled about me last night."

"We discussed you," admitted Thunstone. "But if we had quarreled, seriously, one or the other of us would not be on view today."

They paused as a waiter drifted up to take their order. Over the cocktail, Sharon said, "You won't object, then, if Rowley takes me to the Club Samedi again tonight."

Thunstone scowled a little. "Club Samedi? But it's been closed. Some little technicality about the precautions against fire. I saw a couple of lines in the morning paper."

"I know about that, but it'll open in a few days. Meanwhile, there'll be a late rehearsal of the entertainers tonight. No guests, but —"

"If no guests, how are you and Thorne going to be present?"

She smiled a little. "You are interested, after all, even interested enough to interrupt me. It happens that Rowley has bought an interest in the Club Samedi. He'll be present, and he said he'd call for me at 11 o'clock." She paused, and looked at him shyly. "If you would care to see me earlier in the evening.."

He shook his head. "I'd care to, but I can't. I have something that, as Jules de Grandin would put it, demands to be done. Sharon, do you know where Rowley Thorne lives?"

"Not exactly. I think somewhere near Gramercy Park — yes, on East Nineteenth Street. Why, John?"

He did not answer that, but gazed at the brooch she wore. He put forth a finger and touched it lightly. "Now, I'll ask a favor. I don't do that often, do I? Sharon, wear this tonight."

"Oh, I meant to. I love it, John. It's a beautiful old thing."

The food arrived, and Thunstone had not told her why he wanted Thorne's address. But, after they parted, he again called on the police official who had, at his request, closed the Club Samedi. He asked several

questions, and waited while his friend made telephone calls and checked many papers. Finally the policeman gave him an address on Nineteenth Street. "Don't know what floor, John," said the policeman. "We'll know tomorrow, if —"

"Tomorrow may be too late," Thunstone told him. "Now, one last favor. If I get arrested for house-breaking, will you do what you can to get me a light sentence?"

The particular block on East Nineteenth Street was a shabby, quiet one. It was past ten o'clock when Rowley Thorne emerged from a building with a yellow-brick front. He was dressed magnificently in evening clothes, with a cape falling from his thick shoulders in dignified folds. He got into a waiting taxi, which rolled to the corner, then uptown. After it had gone, John Thunstone emerged from behind a basement stairway railing opposite and entered the door of the building.

On the right wall of the vestibule were five mail slots, each topped with a name and a bell button. Thunstone studied the names.

None of them remotely resembled Rowley Thorne's name. On Thunstone's brow appeared the creasy frown that showed his descent into deep thought. Then he approached his forefinger to the button at the rear of the row, beside a lettered label reading *BOGAN, 5*. At the last moment he did not touch that button, but the one above the next slot, which was marked *LEONARD, 4*.

A moment of silence, then the lock of the door emitted a muffled buzzing. Thunstone turned the knob and entered. A narrow hallway revealed itself, with a staircase mounting upward. Thunstone started to climb, swiftly and softly for all his size.

He came to the top of two flights of stairs without adventure. At the top of the third waited a stocky man in a sleeveless undershirt. "Yeah?" he prompted.

"Mr. Bogan?" asked Thunstone.

"Nah, my name's Leonard," The man jerked a thumb upward. "Bogan's on the top floor. "

"I see. Thanks." Thunstone's eye caught a gleam at the center of Leonard's throat — a cheap, gold-plated crucifix. "Sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Leonard."

"That's all right." The man shuffled back into his apartment. Thunstone mentally crossed him off of a possible investigation list; no partner of Rowley Thorne would wear a crucifix.

He went up the last flight of stairs. Halfway to the top he heard voices, a man's and a woman's, in furious argument.

"I'm fed up," the man was saying vehemently. "I'm tired of all this constant pretending. We're through."

"That suits me fine, and double," rejoined the woman. "Okay, get out."

"Get out?" the man echoed scornfully. "Me get out? Listen, I pay the rent of this place. You're the one that's getting out."

"I'm doing nothing of the sort! It's my furniture, isn't it? Didn't my own mother give it to us? Well, I'm not walking away and leaving you in possession of my furniture —"

Thunstone permitted himself to smile. Plainly there would be no room for Rowley Thorne's career of strange study and experiment in such an atmosphere as that...

He descended to the third floor. He knocked at the door. There was no answer. After listening a moment, he produced a great bundle of keys. The third of them unlocked the door, and he entered. Enough light came through the windows for him to see the interior, comfortable though dingy. There were five rooms, and in one of these was a bed, on which lay the drunkest man Thunstone had met in many months. Thunstone's search was for writings and books. There were no writings, and only two books. Thunstone carried them to the window. One was a cheap, worn copy of "Gone with the Wind," the other a New Testament. Thunstone left the apartment without hesitation.

The apartment on the second floor was occupied by three working girls. Thunstone introduced himself as a field man for a national poll, and asked questions that brought forth the readiest of answers. Within half a dozen exchanges he absolved this apartment too of any Rowley Thorne influence, but it was with difficulty he made his exit; the girls were expecting company, and wanted to exhibit their poll-making visitor.

Finally he tapped at the door on the first floor. A pudgy middle-aged woman answered the knock. "Is this the superintendent's apartment?" asked Thunstone.

She shook her head. "No. He's in the basement. That is, he was. I think he went out just now, all dressed up for lodge or something."

"I'll talk to his wife," said Thunstone.

"Ain't got a wife. Just him."

"What kind of superintendent is he?"

"All right. Kind of close-mouthed and cross. But I'd rather have them that way than too talky. Why?"

"I'm thinking of moving in here," Thunstone told her.

"You can't. House is full up."

Thunstone thanked her, and turned as if to leave. When her door closed, he tiptoed down the basement stairs.

But the door was fitted with a patent lock. His keys would not open it. Thunstone drew out a pocket knife and whittled knowingly at a panel. He made a hole big enough to admit one hand, and unfastened the door from within. Then he moved stealthily inside, past a furnace and coal bin, to an

inner door.

This, too, had a strong and complicated lock, but its hinges were on the outside. Thunstone managed to grub out the pins and lifted the door bodily out. He walked into the silent room beyond.

It was dimly lighted, by a little lamp on a shelf. Thunstone walked to it. There sat a small stone image of extreme ugliness. Thunstone sniffed at the lamp. "Ghee," he muttered under his breath. "Indian god — Indian worship." On the same shelf were several books, two of them in languages that Thunstone could not read. The others were on occult subjects, and all except one had been proscribed, banned and outlawed by various governments.

Thunstone moved into the other room of the caretaker's apartment. Another shelf held more idols, of various makes. Before one burned a long stick of incense. A second was of wood. The caretaker apparently observed several worships, each with its proper and esoteric ritual. On the table were several papers.

The first was a carbon copy of an agreement, whereby Rowley Thorne agreed to pay within thirty days the sum of ten thousand dollars for a half interest in the fixtures and profits of the Club Samedi. The second was a penciled scrawl, by someone of limited education but undeniable shrewdness, reporting on the financial affairs of Sharon, Countess Montesecco. The third was in ink, on scented stationery, the writing of an educated woman:

Thursday.

Like you, I feel that too many worshipers spoil a worship. If you find what you seek, then you will be master of a faith never before followed, and I shall be content, as always, to be your servant. When you have miracles to show, others will bring service and wealth. If this is what you have always wanted, I will be glad, so glad. Even if it must be gained by your gallantry to that blonde fool, I will be glad.

Thunstone did not know the name signed to this letter, but it completed his search for knowledge. He glanced at his wrist watch — the illuminated dial showed that it was 11:30. Quickly he unfastened the front door of the apartment, hurried up the outer steps, and on to the corner, where he waved wildly for a taxi.

"Club Samedi," he bade the driver.

"The Samedi's closed down," the driver began to say.

"Club Samedi," repeated Thunstone, "and drive like the devil."

He reached the rear of the club by entering a restaurant, bribing a waiter, and walking out through the kitchen. Across a courtyard was the dingy back door. He tried the door stealthily. It was locked, and he did not

attempt to pick the lock. Instead he turned to where several garbage cans were lined against the wall. One of these he set on the other, climbed gingerly upon them, and with a sudden leap was able to clutch the guttered edge of the roof.

For a moment he clung, then, swaying powerfully sidewise and at the same time flexing the muscles of his big arms, he drew himself up, hooked a heel into the gutter. He dragged his body up on the flat roof and stole across it to a skylight.

Cautiously he peered in and down. The room below was dark, but he caught a gleam from pots and pans on a rack — this would be the kitchen. He pushed himself through feet first, lowered himself to the full length of his arms, and dropped.

Noise he must have made, but nobody challenged him. He dared to strike a match. On an oven-top he saw a cardboard box, marked SALT. He eagerly clutched it.

"Lafcadio Hearn commented on it," he said under his breath. "So did W. B. Seabrook. I'm set."

He tiptoed toward the service door to the club auditorium. As he reached it, he heard the voice of the master of ceremonies:

"Midnight. The witching hour. And Illyria!"

The voodoo music began, clarinet and tom-tom, and masked the slight noise of Thunstone's entrance.

From the kitchen threshold he could see Illyria's dance begin in the brown glow of the spotlight. To one side stood Rowley Thorne, extra big in the gloom, his hands quelling the struggles of the sacrificial rooster. Plainly he would substitute for the regular assistant. The only spectator was Sharon, sitting beyond the spotlight at a ringside table. This much Thunstone saw at his first glance. His second marked the other presence in the darkened club.

There was a swaying above Illyria, a swaying in time to music. A great fronded shadow drooped lower and lower, as if a heavy weight forced it down. The jungle foliage that Thunstone had seen before had returned to being inside the ceiling, and the shaggy bulk was upon it, edging stealthily close to Illyria.

*"Legba choi-yan, choi-yan Zandor —
Zandor Legba, immole'bai!"*

And, *"Ibro mahnda!"* chanted the drummer and Thorne, doing duty for the absent quartet.

"Ibro mahnda... Ibro mahnda!"

The climax of the dance was approaching. Faster and faster went the music, then died suddenly as Illyria struck her pose, head back and arms

out. Rowley Thorne stole forward, holding the rooster at arm's length. And yet another pair of arms were reaching, enormous arms from above, like the distorted shadows of arms on a lighted screen, but arms which ended in clumsy claws and not hands, arms tufted and matted in hair..

Thunstone darted forward. Under one arm he held the salt-box. His other hand caught Thorne's wrist, wrung it like a dishcloth. Thorne gasped in startled pain, and the rooster sprang free, running crookedly across the floor.

A great streak of gloomy shadow pursued it, something like claws made a grab at it, and missed. Thorne suddenly began to rave:

"Legba, Legba! I wasn't at fault — a stranger — down on your knees, all of you! Death is in this room! Death to your bodies, and your souls, too!"

His voice had the power to command. All of them floundered to their knees, all save Thunstone and the shaggy bulk that was sliding down through the shadows of foliage....

Thunstone tore open the salt package. One hand clutched as much salt as it could hold. The other threw the box, and it struck something that, however ill-defined in the brown light, certainly had solidity. The missile burst like a shell, scattering its contents everywhere.

Thunstone will remember to his death the prolonged wave of high sharp sound that might have been scream or roar, and might even have had words mixed into it — words of whatever unidentified tongue formed the voodoo rituals. A grip fastened upon him, a great embracing pressure that might have been talon-like hands or coils like a huge serpent. He felt his ribs buckle and creak, but he put out his handful of salt, swiftly but coolly and orderly, and thrust it well at the point where a face should be.

The surface on which he spread the salt opposed his hand for but a moment. Then it was gone, and so was the grip on his body. He fell hard and sprawling, but was up again in an instant. Overhead there were no branches. There was nothing. But just at Thunstone's feet lay Illyria. The light was enough to show him that, at some point in the proceedings, her neck had been broken, like the neck of a speckled fowl sacrificed to Legba.

He went to a wall, found a switch, and flicked it. The room filled with light. "Get up, everybody," he ordered, and they did so. Only Illyria lay where she had fallen.

He walked back among them. "Salt did it. Salt will always drive away the most evil of spirits. It was something that Mr. Thorne had not planned for, that I'd attend his rehearsal, too."

"You've caused the death of Illyria," accused Thorne. His face looked pallid and old, and his gray eyes roved sickly in it.

"No. You doomed her when you first took an interest in this matter of invoking Legba. It's possible that her unthinking invocation would have

resulted in unpleasantness, but no more. Your knowledge and deliberate espousal of the activity made the coming of Legba dangerous.

"He'd have come at the third time, if I weren't here to prevent him. He would have come with other powers than the mere opening of gates, for you prayed to no other voodoo deity. A cult could have been founded here, and not even heaven knows how it may have developed."

Thunstone looked around at the shivering listeners. "You others are lucky. Thorne intended to bind you all to Legba, by the sheer fact of your witnessing the cult's beginning. He's the sort who could do it. You'd have been made to help him establish Legba-worship with this club as a headquarters, and with money he intended to get from —"

He felt the wide gaze of Sharon, and said no more, but walked to her.

At her side, he turned on Thorne once again.

"Whatever money you get, you must get elsewhere now. I don't think that Sharon will listen to you further. I'll be amused to know how you are going to meet a debt of ten thousand dollars, when you have been living on sheer wit, bluff and evil. But whatever you do, Thorne, do as honestly as possible. I intend to keep watch upon you."

Sharon caught Thunstone's arm with one hand. The other clung to the brooch on her bosom. "I don't exactly understand..." she breathed.

"Of course not. You weren't supposed to. It will take time to make itself clear. But meanwhile we'll go. Thorne will have his hands full and his mind full, inventing a plausible explanation for the death of the club's star dancer." Nobody moved as Thunstone conducted Sharon to the street.

"John," she said, "I only half-saw that something was coming into view. What? And from where?"

"It came through the gate beyond which such things have life and power. And you may call it Legba, if you want to remember it by name."

"I don't," and she put her hands to her face.

"Then I seem to have made a point. Evil magic isn't to be poked into, is it? Not unless you're able to take both precautions and risks. Shall I see you home, Sharon?"

"Please. And stay there and talk to me until the sun rises again."

"Until the sun rises again," repeated John Thunstone.



The Golden Goblins

LONG SPEAR'S TAILORING WAS, if anything, superior to John Thunstone's, and his necktie more carefully knotted. His blue-black hair, if a trifle longer than currently fashionable, lay smooth and glossy to his skull, swept back from a broad brow the color of a well-kept old saddle. His eyes gleamed like wet licorice, and when he slightly smiled his teeth made a pure white slash in his rectangular face. Long Spear had been an honor man at some Southern university, member of a good fraternity and captain of a successful basketball team. But, as he sat in Thunstone's drawing room, he cuddled most prayerfully an object that looked to have come straight out of the Stone Age.

Thunstone, big and reposeful and hospitable, lolled in an easy chair opposite. He puffed at the pipeful of fragrant tobacco Long Spear had given him — tobacco mixed, Indian fashion, with kinickinick and red willow bark — and eyed the thing that Long Spear had brought into the room. It was shaped like a smallish, compact bolster, snugly wrapped in some kind of ancient rawhide, on which dark hair still remained. Tight-shrunk leather thongs held that wrapping in place. In Long Spear's hands it seemed to have some solidity and weight.

"I want you to keep it for me, my friend," said Long Spear. "Your trail to Those Above is different from the Indian's; but you know and respect the faith of my people."

"I respect all true worships," nodded Thunstone. "Yet I know very little of what your tribe believes. If you care to tell me, I would care to hear."

"We Tsuchah were living on the Western Plains when the first Spaniards came under Coronado," Long Spear told him, and his voice shifted to a proud, deep register. "Before that, we had lived — who knows where? The name of the land cannot be traced today, and perhaps it is legendary. But the old men say that we came from there to the plains country. When the Tsuchah made ready to migrate, their guardians — Those Above — de-

scended from the Shining Lodge and walked like men to advise and help them. To each warrior who headed a family was given a sacred bundle, to keep in his home and to pass on in reverence to his oldest son. This," and he lifted the rawhide bolster, "is one such, given to the man who fathered my clan of the Tsichah. I, as hereditary chief, have charge of it. When I came East, for the purpose of conferring with the government, I felt I must bring it along."

"For worship, or for safe keeping?" asked Thunstone.

"For both." Long Spear spoke almost defiantly. "I have learned white men's ways, learned them so well that I think I shall defeat the warped arguments that now threaten us. But I hold to my father's belief, as a true son should. Do you object?"

"Not in the least, because you don't object to mine." Thunstone leaned forward. "Will you permit me to touch the bundle?"

Long Spear passed it to him, as gently as though it were an infant prince asleep. As Thunstone had judged, it was compact and quite weighty. He examined the rawhide with a soft pressure of his long, strong forefinger. His eyes were studious on either side of his big dented nose.

"Buffalo hide, I judge. But is it as old as you seem to think?"

Long Spear smiled, quite beautifully. "Not the hide. That was put on by my grandfather when he was no older than I, say sixty years ago. When the outer covering of the bundle becomes worn or damaged, we wrap it in fresh hide. It is not permitted to open the bundle. That is, as the Tsichah say, bad medicine."

"Of such bundles I've heard," nodded Thunstone. "Yet I've never seen one, even in the museums."

"You won't find the Ark of the Covenant in a museum, either," reminded Long Spear. "A Tsichah would as soon sell the bones of his father. And don't ask me what's at the center of the bundle. I do not know, and I do not think any other living man knows. I do not think that anyone had better find out."

Thunstone handed the bundle back. "Well, you want me to keep it for you. But why? What makes you hesitate to keep it yourself?"

"Someone's after it," said Long Spear, in a voice that suddenly grew taut and deadly. "Someone who calls himself a reformer, who protests against the old Tsichah worship. He knows it makes our tribe solid on its reservation. And he wants to disrupt, so as to rob the Tsichah as other tribes have been robbed."

Thunstone lighted his pipe again. "Let me guess, Long Spear. Might the name be Rowley Thorne?"

The blue-black head shook. "No. I've heard a little of him, he causes trouble and evil for trouble and evil's sakes. You've met him and defeated him, haven't you? ...Rowley Thorne is washing dishes in a restaurant where

I would not care to eat. This is someone else."

"I've heard of Roy Bulger."

Again a head-shake. "No. The Reverend Mr. Bulger opposes our worship, calling it heathen — but he's an honest, narrow missionary. He isn't in it for profit."

"You Indians like to put riddles, don't you? The man must be Barton Siddons."

"Yes." Long Spear's brown fist clenched on top of his bundle. "He's interested several Congressmen who know nothing about Indians. Convinces them that we're banded together in ancient warrior belief, and may cause trouble, even an uprising. Wants restrictions placed on our worship. Well," and the other fist clenched, "I'm here in the East to argue with certain Congressmen myself. If they don't listen, I'll talk to the President. And I can finish up with the Supreme Court. There's such a thing as freedom of worship."

"And I'm to protect your sacred bundle from Siddons?"

"If you will. He told me that he'd destroy it, as a symbol of wickedness. Nice aping of the fanatic reformer style — but what he really wants to do is shame me before my people. I wouldn't dare go back to them without the bundle, even if I gained a victory in the dispute. You understand?"

"Perfectly," said Thunstone.

He rose, towering mightily, and crossed the room to where hung a painting of autumn trees. He pushed it aside and revealed a wall safe, which he opened. "Will it go in here?"

Long Spear brought it, and it went in easily. Thunstone closed his safe and spun the dial.

"Now, my friend, they say that no Indian will refuse a drink. How about one here, and some lunch in the grill downstairs?"

Those who understand John Thunstone, and they are not many, say that he has two passions — defeat of ill-magic, and service of the lovely Sharon, Countess Montesecco. This does not mean that he is otherwise cold or distant. His friends include all sorts of persons, not all of them canny, but all of them profitable. He likes to set himself apart from others who study occultism in that he does not believe himself to be psychic. If he were asked the wish of his heart, he might say that it was the return of honesty and good manners.

He and Long Spear had a good lunch, for they both liked excellent food and plenty of it. At the end of it, Long Spear excused himself, promising to come later in the evening. Thunstone remained alone at the table, sipping a green liqueur and thinking about whatever Thunstone is apt to think about. His reverie was broken by a voice beside him.

"Pardon me, but aren't you John Thunstone? The author of those articles in the *Literary Review* about modern witch beliefs. I read them — enjoyed them a lot. Mind if I sit down? Siddons is my name."

The speaker was narrow-bodied, tall, with hair growing to a point on his forehead and a cleft dimple in his chin. He might be distinguished-looking except for too shifty, greedy eyes. He dropped into the chair that Long Spear had vacated.

"Mr. Thunstone, to judge by your writings and your looks, you're a civilized gentleman with a sense of spiritual rights and wrongs."

"Thanks," nodded Thunstone.

"Do you know that Indian you were eating with?"

"I seldom eat with people I don't know, Mr. Siddons."

"I mean, do you know his character? Mr. Thunstone, I'll be blunt. He's a dangerous barbarian."

Thunstone sipped. "Barbarian is a hard word for Long Spear. He's well educated, and has profited by it. Do I understand that you and he are enemies?"

Siddons nodded emphatically. "We are, I'm proud to say. I know these aboriginal intellectuals, Mr. Thunstone. Yapping for special rights and prerogatives, on the grounds of being here first. And planning, sir, to bite the hand that feeds them — bite it clear off, if they get teeth enough!"

And Siddons showed his own teeth.

Thunstone made his voice lazy as he said, "I never saw Long Spear bite anything savagely, except perhaps a filet mignon. Suppose, Mr. Siddons, you tell me what fault you find with him, and why you seek to impress me with it."

"Fault? Plenty of that. The man's a heathen. His tribe — the Tsichah — believes in human sacrifice." Again Siddons grimaced furiously. "A captive girl, consecrated to whatever devil they worship, shot to death with arrows and chopped to bits —"

"The Tsichah haven't done that for a century or so," reminded Thunstone smoothly. "It's an interesting study, that sacrifice rite. Done for crop fertility, and suggests some relationship to the Aztecs. The Tsichah were considerably cultured for plains Indians — lived in earth houses instead of teepees, grew maize and beans and potatoes, were well advanced in painting and carving, and had a hereditary aristocracy."

"That's what I'm getting at," rejoined Siddons warmly. "Heredity aristocracy. Because a copper-colored tramp is born of the old chieftain stock, he swanks around like a grand duke. Not American."

"Not American?" repeated Thunstone. "The Tsichah were here well before us. And it's American to let them keep to their own ways."

"Not the ways of the Tsichah. Not when they're dangerous. Sir, I've been there to their reservation. They stick together like a secret society,

with their scowling brown faces and maybe knives and pistols under their shirts. It's their clinging to old customs and worships, and obedience to their hereditary chiefs, that makes them a menace. I'm one who wants to stop them."

Thunstone considered. "It seems," he said slowly, "that twice before white men tampered with the Indian religions. There were uprisings each time, brutal and bloody — the Smohalla Rebellion in the 'eighties, and the Ghost Dance War was in 1891. If the Tsichah worship is tampered with... but why should it be?"

"A religion that advocates human sacrifice?"

"I know that it hasn't been practiced for years. The Tsichah worship the Shining Lodge and Those Above, quietly and sincerely. And they credit their gods with being kind — giving them, for instance, mineral wealth, mines of cinnabar and some oil property."

Siddons started violently, and licked his lips. "Well, it's still heathen and barbaric, and as a non-white organization it's dangerous. Now to answer the second part of your question. Why should I tell you these things, you ask. It ties up to your friend, Long Spear."

"A civilized American citizen," said Thunstone.

"Suppose," said Siddons craftily, "I was to prove that he wasn't?"

Thunstone's black brows lifted, and he said nothing.

"Suppose I should tell you," went on Siddons, "that he carries a savage talisman with him, and places his faith and sense of power in it? An ancient fetish —"

"A sacred bundle of the Tsichah religion?" suggested Thunstone.

"Exactly. You know about sacred bundles?"

"A little. Go on with what you say."

"Well, Long Spear has one. His whole narrow Indian mind is obsessed with how holy and mighty that thing is. I mentioned the possibility of destroying it, and he said quite frankly that he'd kill me for that."

Again Thunstone said nothing. His eyebrows came down again, his eyes narrowed a trifle.

"You, Mr. Thunstone, have a reputation for crushing evil beliefs. And I have in mind that you might be persuaded to help —"

"I know that Long Spear has the bundle. I've seen it."

Siddons leaned forward excitedly. "Do you know where it is?"

"I do," said Thunstone, still smoothly. "It's in a safe place of my lending, and it will stay there. Mr. Siddons, you'd better leave it alone, or I feel sure that Long Spear's prophecy of death will come true."

Thunstone got up. He was always immense when he did that.

"I'd heard about your real purpose in wanting to disorganize the Tsichah. I made sure by mentioning their mineral wealth, and saw you start. You want to get your hands on it, don't you, Siddons? Well, I'm not going to

help you. I'll help Long Spear, because he's a sound, honorable pagan gentleman, and a credit to any race. Good day."

Siddons rose in turn. His face twisted, his eyes rolled a little.

"I might have known. You hocus-pocus birds are all alike, crackpots. But don't try to buck me, Thunstone. I might cut you down to a dwarf."

He strutted out, like a rooster whose dignity has been offended. Thunstone sat back in his chair.

"Waiter," he said, "another liqueur."

Later in the afternoon Thunstone was alone in his drawing room. On impulse he took the sacred bundle from his safe, and sat in the armchair with it on his lap. Long he studied it, and with true reverent attention.

He tapped the outer envelop of rawhide. Under it was what? Another layer. Under that, another. Another beneath the third — and so on for many layers, each representing a generation or more of time. Finally, if one flouted ritual and peeled them all away, would come into view the original sacred bundle, the gift that Long Spear said had come from Those Above. And inside that — what? Nobody knew. The gods had not told her children, the ancestral Tsichah. And no man had looked.

Thunstone took it in his arms, carefully. He had seen Long Spear do that. His constant yearning for knowledge of the unseen and unknown was strong in him; but evidently not strong enough. He was not psychic, he thought once again. His was not the gift of priesthood or prophecy. He had a sense of solemnity, no more.

Long Spear came in. "I had lunch with you," he greeted. "How about dinner with me... I see you're looking at the bundle."

"I didn't think you'd mind, Long Spear."

"I don't. I trust you full with it. What do you think of it?"

Thunstone shook his head. "I was trying to find what to think, by holding it. It should do something to me, but it doesn't."

"Because you're not a priest, a medicine man. But I am. That's hereditary among the Tsichah, too, the chief is also the prophet. Shall I try for you?"

"Why not?" said Thunstone, holding out the bundle, but Long Spear did not take it at once. Instead he produced from his pocket a pipe, not his usual briar, but a stubby one with a bowl of black stone, old and polished as jet. This he filled most carefully. Facing around so that he looked toward the east, he lighted it. Then, without inhaling, he faced north, and emitted a puff of smoke. Continuing his facing, he puffed on — to west, to south, to east. Finally he observed the "two directions," with final puffs up at the ceiling and down at the floor.

"Give me the bundle now," he said deeply, "and take the pipe. Keep it lighted and smoking. You must sit there, and be the council."

Pipe and bundle changed hands. Thunstone drew a lungful of the fragrant mixed vapors and breathed it out. Through the veil of blue fog he saw Long Spear lay the bundle in the hollow of his left arm, almost like a lyre. His right hand, with fingers slightly bent, rested upon it. The heel of the right hand became a fulcrum and the fingers moved slowly and rhythmically. The old dry hide gave forth a scratching tempo, like that evoked by Latin-American musicians from gourds. Long Spear began to chant, monotonously and softly:

*"Ahkidah, ai-ee, ai-ee!
Ahkidah, ai-ee!"*

Over and over he chanted the little hymn in his own tongue, and then began slowly to turn. His feet moved and took new positions softly as though he wore moccasins. His brown face turned upward, his eyes sought the ceiling as though they could pierce it to the sky above.

"Ahkidah, ai-ee!"

Now it seemed to Thunstone that the smoke began to drift and eddy, though there was no draft in the room. A little wreath swirled momentarily around Long Spear's head, something like a halo. And a hint of other voices, softer than echoes, softer even than the memory of voices long dead, became suggestible, as if they joined in the chant of the Tsichah chief. Raptly Long Spear sang, and prayerfully. More smoke drifted from the pipe in Thunstone's mouth, but the room contained some sort of radiance... as if a hand held a lamp on them, not at doors or windows but at some opening from another place, not easily discernible...

Long Spear sat down, and laid the bundle on his knees.

"Put out the pipe," he said. "You've just heard a real prayer-song. We have other stuff, more showmanlike, for tourists and scholars. Not everybody — indeed, hardly anybody — is of the right mind or mood to join with us in our worship. I trust you with that, too."

"I'm flattered, and I did get something, Long Spear. I felt that your prayer, whatever it was, got an answer."

"All my prayers are answered. All of them. I don't mean that all are granted, but I know that they are heard, and that judgment is made on them. Just now I prayed to know what would happen to me, as a man of my people striving for their freedom and good. What I got was a warning of danger — no more."

He was silent, and carefully touched the bundle and its lashings.

"The buffalo hide is old, it may crack soon. I know where a new piece of tanned buckskin may be got, and sinew to sew it on securely. Keep it for me again, will you? I'll bring back the new covering, and make all snug. Then we'll have dinner, eh?"

"Of course."

Long Spear laid the bundle carefully on a center table of rubbed mahogany. Thunstone saw him to the door, and returned to the table for the bundle. He carried it to his safe, put out his hand to open the door.

At that moment something struck him slashingly on the head behind the ear, struck him with such savage force that not even his big body could stand up under the blow. Down he went on his knees, with darkness rushing over him like water. He could not see, and his ears rang. Somebody was trying to tug the bundle out of his hands.

Thunstone fought to keep it, and another blow drove what was left of his wits clear out of him.

He wakened to find himself in an armchair of wood, where he seldom sat. His ears still hummed, and his first opening of eyes filled his brain with glaring lights. He tried to get up, and felt himself held back by cutting pressure at wrists and ankles and across the chest. Shaking his big head to clear it, he looked down, and saw that lengths of insulated electric wire bound his arms to the arms of the chair, his feet to the front legs. More strands encircled his body, and one loop passed under his chin. His head ached furiously.

"You're all right, Mr. Thunstone?"

He knew that voice. It was Barton Siddons'. The gaunt man bent down anxiously, looking at him.

"Get me out of this," said Thunstone.

"Why should I," asked Siddons airily, "when I took such trouble to drag you to that chair and tie you?"

Thunstone said nothing else, but stared at his captor.

"I've been in this room for more than an hour," went on Siddons. "Hiding behind those hangings. I hoped for a chance to get the bundle — twice as much after Long Spear gave that heathen exhibition." He glanced toward the center table, where the bundle was lying. "I've been waiting for you to wake up."

"Why?" demanded Thunstone. He wondered how strong his bonds were, but made no exhibition of tugging and struggling.

"Because you shall witness its destruction." Siddons licked his lips. "I intend to discredit Long Spear with his people — and you with Long Spear. He entrusted his treasure to you. You weren't able to keep it safe for him."

Thunstone again kept silent, and stared. His eyes made Siddons uncomfortable.

"From your own lips I heard words of respect for that savage Tsichah belief, Mr. Thunstone. I don't despair of showing you its fallacy. Watch."

Siddons went to the table. Something gleamed in his hand. A knife — he slit one of the binding thongs, another and another. He pulled the

ancient buffalo-hide wrapping open. It came away stiffly, with a dry rattle.

"Another layer," observed Siddons, grinning briefly at Thunstone. "Whatever is inside, those Tsichah believed in keeping it well muffled." Another stiff layer of rawhide was pulled away. It adhered, and needed force to detach it. "Now for the third — hello, what's this, tucked in between wrappings?"

He picked it up, a dangling pale tassel.

"Human scalp," he diagnosed. "White man's hair, quite fair. Wrapped in there to signalize a victory, perhaps. But there weren't enough victories. The white man won in the end."

Siddons slit away another hide wrapping. Another. The next broke at his touch, into irregular flakes like old paper.

"Old and rotten," pronounced Siddons. "Now the fifth layer — it must be two hundred years old. And here's something that isn't rawhide."

From the last swaddling he lifted a strange thing like a rectangular brick, as large as a commercial cement block.

"It was cushioned inside the rawhide by something — perhaps leaves or grass or herbs, all rotted to powder," explained Siddons, as though lecturing amiably to a class. "Look, it's hollow. Got a little slab of baked clay for a lid — comes off easily. Inside, another smaller hollow brick. You may be right, Mr. Thunstone. The Tsichah must have had an ancient history of something close to civilization to do this sort of brickwork. Inside the second, a third — each nested in old leafy dust. And here — we must be at the heart of the thing."

He held up a vase of pottery, so old that the red of the clay was darkened to a mahogany brown. It was no larger than a man's fist, and shaped like an egg with a flattened end to stand on. Siddons poked and twisted.

"Look, the top comes off — unscrews! Who'd have thought that Indians understood the screw principle and would apply it to pottery? I'm leaving these things and you, Mr. Thunstone, for Long Spear to find."

His grin grew wider. "Why don't you take notes, Mr. Thunstone? You're sitting in on a notable event, the opening of an inviolable sacred bundle of a heathen people. And the notes might be important — Long Spear may be so disappointed in you that he'd destroy you before you had a chance to tell verbally what you saw."

"If Long Spear destroys anyone, it will be you," predicted Thunstone.

"Oh, he'll try — and I'll be prepared, and forestall him, and land him in jail. That's where he belongs, and all who head that Tsichah brotherhood. But let's have a final look."

He unscrewed the top of the vase, peeped in with eyes that squinted, then widened.

"Hello! Take a look at that!"

He thrust the open vessel under Thunstone's nose.

Light struck into the dark interior of the vase, and evoked a yellow gleam. Thunstone had a brief impression of eyes, or something like eyes. Then Siddons was fumbling in the vase with his fingers. He took something out and held it up.

"Tin soldier, eh? But it's not tin — it's gold!"

The little figure was no longer than Siddons' thumb. Its yellow body was lizard-gaunt, and set upon brief, bandy legs with great flat feet. It had arms, too, that held a wire-like spear shaft at an angle across the chest. And the head, crowned with golden plumes, was tilted back and the face turned upward. That face was human only as a grotesque Hallowe'en mask is human — with a blob of nose, a gaping mouth from which a tiny tongue lolled, no forehead and no chin. The eyes were tiny blue stones, probably turquoise.

Siddons weighed the thing in his palm, turned it over and over.

"Gold," he repeated. "A little golden goblin. The Indians weren't metallurgist enough to make brass or anything like it. This is probably virgin, and worth plenty as a nugget — worth more as an archaeological find."

He set it upright on the table, pushing back the heap of rifled hide wrappings. It balanced solidly on those wide flat feet. Siddons smiled down upon it.

"Aztec influence, you suggested? Or maybe Maya or Inca, from farther south. I think we'll just keep that little souvenir. As for this pottery container —"

He poised it as if for a smashing downward throw. But then he hesitated, looked inside again. "Well, well! The little gentleman has a brother!"

He drew out another tiny figure. "A duplicate!" he crowed. "Same size, same shape, same attitude! Same spear, same little crumbs of turquoise for eyes." He set down the vase and picked up the first figurine. "Even the same little scratches and markings, as if the carver duplicated those — what do those Indians think of, Mr. Thunstone?"

Siddons put the two golden goblins side by side on the table. "Cute, eh? How did they both fit in this vase?" He stooped and peered in, then straightened and scowled. He put in a forefinger, drew it out again. "Yes," he said, in a lower voice. "Another of them."

He brought it into view and set it by the first pair. It was exactly like them. And Siddons, again at the vase, took out yet another with his left hand, and a fifth with his right hand.

"I don't quite understand," he said, and he was speaking to himself now, not his prisoner. "There isn't — There doesn't seem to be an end to them."

He set down the fourth and fifth little warriors, took out a sixth. A seventh. An eighth. These, too, he set down. Now his hands trembled. He drew back without fishing in the vase for more.

"Thunstone," he said, "I was wrong about that bundle. It did — it does — have something beyond nature to it.

"It's like that purse in the myth. Fortuna's purse. You took out the gold in it and more came. And," his voice grew strong again, but with a fierce, semi-hysterical note, "I know where I stand! Thunstone, I'll be rich!"

He almost sprang back to the table. "Don't you see? All these generations, nobody dared open these tabooed bundles! But inside were riches! Riches, that is, for whoever dared come after them!"

He was taking more figures out of the vase, a little golden procession of them. Each he set on the table. Now there were ten — eleven — twelve — fifteen.

"All alike," gurgled Siddons. "All of gold, all of them!"

He had made a row of them, like toy soldiers, clear across the table-top. He turned and faced Thunstone exultantly.

"You can give a message to Long Spear," he said in a sort of whooping quaver. "Tell him that I ruined his bundle, but that I'm not going to fight him or the Tsiehah. They can have their land and whatever riches it contains... Thunstone! What are you staring at?"

Thunstone's eyes were not on Siddons, but on the row of figures.

"For a moment," he replied, "it seemed that one or two of those figures moved."

Siddons swiveled around and studied them. "Rot! They only shook or quivered. Maybe I joggled the table."

"You didn't touch it," said Thunstone. "There, Siddons; they moved again. Almost next to your hand."

Siddons turned away from his treasure again, and walked to Thunstone. With the heel of his hand he slapped Thunstone's jaw.

"Don't try to make me nervous," he growled. "It won't work, Thunstone."

"I'll say no more about it," promised Thunstone, watching the table beyond Siddons.

Out of the vase was coming another gold figure, without waiting to be lifted out.

Thunstone saw a tiny fleck of radiance first — a clutching hand on the lip of the vase, a hand no larger than a little frog's forefoot. Then the head came into view, with open mouth and plumes and staring turquoise eyes. Then a leg hooked over, then the whole gleaming yellow body was in view, erect and balancing on the vase's rim. The thing moved nimbly, knowingly, lively as a sparrow. It pointed with its spear — pointed at the back of Siddons.

The others stirred into motion, bunched like a tiny war party.

Siddons was moving back toward the table, and at first glance did not know, or did not accept, what was happening. Then he shuddered and

cried out, but too late.

His hand had rested for a moment on the table. The warrior that had come last from the vase made a sort of grasshopper leap, striking with his tiny gold-wire spear. Thunstone could not make out plainly what happened, but he saw Siddons tugging wretchedly and ineffectually to lift his hand from where it had touched the table. A moment later the other tiny golden bodies had charged, were leaping and scrambling upon Siddons, up his sleeves, up the front of his coat. One thrust a spear at his eye. Another was apparently trying to climb into his ear. Siddons cried out again, but his voice was muffled — Thunstone could not see what was at his mouth.

There was a moving, gleaming cloud and crawling about Siddons' face and head, as if brilliant, venomous insects were swarming there. Siddons dabbed at them once, with his free hand, but very feebly. He began to totter, to buckle at the knees. He sank slowly floorward. The golden warriors receded from him in a wave, as though in disciplined retreat. They were back on the table-top away from him, and the last to leave, their leader, paused to free his little spear from Siddons' hand. Released, Siddons settled prone on the carpet.

The leader of the tiny warriors dropped lightly to the floor. Looking down, Thunstone saw the golden morsel scamper toward him, felt it scale his trouser leg like a monkey on a great tree trunk. The thing came into view upon his chest, fixing him with searching, turquoise eyes, poising a spear calculatingly. The spear-point moved forward — touched a strand of the wire that bound Thunstone. He felt his bonds relax. His feet and hands were free. The golden figurine scrambled down again, retraced its hasty progress to the table, and nimbly hopped up again. It fell into line with the others.

Thunstone sat where he was until Long Spear returned.

"It is all easy to interpret," pronounced Long Spear when Thunstone had finished his story. "Siddons desecrated a sacred object, and that object contained the power to punish him. But you were not only spared, but freed of your bonds. There is no reproach to you."

He looked toward the silent form of Siddons. "I find no marks upon him, not even a pin-prick, to show where or how those little spears wounded him. What explanation need be given of his death?"

"No explanation," replied Thunstone, "because none would be believed. It happens that I know certain men who owe me great favors, and who can easily take this body away and dispose of it unknown to the law."

"That is good." Long Spear moved to the table with its discarded bundle-wrappings and the pottery boxes, and the row of little golden warriors. "I have brought back the buckskin sheathing for my bundle. I shall restore it as it was before Siddons meddled."

For a moment he glanced upward, his lips moving soundlessly in prayer to the gods of his tribe. Then he carefully lifted one of the figures, put it in the vase. Another he put inside, another, another, another. One by one he slid them out of sight.

When the last had been put in the vase, Long Spear lifted the lid to screw on top; then he paused, turned to Thunstone, and silently held the vase so that his friend could see inside.

Only a single golden goblin could be seen, a tiny carved image with bandy legs, a spear held slantwise, and upturned grotesque face. Yet — though it may have been a trick of the light — the turquoise eyes caught and held Thunstone's, and one of them seemed to close for a brief instant.



Hoofs

SOME SUGGEST THAT THE Countess Montesecco was born Sharon Hill, of American parents, and got her title by an ill-advised marriage abroad; that the Count, her husband, was a rank bad man, and that the world and the Countess were better for his death. Nobody knows surely, except John Thunstone, who evinces a great talent of reticence. Yet some suggest...

The Countess, at the telephone in her drawing room, directed that the caller waiting in the hotel lobby be sent up. She was compactly, blondely, handsome, neither doll nor siren, with a broad brow, an arched nose, and eyes just darker than sapphires. Today she wore blue silk, and no jewelry except a heart-shaped brooch of gold.

The caller appeared, smallish and plumpish, with lips that smiled and eyes as bright and expressionless as little lamps. At her gesture he sat in an armchair, his pudgy fingertips together.

"Your name is Hengist?" prompted the Countess, glancing at a note on her desk. "Yes? You sent me this message, about — certain articles I lost in Europe."

"About your husband," amended Hengist. "He loves you."

The sapphire eyes threw sparks. "That's a clumsy lie or a clumsy joke. My husband died years ago."

"But he loves you," murmured Hengist. "What blue eyes you have! And your hair is like a tawny, mellow wine they make in Slavic countries. Your husband cannot be blamed for loving you."

She shook her head. "He hated me."

"Death works many changes. Look at me. I know much about you, and about your husband. As life is to the living, so death is to the dead. Love can exist and thrive after a body's death. It lives with your husband..."

His voice fell to a cadenced drone. She rose to her feet, and so did Hengist. He was no taller than she, and strangely graceful for all his plumpness. He cocked a questioning caterpillar eyebrow.

"I dislike mysteries and conjuring tricks," said the Countess. "Keep your hypnotism for morons. Good-by, Mr. Hengist."

"Your husband loves you," repeated Hengist. "I know, and so does — Rowley Thorne." He smiled as she flinched. "You look pale. Rowley Thorne once frightened and angered you, but you know that his knowledge and practice of enchantment is genuine. Suppose he proved that your husband, who was dead — lived again?"

"Lived?" echoed the Countess. "Physically?"

"Yes. But — in another body. Rowley Thorne will show you." He moved a little closer. "Maybe I could show you something, too. About this love we have been discussing."

She slapped him. He turned and departed.

In the lobby, he entered a telephone booth and dialed a number.

"Thorne," he said to the voice that answered, "I carried out instructions. She did as you predicted."

"Splendid," replied the voice, deep and triumphant. "She believes."

Sharon, Countess Montesecco, did believe.

Alone, she called herself an idiot to accept fantasies; but Hengist had spoken of Rowley Thorne. If Rowley Thorne could raise dread evil spirits — and she had seen him do it — he could raise the spirit of Count Montesecco. The Count alive, in another body of his own; if that was true, what must she do? Would the Count claim her. Was he still selfish and cruel? John Thunstone had always called those traits the unforgivable sins. If she had not had that disagreement with John Thunstone, a disagreement over trifles which wound up a quarrel... the telephone was ringing, and she took up the receiver.

"Aren't we being childish?" John Thunstone's voice asked.

She borrowed strength from her pride. "Perhaps one of us is. You worked hard to say painful things, John."

"You didn't have to work hard to say them. Sharon, I've a plane reservation to go a considerable distance and dig into unpleasant mysteries with Judge Pursuivant. But I'd rather call it off, and take you to a pleasant dinner."

"I — I've a headache, John." Even as she spoke, it was true. A dull throb crawled inside her skull.

"I see." He sounded weary. "Good-by, Sharon. Sorry."

He hung up. The Countess sank into a chair. John Thunstone could have helped — would have helped. Why had she avoided seeing him, when something strange and evil was on the way to happen to her? Had that larval little Hengist hypnotized her enough to make her banish her friends? For John Thunstone was a friend. He was more than that, and she had rebuffed him, and now he'd fly away, she did not know where or for how

long.

Downstairs in the lobby, a big man in a dark gray suit left the house telephone. His eyes half-narrowed, and under his small black mustache his lips clamped. John Thunstone had humbled himself to offer peace. It had been refused. Well, just time enough to go home, pack, taxi to the airport.

But then he saw someone emerge from a telephone booth opposite. The man was small and plump, and purposeful as he hurried away. John Thunstone's eyes lost their vexed bafflement, showed recognition.

He entered the same booth, almost coffin-snug for his huge frame. He telephoned to cancel his plane reservation.

Rowley Thorne's garments just missed being seedy, and his linen could have been cleaner. But he strode from the elevator to the door of Countess Montesecco's suite with a confidence that was regal. He was almost as tall as John Thunstone, and burlier. His features showed broad, hawklike, but here and there were slackening. His great skull was bald, or perhaps shaven, and he had no eyebrows or even lashes to fringe his deep, gunmetal eyes.

He knocked, and inside she ran to the door. She opened it, and a smile of welcome died quickly on her face.

"I'm not who you expected," said Rowley Thorne.

She drew herself up. "I expected no one. Go away."

"You hoped for someone, then. And I'll go, but you'll go with me."

She began to close the door, then paused. "Why?"

"Because your husband has a message for you.... Surely you aren't going to flatter me by fearing me?"

"I fear nothing," said Countess Montesecco proudly. "Fear is folly, for people like you to feed on."

"Since you fear nothing, you will come."

"But you're lying about my husband."

His naked head bowed. "If I lie, come and prove it." He turned to go. "Have you a coat?"

He walked along the hallway. Halfway to the elevator, he paused. The Countess came from her room and fell into step beside him, looking never at him, but ahead.

In a taxi, she looked at him.

"No, I have no fear," she said. "Only curiosity. Why are you trying to impress and amaze me?"

"Because you have things I need. Strength and serenity."

"Strength!" She made herself laugh briefly over that. "I thought you were satisfied with your own enchantments, that you need nothing."

The great bald head shook again. "What enchantment I know and practice I won most painfully and sorrowfully. I swore to renounce per-

sonal possessions and affections. And I did." His voice grew dully soft, just for once. "I lost every cent and stick of property that I owned, in tragic ways that made the loss more bitter. My heart — and it truly ached for love — was torn and anguished, when death took some that I loved, and others turned false or scornful. I paid: why shouldn't I value the commodity I bought?" Now he smiled again. "I have words that some day will be known to all minds, and a will to impose upon all wills. Not world domination, Countess — that's so flat and outworn an idea. I shan't bore you with my own concept of volition and right and profit. But let me assure you of this: I have a will concerning you, and I want your will to be the same. Then neither of us will defeat the other, eh?"

She kept her eyes on mean side streets that flitted by. He continued: "Any living being is a storehouse of power. A sturdy being can give physical strength, a creature of spirit can give spiritual strength. I mean no compliments, only solemn truth when I say that your own spirit is worth my effort, for the profit I can draw from it."

"You plan some sort of sacrifice. I don't think you'll succeed, Mr. Thorne."

"Some day," he sighed, "the world will know me by a name of my own choosing, a name of mastery. Once I tried to draw you into my plans. Your friend Thunstone helped you beat me. Being beaten does not suit me. The experience must be wiped out."

"I see," she said. "Your belief, or worship, or philosophy, or whatever it is, cannot accept failure."

"Exactly," nodded Thorne.

"I don't fear you in the least."

"That's a valiant lie. But you won't try to escape, for you refuse to accept failure, too — and running from me would be failure."

The taxi stopped. Rowley Thorne opened the door and helped her out. They entered the lobby of an aging apartment building.

A porter in a grubby uniform gazed at them, but said nothing. Thorne led the Countess into an automatic elevator, and pressed the button. They rode twenty floors upward in silence.

Stepping forth into a hall, they mounted half a dozen steps to an entry above. The door opened before Thorne could knock. Hengist stood there, smiling.

"All ready," he reported to Thorne.

"Come," said Thorne to the Countess. They entered a room with drawn blinds. There was no furniture except a small table of Oriental lacquer, on which stood some article the size of a teapot, covered loosely with a napkin.

The Countess paused inside the door. "You sent word that my husband would be here, alive."

Thorne shook his head. "No," he demurred. "I said he would be here in a living body. Not necessarily human, not necessarily even flesh and blood. He is here."

He lifted the napkin from the object on the table.

It gave light, or she thought it gave light. Apparently it was made of glass, with an inner substance that glowed dimly, like foxfire.

"Look closely," Rowley Thorne bade her.

It was supported on four legs, like a tiny article of furniture. A doll's chair of glass. No. Crudely but forcefully it was shaped to resemble an animal. The straight legs were vigorously planted, the body was rounded and strong, the head long and supported on a neck that arched. Two blobs of glass made upthrust ears.

"It's a toy horse," pronounced the Countess. "I think you're wasting our time."

"No toy," Thorne assured her. "Touch it."

She reached out to pick it up, but almost flung it down. Stepping back, she chafed her hands together. "It's warm," she said shakily. "Like — like —"

"Like blood?" prompted Hengist, smiling in the dimness.

"Like a living body," amended Thorne. "A spirit you know lives inside. What you see is an old, old image, sacred once to a cult that has vanished. That cult knew ways to locate and imprison ghosts. Inside the horse is all that made Count Montesecco the kind of man he was."

Both Hengist and Thorne were watching her. She forced herself to touch the horse of glass a second time. Having touched it, she forced herself not to shudder.

"You want me to believe that this phosphorescence is a soul?"

"It has been kept thus so as to convince you. The Count, as I learned, was just such a soul as might be expected to remain wretchedly near the place of his death. A European colleague used spells to snare that soul, and sent it to me. The container is designed for the single purpose of keeping it until —"

"Why a horse?" she asked.

"Horses are exceptional creatures. They are strong, intelligent, full of emotion and spirit.

"Remember the kelpie, the *puka*, and Pegasus and the others. There have been horse gods in Norway, Spain, Russia, Greece, even in tropical America. When German wizards foretold the future, they read it in the blood and bowels of horses." Thorne looked from the glass image to the Countess. "Speak to your husband's soul."

"Do you really expect me —"

"I'll show you how." His bald head stooped above the dim-glowing little shape of glass. "You within, do you know this woman?"

The phosphorescence whirled, as vapor whirls in a breeze. The glass head stirred, moved. It lifted, and sagged back.

"You see," said Thorne, "it nodded affirmation."

"Nonsense!" she protested, but her voice almost broke. "That was an optical illusion, or some piece of stage magic."

"Touch it again. Assure yourself that it is a solid, unjointed glass structure... Satisfied? I'll question it again: The woman is your Countess?"

Another nod.

"You — love her?"

Yet again the glass head dipped.

"I still say it's a trick," said the Countess. "Why I came here I don't know."

"You've forgotten? Wasn't there something said about not being afraid? You came, Countess, to scorn me and to conquer me. You felt that you must show how strong and fearless you could be without John Thunstone. And it's not a trick. Lift the thing. Don't be afraid. Make sure that there are not threads or levers or other mechanism. Now look into it. Deep into it."

She felt a flash of pain, as if the subdued glow were too bright for her eyes, but she stared where the radiance was strongest, in the midst of the horse's body. For a moment it seemed as though an eye floated there to return her gaze, an eye she had known and had never expected to see again. The warmth of the glass communicated itself to her hands. She felt, or fancied she felt, a rhythmic pulsing from within the figure.

"Now, questions that only your husband could answer," urged Thorne.

She addressed the object: "If you are who they say you are, you will remember the words I spoke at our last parting."

The glass shape shifted in her hands. Thoughts formed in the depths of her mind, but not thoughts of her own. Those thoughts answered her question:

I remember. You said you would tolerate cruelty, but not lies.

She shuddered and swayed. Rowley Thorne took the figure from her and set it back on the table.

"You believe now, don't you?" he challenged her. "That, I say, is why I kept the soul of your Count in this strange condition — to convince you. Now it shall be transmigrated, to the body of a man. I look forward to an interesting reunion between you and him."

"I'll submit to no more extravagances," she was able to protest.

"Hengist," said Thorne, "take the Countess Montesecco to the observatory."

Hengist laid his hand upon her wrist. When she tried to pull away, he tightened his grip cunningly. Agony swelled along her arm. She had to go with him. He urged her up another flight of stairs.

This second story of the penthouse was a single room, with windows

all around. Twilight was coming to the city outside and below. Hengist smiled as he shut the door behind him.

"You came here partially out of bravado, and partly out of adroit suggestion," he said. "Now the bravado is gone, and the suggestion is going. If you are convinced that your husband lives again, in human flesh, will you be bound to him by vows or sentiments?"

He turned the key in the lock. She drew herself up, pale and angry.

"I thought I was a free agent. Why do you lock me in?"

"Because you are shrugging off the last flimsy bond of suggestion. Because you must stay here and see your husband again in the flesh."

She looked around. "In what body —?"

"Here," and Hengist placed a pudgy hand on his chest. "I am the body."

She sat down in an armchair. Hengist fumbled in a pocket, and brought out a slim vial. It, too, had something phosphorescent inside.

"I am instructed," he told her, "to drink this concoction and prepare myself to receive a new spirit that will dominate and replace my own. But," he paused, smiling sidelong at her. "Why don't we throw it away?"

"Throw it away?"

"Yes, and not be parties to the revival of the Count's life in my body. Keep me just Hengist. I'm Thorne's associate and servitor. He intends, by supernatural means, to house within me the spirit of Count Monteseco. Then you will be constrained and subdued, by use of that spirit in a living body. Your money, for one thing, will become Thorne's. And there are other ways he will triumph over you and your friends."

The Countess remembered that Thorne had spoken of his need for triumph where he had failed.

"Wouldn't you rather have me as Hengist than as Count Monteseco?" Hengist asked again. "I find you attractive. Attractive enough, in fact, to make me wish to stay myself for your sake. What do you think? But think quickly. Because Rowley Thorne will be coming."

On the floor below, Rowley Thorne opened a closet. From shelves inside he brought out a walking stick of jointed bamboo, marked in Japanese characters, and a tarnished bronze lamp. This he lighted, and it shed yellow light, dimming the glow within the glass figure as he placed it and the cane upon the table. While he moved and arranged the objects, he kept up a swift, indistinct mutter in a language that could be neither Latin or Greek, but which fell into cadences and rhymes, like some sort of ritual. After a moment he paused, looked around, and brought a dish out of the closet. Into it he threw white powder and red, and tilted the dish to mingle them. Finally he bit his thumb savagely, and dripped blood from it upon the mingled powder.

"That," said a quiet voice, "is one of the most disgusting commonplaces of your dirty ceremonies."

From behind a window-drape slid the broad shoulders and scornful face of John Thunstone.

Rowley Thorne faced him, his own lips writhing back from big, pointed teeth.

"She has rejected you and your help," he snarled. "I know it. I know all about your quarrel. She didn't want you, or she'd have sent for you. Get out."

Thunstone took a step closer. "The Countess, like many women, is not utterly sure what she does want. I followed your little jackal, Hengist, here. Magic of my own — a skeleton key — let me in by a side door. And I listened. I know everything — to stay within the melodramatic pattern you seem to set, I should say that I know all." He took another step. "Since you're so nervous about the Countess' feelings, be glad that I waited until she left to settle with you."

"Get out," said Thorne again. He picked up the cane.

"Spoiling the preparations for your incantation," Thunstone said, in a voice of friendly warning. "I know about this kind of thing, too. How does the little jibber-jabber go? 'He whose dead ghost has no caretaker is looking for a shelter from the night; and who speaks the Black Name, and speaks it now —'"

"Silence!" bawled Thorne. "You'll ruin —"

Thunstone eyed the collection on the table. "That would be a collector's item, yonder. Etruscan, I take it — the Equine Cult of Aradonia. May I look?" He put out a hand.

Thorne threw himself between the table and Thunstone. The cane lifted in his hand and struck at Thunstone's head. The big man dodged sidewise, caught at the cane and pulled.

But the wood seemed to give in his hand, to slide easily away. Thorne was clearing a narrow steel blade from within it. He laughed once, a sharp laugh like the bark of a fox. Thunstone held a hollow length of cane that had served as sheath for the blade.

"I should have done this long ago," said Thorne, and fell on guard like a fencer. He lunged, speeding his point full at Thunstone's throat.

But Thunstone parried with the hollow cane he held, let the point slither out of line, then struck sharply at Thorne's weapon hand. Wood rang on knuckles, and Thorne dropped his blade with a curse. Thunstone caught it up, breaking it across his knee.

"You'd have found my murder difficult to explain," he said.

Thorne struck at him with his fist, and Thunstone took the blow high on his head. He weaved a little, but countered with both hands, to Thorne's head and body. Thorne staggered back against the table. It toppled.

Something crashed.

Thorne wailed as if his arm had broken. Thunstone moved across the room and snapped a light switch. Turning, he saw Thorne kneeling, almost in tears.

"Yes, yes," Thunstone murmured, as if to soothe him. "The collector's item is gone. Smashed. And what was inside —"

"Do you realize what this means?" jabbered Thorne, rising.

Thunstone nodded. "Perfectly. The captive soul is free — with no prepared haven. Your ceremony had not begun. Count Montesecco undergoes no reincarnation."

"But the ceremony had begun," Thorne insisted. "I'd spoken some of the words — I'd pointed the way to Hengist."

"Ah," said Thunstone. "And if Hengist isn't prepared, that is Hengist's misfortune." He eyed his adversary appraisingly. "Once more, Thorne, I'm leaving you in an embarrassing position."

"You are a stubborn creature," Hengist was saying. "One would think you actually preferred to be the wife of the Count, and the slave of Rowley Thorne. Well, suppose I don't allow it? Suppose I move for your good, and mine, against his magic? He'll never know that I don't house the soul he sent me, and I can watch for a proper time to — What are you staring at?"

"The transom," said the Countess. "Something moved there."

"The transom's as tight shut as this door." Hengist's fat forefinger twiddled the key in its lock. "Not even Rowley Thorne could enter, unless he got a Hand of Glory somewhere on short notice. Now then, to assume? Even if you find me repulsive, you might become accustomed to me later. But what's the matter with the transom now?"

"Something moved there," she said again.

"A shadow," Hengist offered loftily.

"But it has eyes — and it shines —" Something drifted through the closed door, as fog drifts through gauze.

Hengist goggled, backed up, and whimpered. The cloud of dead-glowing vapor billowed, churned, and abruptly lengthened. Its fore part lifted. It was shaping itself dimly and roughly, into a form that reared, a form with a long tossing head, an arched neck, and lean forelimbs with lumpy extremities.

Hengist's whine shrilled into a scream. He tried to get away, but floundered into a corner. Those forelegs came down upon him, and he fell, and the great shining cloud was upon him.

Then the Countess remembered that the key was in the lock. She unfastened the door and ran for the stairs. She might have fallen down them, but John Thunstone was coming up and caught her.

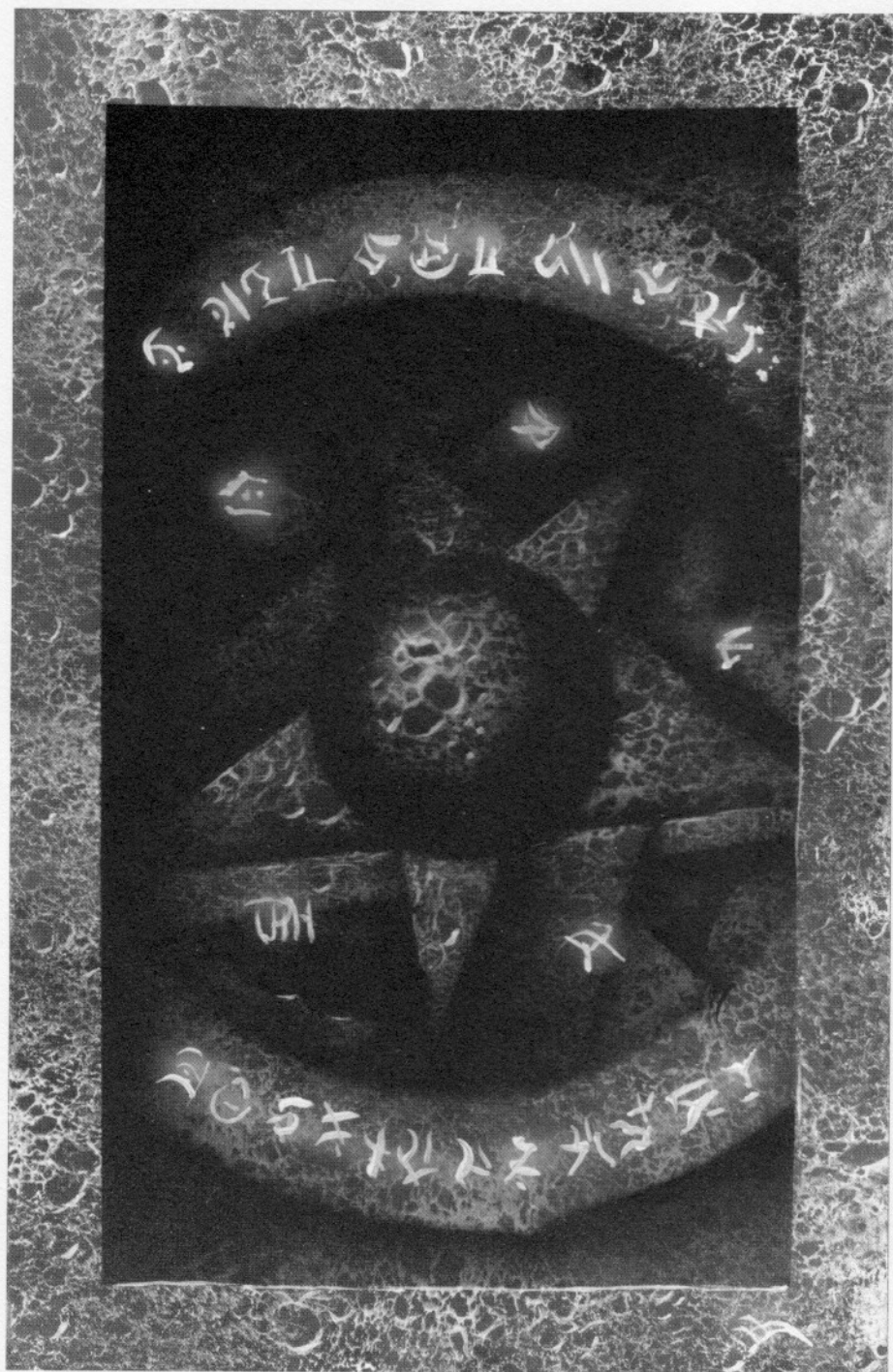
At far as she could remember later, he did not speak then or for quite a while afterward. He shepherded her to the elevator, out into the street, and

home in a taxi.

He did not even say good-night.

The next day, when he took her to lunch, he came as close as he would ever come to discussing the adventure. "The papers," he remarked, "are interested in a man who was found dead in a penthouse. Because he seems to have been beaten all over by heavy, blunt weapons. The police say it's as if a horse had trampled him to death."

Then he gave his attention to ordering the soup.



The Letters of Cold Fire

THE EL HAD ONCE curved around a corner and along this block of the narrow rough-paved street. Since it had been taken up, the tenements on either side seemed like dissipated old vagabonds, ready to collapse without the support of that scaffolding. Between two such buildings of time-dulled red brick sagged a third, its brickwork thickly coated with cheap yellow paint that might well be the only thing holding it together. The lower story was taken up by the dingiest of hand laundries, and a side door led to the lodgings above. Rowley Thorne addressed a shabby dull-eyed landlord in a language both of them knew: "Cavet Leslie is — " he began.

The landlord shook his head slowly. "Does not leave his bed."

"The doctor sees him?"

"Twice a day. Told me there was no hope, but Cavet Leslie won't go to a hospital."

"Thanks," and Thorne turned to the door. His big hand was on the knob, its fingertips hooked over the edge. He was a figure inordinately bulky but hard, like a barrel on legs. His head was bald, and his nose hooked, making him look like a wise, wicked eagle.

"Tell him," he requested, "that a friend was coming to see him."

"I never talk to him," said the landlord, and Thorne bowed, and left, closing the door behind him.

Outside the door, he listened. The landlord had gone back into his own dim quarters. Thorne at once tried the knob — the door opened, for in leaving he had taken off the night lock.

He stole through the windowless vestibule and mounted stairs so narrow that Thorne's shoulders touched both walls at once. The place had that old-clothes smell of New York's ancient slum houses. From such rookeries the Five Points and Dead Rabbits gangsters had issued to their joyous gang wars of old, hoodlums had thronged to the Draft Riots of 1863 and the protest against Macready's performance of *Macbeth* at the

Astor place Opera House... the hallway above was as narrow as the stairs, and darker, but Thorne knew the way to the door he sought. It opened readily, for its lock was long out of order.

It was more a cell than a room. The plaster, painted a dirt-disguising green, fell away in flakes. Filth and cobwebs clogged the one backward-looking window. The man on the shabby cot stirred, sighed and turned his thin fungus-white face toward the door. "Who's there?" he quavered wearily.

Rowley Thorne knelt quickly beside him, bending close like a bird of prey above a carcass. "You were Cavet Leslie," he said. "Try to remember."

A thin twig of a hand crept from under the ragged quilt. It rubbed over cloud eyes. "Forbidden," croaked the man. "I'm forbidden to remember. I forget all but — but —" the voice trailed off, then finished with an effort:

"My lessons."

"You were Cavet Leslie. I am Rowley Thorne."

"Rowley Thorne!" The voice was stronger, quicker. "That name will be great in hell."

"It will be great on earth," pronounced Rowley Thorne earnestly. "I came to get your book. Give it to me, Leslie. It's worth both our lives, and more."

"Don't call me Leslie. I've forgotten Leslie — since —"

"Since you studied in the Deep School," Thorne finished for him. "I know. You have the book. It is given to all who finish the studies there."

"Few finish," moaned the man on the cot. "Many begin, few finish."

"The school is beneath ground," Thorne said, as if prompting him. "Remember."

"Yes, beneath ground. No light must come. It would destroy — what is taught. Once there, the scholar remains until he has been taught, or — goes away in the dark."

"The school book has letters of cold fire," prompted Thorne.

"Letters of cold fire," echoed the thin voice. "They may be read in the dark. Once a day — once a day — a trap opens, and a hand shaggy with dark hair thrusts in food. I finished — I was in that school for seven years — or a hundred!" He broke off, whimpering. "Who can say how long?"

"Give me your book," insisted Thorne. "It is here somewhere."

The man who would not be called Cavet Leslie rose on an elbow. It was a mighty effort for his fleshless body. He still held his eyes tight shut, but turned his face to Thorne's. "How do you know?"

"It's my business to know. I say certain spells and certain voices whisper back. They cannot give me the wisdom I seek, but they say that it is in your book. Give me the book."

"Not even to you, Rowley Thorne. You are of the kidney of the Deep School, but the book is only for those who study in buried darkness for years. For years —"

"The book!" said Thorne sharply. His big hand closed on the bony shoulder, his finger-ends probed knowingly for a nerve center. The man who had been in the Deep School wailed.

"You hurt me!"

"I came for the book. I'll have it."

"I'll call on spirits to protect me — *Tobkta* —"

What else he may have said was muddled into a moan as Thorne shifted his hand to clamp over the trembling mouth. He prisoned the skinny jaw as a hostler with a horse, and shoved Cavet Leslie's head down against the mattress. With his other thumb he pried up an eyelid. Convulsively the tormented one freed his mouth for a moment.

"Oooooooh!" he whined. "Don't make me see the light — not after so many years —"

"The book," said Thorne once more, "or I'll prop your eyelids open with toothpicks and let the light burn into your brain."

"*Tobkta tarvaron* —"

Thorne stopped the mouth as before, and again pried up a lid. When the gaunt figure still twitched, he pinned it with pressure of his weight.

"The book. If you'll give it up, hold up a finger."

A hand trembled, closed — all but the forefinger. Thorne released his grip.

"Where?"

"In the mattress —"

At once, and with all his strength, Thorne chopped down with the hard edge of his hand, full at the bobbing, trembling throat. It was like an axe on a knotted log. The man who had been Cavet Leslie writhed, gasped, and slackened abruptly. Thorne caught at a meager wrist, his fingers seeking the pulse. He stood silent for a minute, then nodded and smiled to himself.

"Finished," he muttered. "That throat-chop is better than a running noose."

He tumbled the body from the cot, felt quickly all over the mattress. His hand paused at a lump, tore at the ticking. He drew into view a book, not larger than a school speller. It was bound in some sort of dark untanned hide, on which grew rank, coarse hair, black as soot.

Thorne thrust it under his coat and went out.

John Thunstone sat alone in his study. It was less of a study than a lounge — no fewer than three chairs were arranged on the floor, soft, well-hollowed chairs within easy reach of bookshelf, smoking stand and coffee

table. There was a leather-covered couch as well. For Thunstone considered work of the brain to be as fatiguing as work of the body. He liked physical comfort when writing or researching.

Just now he sat in the most comfortable of the three chairs, facing a grate in which burned one of the few authentic fires of New York. He was taller than Rowley Thorne and quite as massive, perhaps even harder of body though not as tense. His face, with its broken nose and small, trim mustache, might have been that of a very savage and physical-minded man, except for the height of the well-combed cranium above it. That made his head the head of a thinker. His hands were so large that one looked twice to see that they were fine. His dark eyes could be brilliant, frank, enigmatic, narrow, or laughing as they willed.

Open on his lap lay a large gray book, with a backing of gilt-lettered red. He pondered a passage on the page open before him:

Having shuffled and cut the cards as here described, select one at random. Study the device upon it for such time as you count a slow twenty. Then fix your eyes on a point before you, and gaze unwinkingly and without moving until it seems that a closed door is before you, with upon its panel the device of the card you have chosen. Clarify the image in your mind, and keep it there until the door seems to swing open, and you feel that you can enter and see, hear or otherwise experience what may happen beyond that door...

Similar, pondered John Thunstone, to the Chinese wizard-game of Yi King, as investigated and experimented upon by W. B. Seabrook. He was glad that he, and not someone less fitted for such studies, had happened upon the book and the strange cards in that Brooklyn junk-shop. Perhaps this was an anglicized form of the Yi King book — he said over in his mind the strange, archaic doggerel penned by some unknown hand on the fly-leaf:

*This book is mine, with many more,
Of evilness and dismal lore.
That I may of the Devil know
And school myself to work him woe.
Such lore Saint Dunstan also read,
So that the Cross hath firmer stead.
My path with honor aye hath been —
No better is than that, I ween.*

Who had written it? What had befallen him, that he sold his strange book in a second-hand store? Perhaps, if the spell would open a spirit-door, Thunstone would know.

He cut the cards on the stand beside him. The card he saw was stamped

with a simple, colored drawing of a grotesque half-human figure, covered with spines, and flaunting bat-wings. Thunstone smiled slightly, sagged down in the chair. His eyes, narrowing, fixed themselves in the heart of the red flame...

The illusion came sooner than he had thought. At first it was tiny, like the decorated lid of a cigar-box, then grew and grew in size and clarity — shutting out, it seemed, even the firelight into which Thunstone had stared. It seemed green and massive, and the bat-winged figure upon it glowed dully, as if it were a life-size inlay of mother of pearl. He fixed his attention upon it, found his eyes quartering the door-surface to seek the knob or latch. They saw it, something like a massive metal hook. After a moment, the door swung open, as if the weight of his gaze had pushed it inward.

He remembered what the book then directed: *Arise from your body and walk through the door.* But he felt no motion, physical or spiritual. For through the open door he saw only his study — the half of his study that was behind his back, reflected as in a mirror. No, for in a mirror left would become right. Here was the rearward part of the room exactly as he knew it.

And not empty!

A moving, stealthy blackness was there, flowing or creeping across the rug between a chair and a smoking-stand like an octopus on a sea-bottom.

Thunstone watched. It was not a cloud nor a shadow, but something solid if not clearly shaped. It came into plainer view, closer, at the very threshold of the envisioned door. There it began to rise, a towering lean manifestation of blackness —

It came to Thunstone's mind that, if the scene within the doorway was faithfully a reproduction of the room behind him, then he could see to it almost the exact point where his own chair was placed. In other words, if something dark and indistinct and stealthy was uncoiling itself there, the something was directly behind where he sat.

He did not move, did not even quicken his breath. The shape — it had a shape now, like a leafless tree with a narrow starved stem and moving tendril-like branches — aspired almost to the ceiling of the vision-room. The tendrils swayed, as if in a gentle wind, then writhed and drooped. Drooped toward the point where might be the head of a seated man — if such a thing were truly behind him, it was reaching toward his head.

Thunstone threw himself forward from the chair, straight at the vision-door. As he came well away from where he had sat, he whipped his big body straight and, cat-light despite his wrestler's bulk, spun around on the balls of his feet. Of the many strange spells and charms he had read in years of strange study, one came to his lips, from the *Egyptian Secrets*.

"Stand still, in the name of heaven! Give neither fire not flame not punishment!"

He saw the black shadowy shape, tall behind his chair, its crowning tendrils dangling down in the very space which his body had occupied. The light of the sinking fire made indistinct its details and outlines, but for the instant it was solid. Thunstone knew better than to retreat a step before such a thing, but he was within arm's reach of a massive old desk. A quick clutch and heave opened a drawer, he thrust in his hand and closed it on a slender stick, no more than a roughcut billet of whitethorn. Lifting the bit of wood like a dagger, he moved toward the half-blurred intruder. He thrust outward with the pointed end of the whitethorn stick.

"I command, I compel in the name of —" began Thunstone.

The entity writhed. Its tendrils spread and hovered, so that it seemed for the moment like a gigantic scrawny arm, spreading its fingers to signal for mercy. Even as Thunstone glared and held out his whitethorn, the black outline lost its clarity, dissolving as ink dissolves in water. The darkness became gray, stirred together and shrank away toward the door. It seemed to filter between panel and jamb. The air grew clearer, and Thunstone wiped his face with the hand that did not hold the whitethorn.

He stooped and picked up the book that had spilled from his lap. He faced the fire. The door, if it had ever existed otherwise than in Thunstone's mind, had gone like the tendril-shape. Thunstone took a pipe from his smoking stand and put it in his mouth. His face was deadly pale, but the hand that struck a match was as steady as a bronze bracket.

Thunstone placed the book carefully on the desk. "Whoever you are who wrote the words," he said aloud, "and wherever you are at this moment — thank you for helping me to warn myself."

He moved around the study, peering at the rug on which that shadow image had reared itself, prodding the pile, even kneeling to sniff. He shook his head.

"No sign, no trace — yet for a moment it was real and potent enough — only one person I know has the wit and will to attack me like that —"

He straightened up.

"Rowley Thorne!"

Leaving the study, John Thunstone donned hat and coat. He descended through the lobby of his apartment house and stopped a taxi on the street outside.

"Take me to Eighty-eight Musgrave Lane, in Greenwich Village," he directed the driver.

The little bookshop looked like a dingy cave. To enter it, Thunstone must go down steps from the sidewalk, past an almost obliterated sign that read: BOOKS — ALL KINDS. Below ground the cave-motif was emphasized. It was as though one entered a ragged grotto among most peculiar natural deposits of books — shelves and stands and tables, and heaps of

them on the floor like outcroppings. A bright naked bulb hung at the end of a ceiling cord, but it seemed to shed light only in the outer room. No beam, apparently, could penetrate beyond a threshold at the rear; yet Thunstone had, as always, the non-visual sense of a greater book-cave there, wherein perhaps clumps of volumes hung somehow from the ceiling, like stalactites...

"I thought you'd be here, Mr. Thunstone," came a genial snarl from a far corner, and the old proprietress stumped forward. She was heavy-set, shabby, white-haired, but had a proud beaked face, and eyes and teeth like a girl of twenty. "Professor Rhine and Joseph Dunninger can write the books and give the exhibitions of thought transference. I just sit here and practice it, with people whose minds can tune in to mine — like you, Mr. Thunstone. You came, I daresay, for a book."

"Suppose," said Thunstone, "that I wanted a copy of the *Necronomicon*?"

"Suppose," rejoined the old woman, "that I gave it to you?" She turned to a shelf, pulled several books out, and poked her withered hand into the recess behind. "Nobody else that I know would be able to look into the *Necronomicon* without getting into trouble. To anyone else the price would be prohibitive. To you, Mr. Thun — "

"Leave that book where it is!" he bade her sharply. She glanced up with her bright youthful eyes, slid the volumes back into their place, and turned to wait for what he would say.

"I knew you had it," said Thunstone. "I wanted to be sure that you still had it. And that you would keep it."

"I'll keep it, unless you ever want it," promised the old woman.

"Does Rowley Thorne ever come here?"

"Thorne? The man like a burly old bald eagle? Not for months — he hasn't the money to pay the prices I'd ask him for even cheap reprints of Albertus Magnus."

"Good-by, Mrs. Harlan," said Thunstone. "You're very kind."

"So are you kind," said the old woman. "To me and to countless others. When you die, Mr. Thunstone, and may it be long ever from now, a whole generation will pray your soul into glory. Could I say something?"

"Please do." He paused in the act of going.

"Thorne came here once, to ask me a favor. It was about a poor sick man who lives — if you can call it living — in a tenement across town. His name was Cavet Leslie, and Thorne said he would authorize me to pay any price for a book Cavet Leslie had."

"Not the *Necronomicon*?" prompted Thunstone.

Her white head shook. "Thorne asked for the *Necronomicon* the day before, and I said I hadn't one to sell him — which was the truth. I had it in mind that he thought Cavet Leslie's book might be a substitute."

"The name of Leslie's book?"

She crinkled her face until it looked like a wise walnut. "He said it had no name. I was to say to Leslie, 'your schoolbook.'" "

"Mmmm," hummed Thunstone, frowning. "What was the address?"

She wrote it on a bit of paper. Thunstone took it and smiled down.

"Good-by again, Mrs. Harlan. Some books *must* be kept in existence, I know, despite their danger. My sort of scholarship needs them. But you're the best and wisest person to keep them."

She stared after him for moments following his departure. A black cat came silently forth and rubbed its head against her.

"If I was really to do magic with these books," she told the animal, "I'd cut years off my age — and take John Thunstone clear away from that Countess Montesecco, who will never, never do him justice!"

There was not much to learn at the place where Cavet Leslie had kept his poor lodgings. The landlord could not understand English, and Thunstone had to try two other languages before he learned that Leslie had been ill, had been under treatment by a charity physician, and had died earlier that day, apparently from some sort of throttling spasm. For a dollar, Thunstone gained permission to visit the squalid death-chamber.

The body was gone, and Thunstone probed into every corner of the room. He found the ripped mattress, pulled away the flap of ticking and studied the rectangular recess among the wads of ancient padding. A book had been there. He touched the place — it had a strange chill. Then he turned quickly, gazing across the room.

Some sort of shape had been there, a shape that faded as he turned, but which left an impression. Thunstone whistled softly.

"Mrs. Harlan couldn't get the book," he decided. "Thorne came — and succeeded. Now, which way to Thorne?"

The street outside was dark. Thunstone stood for a moment in front of the dingy tenement, until he achieved again the sense of something watching, approaching. He turned again, and saw or sensed, the shrinking away of a stealthy shadow. He walked in that direction.

The sense of the presence departed, but he walked on in the same direction, until he had a feeling of aimlessness in the night. Then again he stood, with what unconcern he could make apparent, until there was a whisper in his consciousness of threat. Whirling, he followed it as before. Thus he traveled for several blocks, changing direction once. Whatever was spying upon him or seeking to ambush him, it was retreating toward a definite base of operations... At length he was able to knock upon a certain door in a certain hotel.

Rowley Thorne opened to him, standing very calm and even triumphant in waistcoat and shirtsleeves.

"Come in, Thunstone," he said, in mocking cordiality. "This is more

than I had dared hope for."

"I was able to face and chase your hound-thing, whatever it is," Thunstone told him, entering. "It led me here."

"I knew that," nodded Thorne, his shaven head gleaming dully in the brown-seeming light of a single small desk lamp. "Won't you make yourself comfortable? You see," and he took up a shaggy-covered book from the arm of an easy chair, "I am impelled at last to accept the idea of a writing which, literally, tells one everything he needs to know."

"You killed Cavet Leslie for it, didn't you?" inquired Thunstone, and dropped his hat on the bed.

Thorne clicked his tongue. "That's bad luck for somebody, a hat on the bed. Cavet Leslie had outlived everything but a scrap of his physical self. Somewhere he's outliving that, for I take it that his experiences and studies have unfitted his soul for any conventional hereafter. But he left me a rather amusing legacy." And he dropped his eyes to the open book.

"I should be flattered that you concentrated first of all in immobilizing me," observed Thunstone, leaning his great shoulder against the door-jamb.

"Flattered? But surely not surprised. After all, you've hampered me again and again in reaping a harvest of —"

"Come off it, Thorne. You're not even honest as a worshipper of evil. You don't care whether you establish a cult of Satan or not."

Thorne pursed his hard lips. "I venture to say you're right. I'm not a zealot. Cavet Leslie was. He entered the Deep School — know about it?"

"I do," Thunstone told him. "Held in a cellar below a cellar — somewhere on this continent. I'll find it some day, and put an end to the curriculum."

"Leslie entered the Deep School," Thorne continued, "and finished all the study it had to offer. He finished himself as a being capable of happiness, too. He could not look at the light, or summon the strength to walk, or even sit. Probably death was a relief to him — though, not knowing what befell him after death, we cannot be certain. What I'm summing up to is that he endured that wretched life underground to get the gift of this text book. Now I have it, without undergoing so dreadful an ordeal. Don't reach out for it, Thunstone. You couldn't read it, anyway."

He held it forward, open. The pages showed dull and blank.

"They're written in letters of cold fire," reminded Thunstone. "Letters that show only in the dark."

"Shall we make it dark, then?"

Thorne switched off the lamp.

Thunstone, who had not stirred from his lounging stance at the door, was aware at once that the room was most completely sealed. Blackness was absolute in it. He could not even judge of dimension or direction. Thorne spoke again, from the midst of the choking gloom:

"Clever of you, staying beside the door. Do you want to try to leave?"

"It's no good running away from evil," Thunstone replied. "I didn't come to run away again."

"But try to open the door," Thorne almost begged, and Thunstone put out his hand to find the knob. There was no knob, and no door. Of a sudden, Thunstone was aware that he was not leaning against a door-jamb any more. There was no door-jamb, or other solidity, against which to lean.

"Don't you wish you knew where you were?" jeered Thorne. "I'm the only one who knows, for it's written here on the page for me to see in letters of cold fire."

Thunstone took a stealthy step in the direction of the voice. When Thorne spoke again, he had evidently fallen back out of reach.

"Shall I describe the place for you, Thunstone? It's in the open somewhere. A faint breeze blows," and as he spoke, Thunstone felt the breeze, warm and feeble and foul as the breath of some disgusting little animal. "And around us are bushes and trees. They're part of a thick growth, but just here they are sparse. Because, not more than a dozen steps away, is open country. I've brought you to the borderland of a most interesting place, Thunstone, merely by speaking of it."

Thunstone took another step. His feet were on loose earth, not on carpet. A pebble turned and rattled under his shoe-sole.

"You're where you always wanted to be," he called to Thorne. "Where by saying a thing, you can make it so. But many things will need to be said before life suits you." He tried a third step, silently this time. "Who will believe?"

"Everybody will believe." Thorne was almost airy. "Once a fact is demonstrated, it is no longer wonderful. Hypnotism was called magic in its time, and became accepted science. So it is being achieved with thought-transference, by experimentation at Duke University and on radio programs in New York. So it will be when I tell of my writings, very full and very clear — but haven't we been too long in utter darkness?"

On the instant, Thunstone could see a little. Afterwards he tried to decide what color that light, or mock-light, actually was. Perhaps it was a lizardy green, but he was never sure. It revealed, ever so faintly, the leafless stunted growths about him, the bare dry-seeming ground from which they sprang, the clearing beyond them. He could not be sure of horizon or sky.

Something moved, not far off. Thorne, by the silhouette. Thunstone saw the flash of Thorne's eyes, as though they gave their own light.

"This country," Thorne said, "may be one of several places. Another dimension — do you believe in more dimensions than these? Or a spirit world of some kind. Or another age of the world we know. I brought you here, Thunstone, without acting or even speaking — only by reading in my book."

Thunstone carefully slid a hand inside his pocket. His forefinger touched something smooth, heavy, rectangular. He knew what it was — a lighter, given him on an occasion of happy gratitude by Sharon, the Countess Montesecco.

“Cold fire,” Thorne was saying. “These letters and words are of a language known only in the Deep School — but the sight of them is enough to convey knowledge. Enough, also, to create and direct. This land is spacious enough, don’t you think, to support other living creatures than ourselves?”

Thunstone made out blots of black gloom in the green gloom of the clearing — immense, gross blots, that moved slowly but knowingly toward the bushes. And somewhere behind him a great massive bulk made a dry crashing in the strange shrubbery.

“Are such things hungry?” mused Thorne. “They will be, if I make them so by a thought. Thunstone, I think I’ve done enough to occupy you. Now I’m ready to leave you here, also by a thought — taking with me the book with letters of cold fire. You can’t have that cold fire — ”

“I have warm fire,” said Thunstone, and threw himself.

It was a powerful lunge, unthinkable swift. Thunstone is, among other things, a trained athlete. His big body crashed against Thorne’s, and the two of them grappled and went sprawling among the brittle twigs of one of the bushes. As Thorne fell, undermost, he flung up the hand that held the book, as if to put it out of Thunstone’s reach. But Thunstone’s hand shot out, too, and it held something — the lighter. A flick of his thumb, and flame sprang out, warm orange flame in a sudden spurting tongue that for a moment licked into the coarse shaggy hair of the untanned hide that bound the book.

Thorne howled, and dropped the thing. A moment later, he pulled loose and jumped up. Thunstone was up, too, moving to block Thorne off from the book. Flame grew and flurried behind him, into a paler light, as if burning something fat and rotten.

“It’ll be ruined!” cried Thorne, and hurled himself low, like a blocker on the football field. An old footballer himself, Thunstone crouched, letting his hard knee-joint come in contact with Thorne’s incharging bald skull. With a grunt, Thorne fell flat, rolled over and came erect again.

“Put out that fire, Thunstone!” he bawled. “You may destroy us both!”

“I’ll chance that,” Thunstone muttered, moving again to fence him off from the burning book.

Thorne returned to the struggle. One big hand made a talon of itself, snatching at Thunstone’s face. Thunstone ducked beneath the hand, jammed his own shoulder up under the pit of the lifted arm, and heaved. Thorne staggered back, stumbled. He fell, and came to his hands and knees, waiting. His face, upturned to Thunstone, was like a mask of horror carved to

terrorize the worshippers in some temple of demons.

It was plain to see that face, for the fire of the book blazed up with a last ardent leap of radiance. Then it died. Thunstone, taking time to glance, saw only glowing charred fragments of leaves, and ground them with a quick thrust of his heel.

Darkness again, without even the green mock-light. Thunstone felt no breeze, heard no noise of swaying bushes or stealthy, ponderous shape-movement — he could not even hear Thorne's breathing.

He took a step sidewise, groping. His hand found a desk-edge, then the standard of a small lamp. He found a switch and pressed it.

Again he was in Thorne's hotel room, and Thorne was groggily rising to his feet.

When Thorne had cleared his head by shaking it, Thunstone had taken a sheaf of papers from the desk and was glancing quickly through them.

"Suppose," he said, gently but loftily, "that we call the whole thing a little trick of imagination."

"If you call it that, you will be lying," Thorne said between set teeth on which blood was smeared.

"A lie told in a good cause is the whitest of lies... this writing would be a document of interest if it would convince."

"The book," muttered Thorne. "The book would convince. I whisked you to a land beyond imagination, with only a grain of the power that book held."

"What book?" inquired Thunstone. He looked around. "There's no book."

"You set it afire. It burned, in that place where we fought — its ashes remain, while we come back here because its power is gone."

Thunstone glanced down at the papers he had picked up. "Why talk of burning things? I wouldn't burn this set of notes for anything. It will attract other attentions than mine."

His eyes rose to fix Thorne's. "Well, you fought me again, Thorne. And I turned you back."

"He who fights and runs away — " Rowley Thorne found the strength to laugh. "You know the rest, Thunstone. You have to let me run away this time, and at our next fight I'll know better how to deal with you."

"You shan't run away," said Thunstone. He put a cigarette in his mouth and kindled it with the lighter he still held in his hand.

Thorne hooked his heavy thumbs in his vest. "You'll stop me? I think not. Because we're back in conventional lands, Thunstone."

"If you lay hands on me again, it'll be a fight to the death. We're both big and strong. You might kill me, but I'd see that you did. Then you'd be punished for murder. Perhaps executed." Thorne's pale, pointed tongue licked his hard lips. "Nobody would believe you if you tried to explain."

"No, nobody would believe," agreed Thunstone gently. "That's why I'm leaving you to do the explaining."

"I!" cried Thorne, and laughed again. "Explain what? To whom?"

"On the way here," said Thunstone, "I made a plan. In the lobby downstairs, I telephoned for someone to follow me — no, not the police. A doctor. This will be the doctor now."

A slim, gray-eyed man was coming in. Behind him moved two blocky, watchful attendants in white jackets. Silently Thunstone handed the doctor the papers that he had taken from the desk.

The doctor looked at the first page, then the second. His gray eyes brightened with professional interest. Finally he approached Thorne.

"Are you the gentleman Mr. Thunstone asked me to see?" he inquired. "You — yes, you look rather weary and overwrought. Perhaps a rest, with nothing to bother you —"

Thorne's face writhed. "You! You dare to suggest!" He made a threatening gesture, but subsided as the two white-coated men moved toward him from either side. "You're insolent," he went on, more quietly. "I'm no more crazy than you are."

"Of course not," agreed the doctor. He looked at the notes again, grunted, folded the sheets and stowed them carefully in an inside pocket. Thunstone gave a little nod of general farewell, took his hat from the bed, and strolled carelessly out.

"Of course, you're not crazy," said the doctor again. "Only — tired. Now, if you'll answer a question or two —"

"What questions?" blazed Thorne.

"Well, is it true that you believe you can summon spirits and work miracles, merely by exerting your mind?"

Thorne's wrath exploded, hysterically. "You'd soon see what I could do if I had that book!"

"What book?"

"Thunstone destroyed it — burned it —"

"Oh, please!" begged the doctor good-naturedly. "You're talking about John Thunstone, you know! There isn't any book, there never was a book. You need a rest, I tell you. Come along."

Thorne howled like a beast and clutched at his tormentor. The doctor moved smoothly out of reach.

"Bring him out to the car," said the doctor to the two men in white coats.

At once they slid in to close quarters, each clutching one of Thorne's arms. He snarled and struggled, but the men, with practiced skill, clamped and twisted his wrists. Subdued, he walked out between them because he must.

Thunstone and the Countess Montesecco were having cocktails at their favorite rear table in a Forty-seventh Street restaurant. They were known and liked there, and not even a waiter would disturb them unless signaled for.

"Tell me," said the countess, "what sort of fantastic danger were you tackling last night?"

"I was in no danger," John Thunstone smiled.

"But I know you were. I went to the concert, and then the reception, but all the time I had the most overpowering sense of your struggle and peril. I was wearing the cross you gave me, and I held it in my hand and prayed for you — prayed hour after hour —"

"That," said Thunstone, "was why I was in no danger."



John Thunstone's Inheritance

IT WAS NOT A first-rate hotel, not even for that section of Manhattan, but Sabine Loel's drawing room on the seventh floor was handsomely kept and softly lighted. Sabine Loel herself was worth looking at twice, a tall, mature woman of a figure both opulent and graceful. She had splendid black eyes and slim white hands that half-concealed themselves in the wide sleeves of her black gown. Her dark hair, brindled with one lock of white, she wore combed well back from her almost Grecian face, and her mouth, though sullen, was curved and warm.

"Mr. Thunstone," she greeted her caller, with a formality that half sneered. "Won't you sit down? I hope this is going to be a friendly visit — last time we met you were downright unpleasant about my approach to occultism. You did say, however," and she smiled slightly, "that I was attractive."

Thunstone sat down across the writing desk from her. He was larger for a man than she for a woman, with a thoughtful rectangular face and a short, neat moustache black enough for an Arab. His deep-set bright eyes did not flicker under her searching gaze.

"You're entirely too attractive," he assented deeply, "especially as you have potentialities for danger, in your unusual attitudes toward, and studies of, the supernatural. However, I'm here on business."

"Business?" she echoed, and her eyes glowed as his big left hand thrust itself into the inside pocket of his jacket, where his wallet would be.

But he brought out a document instead, something legal-looking in a blue folder, so creased and doubled as to exhibit one typewritten paragraph. He passed it to Sabine Loel, who leaned back to let light fall upon it:

...and to John Thunstone, the character and success of whose investigations into psychic matters I have observed with interest. I do hereby bequeath my house known as Bertram Dower, situated one mile north of the town of Darrington, county of...

"I know about Bertram Dower House," said Sabine Loel. "What student of the occult hasn't heard of it? Conan Doyle said the atmosphere alone proved the existence of spirit forces; and John Mulholland isn't all skeptic when he talks about it. The house belonged to old James Garrett who wouldn't let anyone enter. And there's that story of hidden treasure — " She broke off, and licked her full, curved lips with a tiny pointed tongue. "What's this on the margin? The bit, written in ink?"

"Apparently it's for me," said Thunstone, "but it's cryptic. Something to the effect of 'Call him twice, and the third time he comes uncalled.' Read on."

Stretching his long arm across the desk, he turned the folded will and showed another passage:

...with the understanding that the said John Thunstone shall institute a serious and complete study of the phenomena which have excited so much discussion...

When Sabine Loel had finished, Thunstone took the document back and restored it to his pocket.

"I'm in honor bound to study the place, even if I weren't eager to do so. But Garrett was deceived in one particular — I'm not psychic, not a medium. You are. I want you to come with me."

She did not reply at once. Finally: "I didn't know you knew James Garrett, Mr. Thunstone."

"I didn't. I knew only about his place, and the strange stories. He seems to know me only by my flattering reputation. But that's beside the point. Will you come?"

She smiled, with a great deal of maddening mystery. "Why not ask your friend the Frenchman — Jules de Grandin? You and he are very close. Are you surprised to learn that I keep some watch on your movements?"

He answered her questions in order. "I invited de Grandin, but he and Dr. Trowbridge have all they can do in that line just now. No, I'm not so much surprised as warned."

Still she temporized. "Once you suggested, in public, that I was dishonest in claiming to communicate with the spirit world."

"Yet you have the power to communicate, and to do honest business when you wish. If a broker sells spurious stock, can't he change and sell honest shares? I've kept track of you, too. I venture to say that you need money now, this minute."

Again he put his hand into his inside pocket.

This time he brought forth a note-case, from which he took several bills. She accepted them gravely but readily, folded them small between her slender, white fingers.

"When do we start?" she asked.

"Let's have an early tea, then I'll fetch my car around. There's a storm threatening, but we can reach Darrington before it breaks."

"I'll get my wraps," she said.

It was twilight when they passed through the little town of Darrington. Thunstone, who had a marked bit of road map to guide him drove up a steep, winding stretch of concrete where he had to put his car into second gear. Trees, their winter-stripped branches making strange traceries against the last pallor of light in the sky, crowded thickly at each brink of the pavement. Almost at the top of the slope, he turned off upon a very rough and narrow dirt road, which brought them at last to Bertram Dower. The house was a tall, sturdy-looking structure, almost like a fort. As they rolled into the yard, sleet began to fall.

"I trust," said Sabine Loel in a murmurous, mocking voice, "that you came prepared with wolfbane and holy water."

"Wolfbane's out of season," replied Thunstone, and made the car creep into a tumbledown shed at the rear of the house. "And I'm no priest, so I bring no holy things. Aren't there other ways of confronting the supernatural?" Shutting off the engine, he turned on the inner lights. Sabine Loel's face, a frosty white oval among dark furs, turned sidewise to him.

"This inheritance of yours — " she began, and then broke off. "Shall I help you with your packages?"

"If you like." He handed her two wrapped bottles. He himself took a much larger parcel, slid out of the car and held the door open for her. Then he snapped off the lights. In unfamiliar gloom they walked slowly around the big house to the roofless porch. Thunstone produced a key, and the lock whined protestingly at its turning. They entered thick darkness.

"What's that white thing?" gasped Sabine Loel, suddenly cowering back.

"A chair in a muslin cover," Thunstone reassured her, and groped his way to a table where he set down his package. Peering about, he made out a fireplace almost directly opposite. Crossing to it, he felt for and discovered logs and kindling. Rapidly he made a fire. It burned small for a moment, then strong and bright. The sleet began to rattle at the windows like hard, insistent little fingertips demanding admittance.

The fire showed them a spacious room, occupying the whole width of the house's front. A door stood open at the rear, and to one side mounted a staircase. All was paneled in dark wood, and bookcases loomed bare, while the furniture was swaddled against dust.

To Thunstone's mind came, all unbidden, the lines of the ancient *Lyke-Wake Song*:

*This æ nighte, this æ nighte,
Every nighte and alle,*

Fire and sleete...

The fire was doing well now, shedding its first cheerful heat. Sabine Loel moved gratefully toward it. The redness made her pallor seem more healthy. "I wonder where the treasure is," she ventured.

"Nobody seems to know about it, not even whether it exists or not," returned Thunstone. "The story is that some Revolutionary War looter hid it — a bad character, to judge from the implication of ghosts around it." From his parcel he dug a fat coach-candle and held a match to it. He set it in its own wax at the edge of the table.

*...Fire and sleete and candle-lighte,
And Christe receive thy saule.*

He had no desire to give up his soul this night, or for many nights to come; but the memory of the quaint old lines might be a good omen. Bishop Peter Binfel's witch-history, he reflected, points out that holy names are protection against ill magic.

"This is going to be cozy," said Sabine Loel, and dropped into the muslin-covered chair that had startled her. "Are you worrying? Remember old beliefs and stories?" And she laughed, as if in triumph that she had half-read his mind.

He smiled back at her, without any pique, and opened his package further. There were more candles, some paper napkins, sandwiches in oiled paper, fruit, and two glasses. Unwrapping one of the bottles, he skillfully forced its cork and poured out red wine.

"Supper?" he suggested, and Sabine Loel made a gay gesture of applause. He uncovered two straight chairs and held one for her as she came to the table.

But she paused, in the very act of sitting down, paused with her knees half bent and her head lifted. It was as though she had frozen in mid-motion.

"Th-there!" she wailed. "At the door!"

Thunstone could not see what she was talking about, for the candle glared in his eyes. He moved, lightning swift for all his size, around the table and to the door beyond — the inner door, that stood open to the rear of the house. All was black there, save for the wash of light that beat dimly past him.

"Don't leave me here alone," Sabine Loel was pleading, and he strode quickly back to the table, but only to seize and light another candle. Holding it high, he pushed into the rearward room. It was huge, musty, full of furniture. He saw another door, closed. As he touched the knob, he started. Something was moving softly up behind him.

"I was afraid to stay there by myself," Sabine Loel breathed in his ear. "Can't I come along?"

"Come," he granted shortly. He peered through the door he had opened. "Here's the kitchen, evidently. And there, to the right, a pantry. Now, then, for upstairs. Are you game?"

"I haven't told you yet," she half-chattered, "what it was I saw."

"No, I've not given you much time. Was it something human?"

"Yes. That is, it stood erect, as tall as a man, with a head and a long body." They had walked back into the front room together. "But it wasn't flesh. It was all misty, and I didn't see any limbs or features." She gulped and shivered.

"Well, it wasn't in the back of the house. Not downstairs, anyway. You want to come up?" And Thunstone started for the staircase.

She almost ran to keep up with him. "What if you meet it?"

"Come along and see." His feet were heavy but confident on the stairs. He held aloft the candle to illuminate a little cell of an upper hallway, from which opened several rooms.

"This," he pronounced, gazing into the first, "is a bedroom. Look at that fine old walnut bureau. This next one is a bathroom. Fixtures archaic, but serviceable. Another bedroom here — and another. That's all. No phenomena to greet us. At least none that shows itself."

Sleet bombarded the slopes of the roof as they turned back down the stairs.

"You didn't pry too closely," observed Sabine Loel, and her voice was steady enough now. "Afraid of finding something?"

He shook his dark head. "If anything is afraid, it's whatever you saw. If you saw it."

In silence they descended. Thunstone poked the fire-logs with a long, heavy poker of wrought iron, and up sprang sparks and banners of flame. Again they went to the table, and this time there was no interruption. Sabine Loel took her seat facing the inner door, and Thunstone's broad back turned toward that dark rectangle, almost within clutching distance of it. He could not deny a feeling of apprehension, but his big hand was steady as it lifted his wine glass.

"A toast," said Sabine Loel, lifting hers in turn, and at least she spilled none. "I drink to — realities!"

"To realities," repeated Thunstone. "Sometimes they are stranger than fancies."

They drank, and Sabine Loel laughed quietly over the rim of her glass. But her shining eyes were fixed on the darkness behind her companion. He pretended not to notice.

When they had finished eating, and had emptied one of the bottles of wine, both returned to the fireplace. "It seems to be smoking," pointed out

Sabine Loel.

"Perhaps the chimney's clogged." Thunstone again took the iron poker, and probed exploringly upward. A shower of soot descended, and he jumped quickly back to keep from being soiled. Not so Sabine Loel, who cried out in excitement, and snatched up something else that had fallen down, from a ledge within the fireplace.

"A little box — the treasure!" she exulted. "No, it's a book. A ledger, tied shut with cord, and dirty."

With a quick pull she broke the cord and opened the book. "Look, here on the first page. The name of James Garrett, and some sort of warning: 'This book is for my eyes alone.'" She turned a page. "Don't tell me that he was a psychical investigator, too!"

"Give it to me, please," said John Thunstone.

"I want to look through it," she demurred.

"Give it to me," he repeated. "I'm owner of this house, and it's best that I examine documents." He took it from her hand, not roughly, but without waiting for her to offer it. She stared, with a sort of bright hardness, and wiped her sooty fingers on a paper napkin.

"Will you pardon me?" asked Thunstone. He drew an armchair close to the fire. By its light he began to read the slovenly handwriting. What James Garrett had written began very ponderously:

I had best enter my thoughts and findings on paper. If this is not a record to impress others, it will at least give me calmness in the writing, perhaps strengthen me against follies of imagination.

They do me wrong who say I want to practice evil enchantments. It is only that I bought this old house, with its weird reputation; haunted, the countryside calls it, and haunted I believe it to be. It is also true that there is a hidden treasure in the cellar — a treasure that I will never let my kinsmen hunt for in their turn.

Thunstone's eyes widened a trifle. "That's why he left the place to me," he said aloud.

"May I take more wine," asked Sabine Loel, at the table. He nodded, and read on:

I have dug deep and its guard must know that I am close at hand. The least touch of my pick or spade brings him to drive me away. For I called him twice out of curiosity, and the third time...

Sabine Loel screamed loudly and wildly, and dropped her wine glass to shatter on the floor.

Thunstone had been leaning back in his chair, as relaxed and comfortable in seeming as a cat. But, like a cat, he was up and out of the chair

before one could well follow his movement. The book spun out of his lap and fell on the hearth. His hand caught up the heavy poker and brought it along.

Sabine Loel faced toward the staircase. She did not turn toward him as he came to her side, but kept her eyes fixed on the darkness at the top. "It started to come down," she whispered hoarsely, and choked on the rest.

Thunstone seized one of the candles and went up the stairs again, two and three at a time. Sabine Loel remained by the table, leaning upon it with one slim, pale hand, her face a mask of expectant terror.

As Thunstone mounted into the upper hall he lifted his candle high, but for the moment it was as if the darkness muffled and enclosed that quivering little blade of light. He had to strain his eyes to see, though he had seen well enough the first time up. In spite of his steady native courage, he hesitated for ever so little. He forced himself to enter the nearest bedroom.

As he crossed the threshold, he thought that something crept to face him; but it was only a shadow, jumping as his candle-flame moved. All else was quiet in the close, cold air. He thought of a creepy witticism in a novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald: "If there's a ghost in the room, it's nearly always under the bed." That was the sense, if not the actual wording. Thunstone wished that all men were here who joked about supernatural dangers. Stooping, he thrust his poker under the bed. Something stirred — a cloud of dust.

Sneezing, he went to the other rooms in turn. Nothing moved in them but shadows, nothing spoke but the sleet on windows and roof. Yet, as he descended the steps once more, he felt weary.

Sabine Loel stood exactly as he had left her. She questioned him with her midnight eyes, and he shook his head. "I found nothing," he told her.

She smiled back, ruefully. "You must forgive me, Mr. Thunstone. I came here expecting things, I'm not sure just what. I may be mistaken in what I seem to see. But you did say that you believe in my psychic powers."

"I do believe in them," he assured her. "You haven't always used them wisely or honorably, but you have them."

He laid the poker on the table and stuck his candle beside its fellow. Then he went back to the fire. As he came close to the hearth, he stifled an exclamation.

The book in which James Garrett had written his secrets of treasure and terror was ablaze in the fire.

"How did that happen?" he cried, and quickly dragged it out with the toe of his shoe. Too late, he saw at once. The thing was consumed beyond restoration.

"What's the matter?" he heard Sabine Loel asking, but he was too busy to reply. Kneeling, he slapped out the fire in the book. Only a few bits of

the inner leaves remained uncharred. He put together two of them, then a third, like bits of a puzzle. Part of a sentence became legible:

...terialized, it can do harm; but materialized, it can also be harmed itself...

He turned toward the hearth to look for more remains. As he did so, something seemed to explode in his head, and lightning and thunder filled the room. He collapsed forward, and did not see, hear or feel.

His wits returned slowly and cautiously, as to a place both dangerous and unfamiliar. The back of his head housed a red-hot throbbing, and his nose pressed against the warm stone of the hearth. He knew that he lay on the floor, face down, but for the moment he could not move, not even for the sense of peril hovering over him.

"Who hit me?" he mumbled thickly.

Sabine Loel did not answer, and he made shift to rise to his hands and one knee, shaking his head to clear it, like a groggy boxer. The dim room, distorted to his vision, was empty of her. As he straightened his body, something slid along it and fell with a startling clang — the stout iron poker, that had been lying across his back. Getting shakily to his feet, he shook his head again. It still hurt, but his strength was flowing back into him.

Sabine Loel's fur coat still hung draped across the back of the chair in which she had sat to eat and drink. One of the candles was gone from where it had stuck in its own wax. Thunstone tottered to the table, clutched it, and bent and gazed at the floor. A blob of candle-grease stuck to the planks, midway to the open door that led to the silent back of the house.

Thunstone shakily put out his big hand for the other candle, then thought better of it. The weakness was leaving his knees. After a moment he moved again, and this time with the strange, wise silence that his big but capable body could achieve. There was little light in the room to the rear, but enough for him to see that the kitchen door now stood open. He groped his way through it.

A great section of the kitchen floor had been lifted up and back, like a trap door. From beneath beat up a feeble, pale radiance. Thunstone settled on one knee at the edge of the open hole and peered down.

The cellar of Bertram Dower House was simply a great squared hole in the hard earth, walled by uncemented banks of rough soil. Crude, solid stairs, almost as steep as a ladder, led downward fully twelve feet. Thunstone lowered his still aching head until he could see well below the level of the floor, and gazed downward, in the direction of the front of the house.

From that direction blazed the light, the big candle that had been taken from the table. It was now stuck upon a rock or clod of earth on the cellar floor, and shed its yellow light into a cavelike hole in the frontward bank.

Here stooped a human figure in a dark gown, toiling with a spade. Thunstone caught a momentary glimpse of the pale face, stamped with an almost murderous determination — the digger was Sabine Loel.

She knelt as he watched, and thrust one hand into the loosened soil. For the space of a breath she groped, then voiced a little cry of triumph. She lifted a palmful of gleaming stuff, yellower and brighter than the candle-light. It was gold.

Again she took up the spade and began delving, swiftly but shakily. Her head and shoulders pushed themselves deeply into the little cavern, just below a pair of graying lumps on the lips of the bank. Thunstone, straining his eyes, could not decide what those lumps were.

But he saw them stir.

He bent lower, lying at full length on the floor. The candlewick in the cellar sent up a momentary flare of strong bluish light. It showed him that whole part of the cellar in brief radiance, and he identified the grayish objects.

They were a head and a hand, strangely shaped and indistinct but unmistakable. And they were moving, slowly and stealthily.

Thunstone's lips opened, but no sound came out. The smaller lump, the hand, crawled deliberately over the lip of the bank and down the face of earth, above Sabine Loel's stooped, straining shoulders. It was somehow only half-formed, a rounded cobble of some foggy substance, and its arm was reed-thin and jointless. The effect was of a strange gray spider with thick, short legs, descending on a preternaturally stout strand of web. The hand opened, the fingers quivered, like the spider-limbs clutching for prey.

They touched Sabine Loel's neck. And she looked up, and shrieked with a wild, trapped terror.

John Thunstone rolled himself into the opening, his hands holding the brink to break his fall. He spun in the air, dropped several feet and landed upright on soggy earth.

His nostrils suddenly filled with a damp mouldy smell, and the shock of his heavy descent made the blue candle-flame quiver. All these little details he noted, even as he rushed.

The rest of what had been on the dark bank above Sabine was coming down. It flowed swiftly and unsubstantially, like a heavy cloud of greasy-gray vapor settling through lighter atmosphere. Beneath it, Sabine Loel was collapsing, but whether in a faint or under the weight of the thing Thunstone could not take time to decide. Three plunging leaps took him across the earthy floor.

The creature faced him, rising to his own height, and higher.

It was like a grotesque body moulded of thick, opaque steam or smoke, its substance churning and whirling within strange, sharp confines. Its head,

set on top without benefit of neck or shoulders, looked to be without a cranium as well — it had great, gross lips and jaws, and pointed bat-ears jutted from it, but there were no eyes or brow that he could see. Hands, at the ends of scrawny, jointless arms, lifted toward him, as though they were trying to fumble at his throat. Thunstone had a sense as at the presence of an unthinkable, revolting foulness; but he did not retreat or falter. His big right fist sped straight at the head-blob.

No impact, only a swirling and sucking inward of the vapors. The whole body-form drifted backward, like smoke before the swing of a fan. It hung like a smudge against the bank, and there he saw that it thickened, immediately and considerably, to a slimy wetness. It was no more like moulded vapor, but like a dank daub upon the earthen face, a foul stagnant pool set upon on end. And it moved back toward him.

Its hands came up gropingly as before, to the level of his face.

He felt a moist flick, as if wind had blown a bit of stinking spray upon his cheek. Despite all his determination, he broke ground before the advancing filthiness. As he did so, he almost stumbled backward over the crumpled form of Sabine Loel. Stooping quickly, he scooped her up under one arm and dragged her back with him toward the ladderlike stairs. His eyes did not falter from the presence that slowly pursued.

It had changed yet again. Now it was no longer liquid, but solid.

Still it presented the ungainly gargoyle outline it had first shown, degenerate head upon misshapen body, with gross hands upon reed-like arms. But it had gained substance, as much substance as John Thunstone's own big frame had. Details were now sickeningly clear. Its loose slab lips twitched and gaped open, showing a toothless mouth full of the blackest shadow. Its big hands hooked their fingers like grapnels. They bore claws at their tips, claws as black as crystallized vegetable decay.

To his wire-tense mind came a sudden blessed memory, the memory of that surviving scrap of James Garrett's burned ledger:

...materialized, it can do harm, but, materialized, it can also be harmed itself..

He let go of the slack form of Sabine Loel, and as she sank to the earthen floor, still swooning, he stepped in front of her. Had her eyes been open, she would have seen Thunstone's face grow suddenly bright and purposeful, his lips drawn taut beneath his dark moustache. His wide shoulders hunched themselves, as if power greatened within him. For a third time he set himself in the way of the entity's advance.

Yet again the hands stole toward him. His left arm was extended, pugilist fashion, and the hands found it and closed upon it. He felt those claws of hard rock as they pierced his coat-sleeve, but he did not try to pull or struggle loose. Shifting his stance, he drove his right arm with all the strength

he could put back of it, powerfully and scientifically, at that working, grimacing mouth.

His knuckles pulped the blub lips over something hard — the thing must have teeth after all, chalk-textured rather than bony. The witless-looking head snapped back from his blow like a batted ball, carrying with it the body, the arms, the hands. Cloth ripped as the talons tore from their hold on Thunstone's sleeve, and with his freed left fist Thunstone sped a long, clean jab. From somewhere a moan drifted up, the thing could feel pain. Thunstone stepped in, crouching low. The talons, missing a grab at his neck, scrabbled clumsily in his disordered dark hair. He dug his right fist, then his left, into the spongy-seeming middle of the body. Then his right fist cut upward to where normal beings have a chin.

There was a sudden floundering fall before him, and there rose at him two flourishing, kicking extremities that he could not call feet.

He launched a kick himself, and wondered half-foolishly if the torso he struck had ribs to break. Again he kicked and shoved, and the misshapen form tried to roll clear, to get up. He kept after it, hooking a toe behind a hand on which it was rising and dragging it into another sprawl. A third kick hefted its slack, squirming weight bodily into the hollowed-out cavern where Sabine Loel had toiled.

There his enemy seemed to recover itself. Shrinking clear of him, it struggled to rise. But Thunstone had caught up the fallen spade and poised it for a downward sweep.

Though there were no eyes or excuses for eyes in that gray face, the creature knew danger and cowered back. Candlelight, strongest here, showed it suddenly wet like filthy snow in the sun — it was dissolving into flowing liquid again, hoping to trickle away to escape, reorganization, new attack.

Thunstone struck with his shovel, not into the hole but above it.

A shower of clods fell from the walls and roof of the depression, momentarily overwhelming the form inside. It was already half-melted into dampness, and into that dampness fell earth and muck, mingling and disorganizing. Thunstone struck again and again at the earth above and around it, piling shovelfuls of clods as into a grave.

"What — what —"

It was the voice of Sabine Loel. The noise of the struggle must have roused her. She was on her feet, moving close. Her pale, handsome face showed no terror, only mystification and some embarrassment. Plainly she only half remembered what had frightened her, literally, out of her wits.

Thunstone paid no attention, but hurled still more earth into the cave, and more. Some black dampness seeped through for a moment, and he flung a fresh spadeful upon it. Then he paused.

"Let it finish its change now," he said, when he caught his breath. "Even if it's vapor again, this dirt will confine it tonight. Tomorrow I'll be back

with workmen and cement mixers. This cellar shall be filled to the brim with concrete-marked with protecting symbols — ”

Sabine Loel was at his side. Now she was remembering. Her eyes flickered in horror. She held out a trembling right hand, in which she still clutched half a dozen broad pieces of gold.

“I found these — ” she began.

Roughly, Thunstone snatched them from her and flung them into the pit. He shoveled more dirt upon them. She cried out in protest, a hand at her brow from which sprouted the waving gray lock of hair.

“You can testify now to the meaning of tainted money,” Thunstone told her flatly. “The treasure and its guardian seem to go together. It threatened James Garrett, it threatens us. Some would be trite and call the gold accursed. I call it unprofitable.” Once again he threw in earth. “Let the thing stay shut up here, and its gold with it.”

“But there’s a fortune,” protested Sabine Loel frantically. “I’d touched only the top. There’s enough to — ”

“It was left to me, by the will of James Garrett.” Thunstone toiled on without easing. “I half-guessed that something like this would happen. You, with your power and your deceit, were exactly what was needed to tempt the thing forth, so that it could be defeated and hereafter kept out of reckoning. As I construct it, you read James Garrett’s ledger while I was upstairs alone.”

“Why,” she stammered in confusion, “why — ”

He smiled as he dug his spade into fresh earth. “I’ll hazard a guess. I’d paid you to hunt spirits, so you began by pretending — only pretending — to see something as we sat down to eat.”

She did not deny it, but lowered her head. “That was only mischief on your part,” he went on. “Then, when I found the book in the chimney, you pretended again to see something on the stairs. That was to start me on another chase, so that you’d have a chance to read. You quickly skimmed through what Garrett had written about where the treasure was to be dug for. To keep me from seeing it too, you threw the book into the fire. Isn’t that true?”

Still she kept guilty silence. Thunstone smiled more broadly, completely without malice.

“And you hit me on the head with the poker, eh? Thought to get the money while I lay unconscious. But I woke up sooner than you thought, just in time to save you from what you had summoned.”

“I!” she cried, finding her voice at last. “I summoned it!”

“You were too greedy to remember what James Garrett wrote in his book, and on the margin of the copy of the will sent to me. ‘Call him twice, and the third time he comes uncalled.’ That’s exactly what you did. Twice you pretended to see something terrible, to deceive me. The third

time, there was no deception. The guardian of the treasure rose to deal with you."

Sabine Loel's face was white, but calm. "Listen," she pleaded. "Be sensible. There is too much money here to let lie."

"No," he replied, "there is not too much money here to let lie." Stooping, he gazed at his heap of earth. Above it hung a swirl of grayish vapor, no larger than the upward waft of a cigarette's smoke. He patted the place with the bottom of the spade, and the vapor vanished.

"We could both be rich," Sabine Loel persisted. "We can come and dig tomorrow, by daylight. We could bring crucifixes, priests, any protection you want."

"We'll never dig for it," he said.

"We must," she fairly sobbed. Her white hand caught his sleeve, the same sleeve that had been torn by filthy talons. "Listen, I say. You admit I'm attractive — well, I'll be yours. I'll spend my life making you happy beyond any dream. I can do that. You'll have both the gold and me."

He did not answer, did not even look at her.

She brought her beautiful white mask of a face close to his, fixing his eyes with hers. "Am I so easy for a man to refuse?" she murmured softly.

"No," said John Thunstone honestly. "You are by no means easy for a man to refuse. But I refuse you. I'll fill this hole tonight. Tomorrow it'll be sealed so that only dynamite will ever open it. Of course, if you feel that you can't live without the treasure, I'll go away now. You may remain alone, with the spade and the candle, and dig up everything I've buried."

Sabine Loel drew back, and bowed her head again. This time she was accepting defeat.

John Thunstone resumed his shoveling.



Sorcery from Thule

Jon. *You tremble with Arctic cold?*

Thorwald. *With Arctic fear.*

— Pog Abrosto, *The Baresarks*

(Trans. by Leon Minshall)

JOHN THUNSTONE'S DINNER GUEST was not the most remarkable person he had ever entertained in public, but almost. John Thunstone introduced him to the Countess Monteseco, to Verna Hesseldine and to the head waiter of Whiteside's as Mr. Ipsu, and Mr. Ipsu acknowledged all courtesies in a quiet voice, with an accent not immediately classifiable, even in Times Square. He was of medium height and slender build, so that he seemed a child beside the massive Thunstone. His dinner clothes had surely been tailored in Europe. His face was square and pleasant and the color of a well-roasted fowl, so that his white teeth seemed whiter by contrast. His narrow, bright-black eyes had an almost hypnotic directness. One decided that he might be Levantine, or Polynesian, or Punjabi; then decided that he was none of the three.

They had a cocktail before dinner, at a table not too far from the music, and Mr. Ipsu dispelled the mystery. "By vocation I am a sort of religious leader," he told the ladies. "By inclination, I am a student. By race, I am an Eskimo."

"The first I ever met," announced Verna Hesseldine, who had met most classes and peoples apt to turn up at Whiteside's. "Do you like New York, Mr. Ipsu?"

The black eyes and the white teeth smiled. Ipsu looked at Thunstone, who was telling the waiter how he wanted the soup seasoned, then at the Countess, and back at Miss Hesseldine. "Ask me that in thirty years. I don't know now."

"You never dreamed of such a place in Greenland," she suggested.

"No, though I've not lived always in Greenland. I attended the university at Copenhagen, and studied later at Stockholm and Edinburgh. I've acted in two motion pictures, and lectured to women's clubs in Los Angeles and in Montreal and Chicago. All this as part of the study of the world that I felt a good *angekok* should make."

"*Angekok*," repeated the Countess uncertainly. Mr. Ipsu smiled. "Ev-

ery Eskimo community has an *angekok*, and white explorers call him a magician, a medicine man, a priest, a soothsayer, a four-flusher — a variety of things." The smile became apologetic. "I can't translate the term myself. But *angekoks* are necessary. Arctic life is so hard as to be almost impossible, yet Eskimos have lived and flourished and developed their own culture since the beginning of time. I venture to say that we *angekoks* help to make their lives livable."

"How?" asked Miss Hesseldine. "Magic?" She turned to Thunstone. "John, I know you study and do amazing things, but do you believe —"

"Dear lady," broke in Ipsu gently, "I claim nothing, I only wonder and work. My people must have guidance in hunting, in travel, in a hundred labors and adventures against the cold and the snow. They ask me what happens ten days' journey away, or a week in the future, and I try to oblige. I turn out right more often than not. Or there is sickness or peril. I enter the *quaggi* — the singing house, you might call it, though we do more there than sing. I do and say and think certain formulas. Perhaps I succeed."

A little silence. The waiter brought hors d'oeuvres.

"Excuse me if I say the wrong thing," ventured Verna Hesseldine, "but how can an educated and traveled man seriously say —"

She paused, and Mr. Ipsu smiled again.

"Dear lady, I was bred and seasoned in my faith, as you in yours. The nature of reality is my whole goal of search, and I have only begun. On the shores of the ocean of knowledge, I gather a few pebbles, but they have substance and shape and reality."

"You must be a worthwhile person, Mr. Ipsu," said Miss Hesseldine. "John here studies magic and the supernatural, and he wouldn't consort with you if you were a bad — what is the word again? — if you were a bad *angekok*."

"Oh," and he took some spiced sausage, "the very term *angekok* means good magic. If we fail to do good, it's only because we bungle. Bad magic," and he grew somber, "is the province of the *issintoks*."

"Are they powerful, as the *angekoks* are?" asked the Countess.

"They are powerful in a different way. They consort with bad spirits — even Sedna, who rules the Night Land. They turn themselves into strange, unpleasant animals. They kill from a distance, by words I would never, never say."

Then he smiled and made a deprecatory gesture. "But this is boresome, ladies. I speak of savage superstitions, and of my stupid, clumsy self. I am ashamed to show such poor manners."

"Oh, we want to hear," protested both women, but Ipsu shook his gleaming black head.

"That you consent to sit with me is more than honor enough. I come from a stone-age people. The things I speak about are too ridiculous to

interest you. Please," he said to John Thunstone, "ask them to forgive me."

Verna Hesseldine coughed. "If I've offended you, I'm sorry."

"Offend me?" repeated Ipsu. "I would not presume to be offended. I know that I have fatigued you with my drivel about Eskimo myths."

Thunstone understood. Ipsu, like all well-bred Eskimo gentlemen, was being formally modest and abasing himself. He had been taught that conceit was worse than torture or death. Thunstone tried to approach the little crisis.

"Ipsu," he said, "I haven't been to your country, but I've read the books — Freuchen, Dr. Kane, and the others — who went there and who had the sense to observe your customs. Remember that you're in my land now. Do as the Romans do."

Ipsu brightened. "If you truly want to hear —"

"We do." Verna Hesseldine assured him eagerly. "Tell us about the *issintoks*, the evil sorcerers."

"This far from where they work, I may speak," began Ipsu, and once again broke off.

His mouth hung open, then closed with a sudden grinding of teeth. His eyes started, his hand flew to the front of his dinner jacket and came away with blood on the fingers.

"You're hurt?" cried the Countess.

Thunstone was on his feet. The waiter hurried forward, goggling.

"Accident," said Thunstone. "Where may I take my friend?"

The waiter led him to the lounge. Ipsu staggered as he tried to follow, and Thunstone lifted him like a kitten, hurrying him along. Laying Ipsu on a couch, he pulled open the coat and shirt.

Ipsu's brown skin was gashed, just to the left of the breastbone. Recovering a bit, he studied the place. "There *is* one here," he said shakily. "John, that was done by —"

The manager of Whiteside's was telephoning for a doctor. Thunstone took a clean napkin from the waiter, and wadded it into a compress.

"By rights," said Ipsu, "I should be dead. Look in my waistcoat pocket, on the left side."

Thunstone drew a flat cigarette case of silver from Ipsu's pocket. At its center appeared a jagged hole, as if a hard, rough point had been jammed through it. Ipsu studied it.

"The *issintok* spear." His voice had grown stronger "Driven for the heart, but blocked away. Isn't your temperate-zone magic full of references to silver as a protection? Please ask the ladies to excuse us. I was wrong to be coy. I must tell you much about *angekok* and *issintok* and the battle between them — battle which now opens on the New York front."

When the doctor came, he spoke about slight flesh wounds and ner-

vous shocks, and went away puzzled. Later, lying on the cot in his little hotel room, Ipsu talked.

"I need not persuade you how well enchantments work, John. An *angekok* might use the spell to kill remote game for his hungry brothers, but an *issintok* uses it against human enemies. It calls for preparation by fasting and chanting, then prayer to spirits of good or evil, according to the good or evil of the wish. Finally, rushing to the door of the *quaggi*, you strike out into the night with a certain spear, of peculiar name and history. It comes back covered with hot blood. The stricken beast or man is later found stabbed to the heart, unless, of course — " He picked up the damaged silver case, and regarded it gratefully.

"Why should it be less possible than radio devices that show the position of a far-off ship, which is then smashed by shells fired from beyond the horizon?" said Thunstone. "But who, Ipsu? Who would want to kill you, and who would know how?"

"The only *issintok* whom I ever challenged," said Ipsu slowly, "lived far north of Etah in Greenland. He and I had a contest of magic. It would have interested you, I think. When he was shown to be the weaker for that time, his followers turned on him and drove him from the tribe... Wait!" Ipsu sat up. "He is an exile. Perhaps far from Greenland. He, too, had studied among civilized peoples — can it be that he has come here?"

"What was his name? Would the police be interested?"

"His name was Kumak. If he continued as he began, police would want him badly. But do me a favor by leaving this to me."

Thunstone bowed his head in agreement. Ipsu swung his feet to the floor and slid them into shoes. He buttoned a fresh shirt over his bandaged chest. "Kumak," he said again. "He knew how to find me, and I shall know how to find him." He pointed to the corner of the room. "My side is sore. Will you lift the small suitcase to the bureau-top? And open it?"

It was done. Ipsu took from the suitcase a small roundish parcel, the size of his fist. Carefully he unwrapped it and revealed a pitted stone, like a lump of slag from a furnace, then laid it carefully on a table.

Thunstone stooped to examine. "Meteorite."

"Do not touch it. A *tornaq* — a rock — spirit lives there."

"I've read of the belief. Aren't the strongest of the *tornait* in big boulders?"

"Those with small homes may be the shrewder because of their smallness," replied Ipsu sententiously. He took something else from his case, a carved bone that Thunstone could not identify as being either human or from any animal he knew. This Ipsu laid beside the meteorite, and looked at Thunstone.

"If you stay to listen, please do not move or speak. Sit yonder in the corner." Ipsu dropped into a chair before the table, and drew his feet up

under him, Eskimo fashion. Softly he began to sing, a minor tune reminiscent of old, old Chinese flute-music:

"Amna-aya! Amna-aya!"

Thunstone, watching from where he sat, saw a shadowy movement. The little meteorite had stirred, was sliding or turning. It rolled slowly over, as if impelled by an invisible lever. It joggled the bone toward Ipsu's hand, and he took it up.

"The *tornaq* empowers the bone," he said to Thunstone. "It will guide me. If you wish to come —"

Thunstone's car was parked outside. As they drove, Ipsu held the bone between his brown palms, and it twitched once or twice, like the willow rod with which dowsers claim to find hidden water or gold. They drove across town. "*Ja mua*," muttered Ipsu. "Turn to the right." Several blocks toward Lower Manhattan, and: *Ana* — right again. The little brown shop front there ahead. *Obaba* — stop!"

On the door was a sign proclaiming the building to be a zoological laboratory. They entered a dim, old-fashioned room like a shop, where a gray-haired man in a smock was wrapping up something. The customer who waited was as brown as Ipsu, but heavy and coarse-featured. To Thunstone he looked somehow like unfinished handiwork. Whatever creator had fashioned him should have spent another hour or so at it...

"Kumak," Ipsu greeted softly, and the fat face turned toward them. Slant, narrow eyes glowed in recognition.

"You know me, Ipsu," ventured the man, bowing jerkily. "I am flattered that a decent person speaks to me."

Ipsu, too, bowed, like a mandarin. "It is you, Kumak, who lower yourself by recognizing me." His eyes were calculating. "You have been living in New York? You are a friend of New Yorkers?"

"Oh," protested Kumak, "nobody notices me. I am so ugly and low that no sensible man would give me his attention. You are the first to grant me a word in many days."

Kumak's eyes shifted to Thunstone. Ipsu made a gesture of introduction. "My friend, though I am not worthy to call him that. John Thunstone."

"You have named him only to make a fool of me," complained Kumak, fidgeting. "I am so stupid and poorly brought up that I have never learned to speak. I am contemptible before this great American." He studied Thunstone more closely, as if wondering where a weapon might strike. The man in the smock offered the package, and Kumak gave him money.

"Where do you live, Kumak?" asked Ipsu.

Kumak shook his head. "You know I do not dare tell a great *angekok* my wretched dwelling. It is the filthiest and most uncomfortable room in New York. Even to speak the address would be to give offense." Kumak bowed once more, and shuffled out.

Thunstone had listened in utter fascination. This was Eskimo formality, the ritualistic humility that constituted polite discourse in the Arctic wilds. If it was ever so slightly more extravagant than usual, that meant that the two were being extra alert, extra cautious of each other. Ipsu was staring after Kumak. Thunstone turned to the proprietor.

"What did he buy from you?"

The man stared, a little hostile, and from his pocket Thunstone drew a small shiny badge.

"Police?" asked the man.

"Of a sort. What did he buy?"

"Venom. Snake venom." A lean old finger pointed to a wire cage on a shelf, where dozed a great coiled rattlesnake. "He had an introduction from someone at the university —"

"Come with me," said Thunstone to Ipsu, "and talk. It seems as if your *issintok* friend will make a new try with the spear that didn't kill you."

They went back to the car.

"Poison, in the slightest of wounds, should succeed," said Thunstone.

"Succeed against us both," nodded Ipsu. "Kumak knows that you are with me in the matter, John. You will be attacked, too — perhaps first, perhaps second. Quick, back to the room. We must do more magic of our own, and do it first."

At Ipsu's quarters, the two went quickly to work, pushing all furniture to the walls. Ipsu produced a little soapstone lamp, full of hard-congealed fat. Turning out the electric lights, he kindled the crudely twisted wick of dried moss. A dim glow, pale-brown in color, flickered up, casting strange shadows.

"This room must serve as our *quaggi*," he announced. "Sit opposite me on the floor."

Squatting, Ipsu held up something else, a piece of dry, untanned seal-skin. It gave out a whisper of crackly sound. "Shake this in rhythm for me. I must call a spirit — a strong spirit —"

"A good spirit, of course?"

"I hope it is a good one," replied Ipsu cryptically, and thrust the patch of skin into Thunstone's hand.

Thunstone began to shake it. It rustled gently, like marching feet in distant dead grass. The light began to die down, gradually and steadily, and finally winked out, as if a thumb and finger had pinched the flame from the wick. The last flicker showed Ipsu, squatting on his heels with knees on the floor, arms extended and hands tight clasped, face raised a little.

From somewhere rose a vibrating cry, deep and musical, like the blast of a bass horn. It changed to a wheezing, hissing note. Still shaking the skin in rhythm as Ipsu had directed, Thunstone experimentally held the

breath that was in his own great lungs. He kept it stubbornly pent up until his head swam and his eyes stung. At last he breathed out because he must, and at once gulped fresh air and held it until he was forced to breathe a second time. Not once in that time did the prolonged hiss break off, or even quaver. It seemed long minutes before it went silent.

"Stop now," said a voice in the darkness that must be Ipsu's. "Full silence."

The dim-seen squatting figure opposite Thunstone collapsed where it was, lying on the floor like a corpse.

Thunstone laid down the rustling skin. Carefully, silently, he leaned forward to touch Ipsu's outflung arm.

Ipsu's wrist was slack and chill. Thunstone could feel no pulse. When he let go the wrist, it fell like a clod to the boards. Thunstone bent closer, feeling for Ipsu's heart. It, too, did not stir.

The *angekok*, then, had died. Kumak's magic — what else? — had stricken him in the very midst of his defense conjuration.

Thunstone got to his feet. His groping hand found the table against the wall, and his fingers touched something — the carved bone that Ipsu had used as a guide to Kumak. Thunstone picked it up. It was as warm as a living thing, and seemed to quiver between his great fingers. Thunstone remembered what Ipsu had said of the *tornaq*, the rock-spirit. Would it lead again to the enemy? As if in response to his thought, the bone stirred more strongly in his grasp.

Thunstone tiptoed to the door and went out, hatless and coatless. He did not look back at the limp, quiet form of his prostrate friend. Downstairs he got into his car. With one hand he started the motor, shifted gears, and with one hand he steered away from the curb. The bone, close held in his other hand, made a little throbbing leap to the right. Obediently Thunstone turned at the next corner, turned again when the bone indicated a change of direction.

He rolled past the laboratory where Kumak had bought snake venom. It was two blocks further on that the bone seemed to press backward against his palm, and he braked to a halt. As he got out, he felt his guide tugging toward a doorway between two flights of stone steps.

Kumak must live there. Kumak had killed Ipsu, would kill others. Kumak had best die himself. Thunstone, who from time to time had done considerable killing of his own and always with the clearest of conscience, put the bone in his vest pocket. His broad, heavy shoulders hunched, as if ready to put power back of a blow.

The lock of the door was simple and old. The first of the skeleton keys on the bunch Thunstone carried opened the door. Inside was a narrow, shabby hallway, with a row of doors on each side. The door-jambs bore

cards, lettered in pen and ink. He looked at the names in turn. Travers. Lorenzen, McCoy. Kumak.

His fingers touched the brass knob, and it was icy cold.

He paused a moment, even then, to ponder the connection between thoughts of evil and thoughts of the Arctic. Lovecraft, who wrote and thought as no other man about supernatural horror, was forever commenting upon the chill, physical and spiritual, of wickedness and baleful mystery. The ancients had believed in whole nations of warlocks to the far north — Thule and Hyperborea. Iceland and Lapland had been synonyms for magic. Where did one find the baleful lycanthrope most plentiful? In frozen Siberia. Why do natives dare not scale the snowy crests of the Himalayas? For fear of the abominable ice-demons. Death's hand is icy. The Norseman's inferno is a place of utter dark and sleet.

He opened the door.

Kumak had spoken truth when he said that his living quarters were wretched. The little cube of a room was painted in sad, rusty colors. The carpetless floorboards were worn and uneven. Like Ipsu's hotel chamber, it had been lighted by a stone lamp from the Arctic, now burning low. In the center of the floor lay a coiled ring of rawhide rope that would be the mystic doing of the *issintok*, the opening into the world of spirits. And the spear with which death could be dealt afar was now in Kumak's hand.

Kumak, stripped to his undershirt and trousers, looked shiny with sweat. He held the weapon with its butt on the floor and its point upward, at a level with his pudgy shoulder. The spear-haft was of dark, well-seasoned wood, and the head was a full foot in length, pale yellow in color, fluted and twisted to the tapering point. Thunstone knew what it was. The ancients would take it for the horn of a unicorn, capable of any magic. In reality it was the ivory tusk of a norwahl.

From a small bottle Kumak was anointing the tip. He sang to himself, softly and tremulously, a song of Eskimo enchantment.

Then his magic was not complete. Why had Ipsu died?

"Kumak," said Thunstone.

Kumak looked up. His eyes were no longer narrow, but bulged and stared. They were full of green lights, like the eyes of a meat-eating animal.

"You think I cannot kill him," muttered Kumak. "The shadows from Sedna ripen. He shall die. But you — you die first."

He faced Thunstone and poised the spear for a throw or a stab. His ungainly body seemed to take on a dangerous grace, the grace of the trained hunter who knows the gear with which he deals death. A drop of moisture on the ivory tip gleamed in the moonlight. That would be the rattlesnake venom. A scratch would be enough to kill. Thunstone set himself to repel any rush.

"You die first," repeated Kumak. "Then Ipsu, when the shadows lead

my thrust to his heart."

He moved a step forward. His foot planted itself close to the coil of cord upon the floor.

Then it was that Thunstone saw a bit of movement on the cord. It seemed that a knot, a large knot, tied itself among the strands; a knot that was strangely intricate, and seemed to tighten steadily. It was a brown knot and tense, shaped like a fist.

No, not like a fist. For it was a fist.

A brown hand had come up from within the coil and was clinging there, as to the rim of a manhole.

"I shall kill you," promised Kumak. "I shall thrust you through the heart, then through the arms and legs, so that you cannot walk or hunt in the Spirit Country. And with this spear I shall slash the skin from your brow over your eyes, so that your spirit cannot see."

The hand rose, and after it an arm. It caught Kumak by the ankle, and twitched him from his feet.

Kumak opened his writhing mouth and would have howled, but what whipped out of the circle of rope was too quick for him. Another hand was on his mouth, a sinewy brown body, stark naked, flung itself upon him to hold him down. There was a struggle for the spear.

Thunstone stood where he was, and watched. The naked brown attacker was blurred at the edges of its silhouette, like the memory of an acquaintance. The memory of Ipsu.

The two grapplers struggled to their feet. The spear was between them, but with a sudden effort the Ipsu-thing wrenched it away. There came a darting stroke, the abrupt, heavy sound of a blow striking deep into flesh. Ipsu's image stepped back.

Kumak stood wavering. The haft of the spear jutted from his panting chest. The norwahl tusk, no longer ivory-pale but red, stood out between his shoulders. He thudded down on his face. Ipsu's dark eyes and white teeth flashed a smile at Thunstone. Then the naked figure slipped, feet first and swifter than a diving seal, back into the ring of cord. It sank from sight.

Thunstone stepped across to look. Within the rawhide circle there was only floor, bare and solid. He turned, strode across the still twitching body of Kumak, and departed the way he had come.

Back at the hotel he had something else to stare at.

The electric light was turned on in Ipsu's room, the furniture pulled back into place, and all the properties of Eskimo magic stowed out of sight. On the bureau stood a tray of sandwiches and a pot of coffee from the grill downstairs. Ipsu sat in his shirt sleeves on the edge of the cot, biting hungrily into bread and meat. He smiled again at Thunstone, as the

entity in Kumak's room had smiled.

"I believe you expected to find me dead," he greeted his friend.

"You were dead," replied Thunstone. "I touched your body, and there was no pulse nor heart beat."

"I was only sleeping very soundly," explained Ipsu. "A trance — any one of several hundred New York mediums can go into one. Will you have a sandwich? Next you'll claim that you saw my disembodied spirit in Kumak's room."

"Indeed I did see it," Thunstone assured him. "I thought — "

"That my ghost was taking vengeance? It was. But I had not died. I simply left my body for a short time and went to do what must be done. Since Kumak had made his rope-coil — the doorway to the Spirit Country — it was doubly easy to reach him. Don't stare, John. *Angekoks* can do these things."

Thunstone sat down and drew in his breath. He was perspiring.

"I might expect strange things from Eskimo magic," he said at last. "Night, when magic is strongest, lasts six months at a time up near the pole."

"Yet six months is only half of the year," reminded Ipsu, pouring coffee. "Snow — clean, white snow — is there forever. White is more lasting and more universal than black in the Eskimo land. Therefore magic of good can be stronger than magic of evil."

Thunstone shook his head. "What I have seen is so strange, even to me — "

"But what did you see?" Ipsu demanded. "Don't you think it was only your imagination? You rate me too highly. I am no real *angekok*. I am not capable of using the wisdom of my people."

"No more of your Eskimo false modesty," begged Thunstone. "I don't think I can endure it just now."

"Just hocus-pocus and trickery, and maybe some self-induced hypnotism in us and in Kumak," went on Ipsu stubbornly. "John, you ascribe intelligence and courage to me, and I have none of either. I am only the most stupid and ugly of my people, on whom you take pity. Shall we talk of something that is fit to interest grown men?"

Again he offered the sandwiches. And winked.



The Dead Man's Hand

Now open lock To the Dead Man's knock!

Fly bar and bolt and band!

Nor move nor swerve Joint, muscle or nerve

At the spell of the Dead Man's Hand!

Sleep, all who sleep!—Wake, all who wake!

But be as the Dead for the Dead Man's sake!

— Thomas Ingoldsby, *The Hand of Glory*

THE MEN IN FRONT of the store were all laughing in the sunset, but not one of them sounded cheerful.

"Y'hear this, Sam?" someone asked a latecomer. "Stranger askin' the way to Old Monroe's. Must be the one who bought the place."

More laughter, in which the latecomer joined. Berna's father turned grim and dangerous enough to counterbalance all their mockery. He was hard and gaunt in his seersucker suit, with a long nose, a long chin, and a foxtrap mouth between them.

"I know the joke," he said, leaning over his steering wheel. "You think the place is haunted."

"No," cackled a dried little gaffer on an upturned nail-keg. "Haunted ain't the word. Curst, more like it. Me, I ain't got many more nights to live, and I wouldn't spend none of 'em at Old Monroe's."

"I know all about that silly story," announced Berna's father.

"All?" teased someone else. "Silly story?"

"And I'm thankful it's so well believed. That's how I was able to buy the farm so cheap."

"I wonder," mumbled the little old man, "if you bought it from who owns it rightful. 'Fter all, way I heard it, Old Monroe's deal was only for his lifetime — long enough in all conscience." He spat at a crack in the boardwalk. "When it comes to that, whoever bargained for Old Monroe's soul made a fool trade, for Old Monroe's soul was a sure shot anyway to go to —"

"If you're all through laughing," interrupted Berna's father savagely, "maybe someone will remember enough manners to direct us."

"Please, gentlemen," added Berna timidly from beside her father. She was slender where he was gaunt, appealing where he was grim. Her dark wide eyes sought a loiterer, who removed his palmleaf hat.

"If you're set on it," said this one, "you follow the street out, along the pavement. Miss the turn into Hanksville, then go left on a sand road. Watch

for a little stone bridge over a run, with a big bunch of willows. Across the run, beyond them willows, is a private road. All grown up, and not even rabbit hunters go there. Well, at the other end is your new house, and I wish you luck." He fiddled with the hat. "You'll need it."

"Thank you kindly," said Berna's father. "My name's Ward Conley. I'll be your neighbor at the Old Monroe farm. And if you think you'll play any ghost jokes around there at night remember I'm moving in with a shotgun, which I can use tolerably well."

He started the car. Berna heard the men start talking again, not laughing now.

"I didn't think," she ventured as they drove out of the little town in the last red sunglow, "that the story we heard was taken so seriously." She looked at her father. "I didn't even pay attention when the farm broker mentioned it. Tell me all of it."

"Nervous, Berna?" demanded Ward Conley.

"No. Just curious."

"It's the sort of yarn that's pinned on some house in every district where history's old enough, and ghost-believing gawks are plentiful enough. What I heard was that the former owner, the one they called Old Monroe, came here eighty years ago and took a piece of land that seemed worthless. By working and planning he made it pay richly. He never got married, never mixed with his neighbors, never spent much of what he took in, and he lived to be more than a hundred. Knowing so little about him, the corn-crackers hereabouts made up their own story. That Old Monroe made a sort of bargain with — well — "

"With the devil?"

"Maybe. Or anyway some old Indian spirit of evil. They said the bargain included a magic-built house, the richest of crops, and more money than anyone for miles around. Old Monroe got the last named, anyway. When he died, he died raving. Most hermits and misers are crazy. Since then nobody goes near the place. A second cousin up in Richmond inherited, and sold to us for a song."

"A bargain with devils," mused Berna. "It sounds like Hawthorne."

"It sounds like foolishness," snapped Conley. "Any devils come bargaining around, I'm enough of a business man to give them the short end of the deal."

In a city to the north, big John Thunstone listened earnestly as he leaned across a desk.

"You don't mean to tell me, Mr. Thunstone," said the professor opposite, "that you're really serious about the Shonokin myths?"

"I discount nothing until I know enough to judge," replied Thunstone. "The hint I picked up today is shadowy. And you're the only man who has

made an intelligent study of the subject."

"Only the better to finish my American folkways encyclopedia," deprecated the other. "Well the Shonokins are supposed to be a race of magicians that peopled America before the Red Indians migrated from — wherever they migrated from. One or two commentators insist that Shonokin wizardry and enmity is the basis for most of the Indian stories of supernatural evils, everything from the Wendigo to those nasty little tales about singing snakes and the Pukwichee dwarfs. All mention we get of Shonokins today — and it's mighty slim — we get third or fourth hand. From old Indians to recent ones, through them by way of first settlers to musty students like me. There's an amusing suggestion that Shonokins, or their descendants, actually exist today here and there. Notably in the neighborhood of —"

"I wonder," broke in John Thunstone, rather mannerlessly for him, "if that isn't the neighborhood I'm so curious about."

In the dusk the Conley car passed the Hanksville turn, gained the sand road and crossed the stone bridge. Beyond the willows showed a dense-grown hedge of thorny trees, with a gap closed by a single hewn timber on forked stakes. The timber bore a signboard, and by the glow of the headlights Berna could read the word "PRIVATE." Conley got out, unshipped the barrier, then returned to drive them along a brush-lined road with ruts full of rank, squelchy grass.

A first journey over a strange trail always seems longer than it is. Berna felt that ages had passed before her father stepped on the brake. "There's our home," he said.

At almost the same moment the moon rose, pale and sheeny as a disk of clean, fresh bone.

The pale light showed them a house, built squarely like old plantation manors, but smaller. It had once been painted gray, and still looked well kept and clean. No windows were broken, the pillars of the porch were still sturdy. Around it clung dark, plump masses of shrubbery and, farther back, tall flourishing trees. A flagged path led up to the broad steps. Berna knew she should be pleased. But she was not.

From the rear seat Conley dug their suitcases and rolls of bedding. Berna rummaged for the hamper that held their supper.

She followed her father up the flagstone way, wondering why the night seemed so cool for this season. Conley set down his burdens, then mounted the porch to try the door.

"Locked," he grumbled. "The broker said there was never a key." He turned and studied a window. "We'll have to break the glass."

"May I help?" inquired a gentle voice, and into view, perhaps from the massed bushes at the porch-side, strolled a man.

He did not stand in the full moonlight, and later Berna would wonder how she knew he was handsome. Slim white-clad elegance, face of a healthy pallor under a wide hat, clear-cut features, deep eyes and brows both heavy and graceful — these impressions she received. Conley came down off the porch.

"I'm Ward Conley, the new owner of this farm," he introduced himself briskly. "This is my daughter, Berna."

The stranger bowed. "I am a Shonokin."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Shannon."

"Shonokin," corrected the man.

"People in town said that nobody dared come here," went on Conley.

"They lied. They usually lie." The man's deep eyes studied Berna, they may have admired. She did not know whether to feel confused or resentful. "Mr. Conley," continued the gentle voice, "you are having difficulty?"

"Yes. The door's jammed or locked."

"Let me help." The graceful figure stepped up on the porch, bending over something. A light glared. He seemed to be holding a little sheaf of home-dipped tapers, such as Berna had seen in very old-fashioned farmhouses. They looked knobby and skimpy, but their light was almost blinding. He held it close to the lock as he stooped. He did not seem to move, but after a moment he turned.

"Now your door is open," he told them. And so it was, swinging gently inward.

"Thanks, Mr. Shonokin," said Conley, more warmly than he had spoken all evening. "Won't you step inside with us?"

"Not now." Bowing again, the man swept his fingertips over the lights he held, snuffing them out. Descending the steps lithely, he walked along the stone flags. At the far end he paused and lifted his hat. Berna saw his hair, long, wavy and black as soot. He was gone.

"Seems like a nice fellow," grunted Conley. "How about some candles of our own, Berna?"

She gave him one from the hamper, and he lighted it and led her inside.

"I know that it's a considerable journey, and that the evidence is slim," John Thunstone was telephoning at Pennsylvania Station. "But I'll get the full story, on the exact spot. I'm sorry you and Dr. Trowbridge can't come. I'll report when I get back." He listened a moment, then chuckled in his trim mustache. "Haven't I always returned. Now, goodbye, or I'll miss my train."

Ward Conley lifted his wax candle overhead and grunted approvingly. "I was a little worried, Berna, about buying the place sight unseen, even at a figure that would make the worst land profitable." His eyes gleamed. "But

this is worth coming home to, hah?"

The old furniture looked comfortable and in good shape. Berna wondered if the rich carpet in the hall was not valuable. In the room beyond was a table of dark wood, with sturdy chairs around it, and farther on glass-doored closets with china and silver and the white of folded linen. Conley dragged down a hanging lamp.

"Oil in it, and the wick ready trimmed," he announced. With his candle he lighted the lamp and drew it up to the ceiling. "Berna, someone's put this place in apple-pie order for us. Even swept and dusted. Might it have been Mr. Shonokin's family? Neighborly, I call it." His stern face was relaxing. They walked into a kitchen, well appointed but cool. There was firewood in the box. Berna set down her hamper. Then they mounted to the upper floor.

"The beds are made," Conley exulted. "This front room will be yours, Berna. I'll take the next one. Suppose we eat now, and poke around more tomorrow. I want to be up early, out at the barn and in the fields."

Returning to the kitchen, they brought out sandwiches and fruit and a jugful of coffee. "It's getting cold," pronounced Conley, peering into the jug. "Let's fire up the range and heat it."

Berna believed that the coffee was hot enough, but she was glad that her father had made an excuse for a fire. The kitchen was downright shuddery. Even while the kindling blazed up, she got a sweater from her suitcase and put it on. They ate in silence, for Conley disliked conversation while he was at the important business of eating. When Berna had brushed up the crumbs, he yawned.

"Bed now," he decreed, and again took up the candle. Walking through the front room, he drew down the lamp and blew it out. Berna kept close to his heels as they mounted the stairs. The little moving flame that Conley held up made a host of strange and stealthy shadows around them.

Alone in the room assigned her, Berna drew back the bedclothes. They were so chilly within as to seem damp, but she had brought up a blanket roll from the car. She made the bed afresh, and before creeping in she knelt down. Her prayer was the one taught her as a child, while her mother still lived:

*"Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed I lie upon.
There are four corners to my bed,
There are four saints around my head —
One to watch and one to pray,
And two to bear my soul away."*

She remembered her flutter of dread at the last two lines. Though

serious and thoughtful, Berna was young. She did not want her soul to be borne away yet. And she felt a close silence about her, as of many lurking watchers.

Of a sudden, there popped into her mind a tag of another bedtime prayer, heard in the long ago from a plantation mammy. She repeated that, too:

*"Keep me from hoodoo and witch,
And lead my path from the poorhouse gate...."*

The tenseness seemed to evaporate around her. Berna got into bed, listened a while to the sighing of a breeze-shaken tree outside her window, and finally slept soundly until her father's fist on the door told her that it was dawn and time to be up.

They had fried eggs and bacon in the kitchen that remained cool despite the fire that had smouldered in the range all night.

Wiping his mouth at the end of the meal, Ward Conley tramped to the back door and tugged at the knob. It refused to budge, though he heaved and puffed.

"I wish that Shonokin man was back here to open this, too," he said at last. "Well, let's use the front door."

Out they went together. The early morning was bright and dry, and Berna saw flowers on the shrubs, blue, red and yellow, that were beyond her knowledge of garden botany. They walked around the side of the house and saw a quiet barnyard, with a great red barn and smaller sheds. Beyond these extended rich-seeming fields.

"Something's been planted there," said Conley, shading his eyes with his hand. "If anybody thinks he can use my fields — well, he'll lose the crop he put in. Berna, go back to the house and make a list of the things we need. I'll drive into town later, either Hanksville or that little superstition-ridden rookery we passed through yesterday."

He strolled off, hands in pockets, toward the land beyond the barnyard. Berna again walked around the house and in through the front door. For the first time she was alone in her new home, and fancied that her footsteps echoed loudly, even on the rug in the hall. Back in the kitchen she washed the dishes — there was a sink, with running water from somewhere or other — then sat at the kitchen table to list needed articles as her father had directed.

There was a slight sound at the door, as if a bird had fluttered against it. Berna glanced up, wide-eyed.

That was all. She sat where she was, pencil in fingers, eyes starting and unwinking. She did not move. There was no feeling of stiffness or confinement or weight. Trying, in the back of her amazed and terrified mind,

to diagnose, she decided it was like the familiar grammar-school experiment — you clasp your hands and say “I cannot, I cannot,” until you find yourself unable to move your fingers from each other. Berna may have breathed, her heart may have beaten. She could not be sure, then or later.

The door, that had not budged for her father's struggles, was gently swaying open. In stepped Mr. Shonokin, smiling over the glow of his peculiar little sheaf of tapers. He snuffed them, slid the sheaf into his pocket. And Berna could move again.

Only her eyes moved at first, quartering him over. He wore the white suit, beautifully cut, and of a fabric Berna could not identify — if it were fabric and not some sort of skin, delicately thin and soft and perfectly bleached. His hands, which hung gracefully at his sides, were long and a little strange; perhaps the ring fingers were unnaturally long, longer than the middle fingers. One of them held his wide hat, and the uncovered locks of dead black hair fell in soft waves over Mr. Shonokin's broad brow. As Berna's eyes came to his, he smiled.

“I've been talking to your father,” he said, “and now I want to talk to you.”

She got to her feet, grateful for the restored power to do so. “Talk?” she echoed. “Talk of what?”

“This place of yours,” he told her, laying his hat on the table. “You see, the title isn't exactly clear.”

She shook her head at once. She knew her father better than that.

“It's completely clear, Mr. Shonokin. All in order, back to the original grant from the Indians.”

“Ah,” said Shonokin, still gently. “But where did the Indians get their title? Where? I'll tell you. From us, the Shonokins.”

Berna was still trembling, from that strange moment of tranced inaction. She had been hypnotized, she told herself, like Trilby in the book. It must not happen again. She would face this stranger with resolution and defiance.

“You don't mean to claim,” she replied, with an attempt at loftiness, “that your family was in this part of the country before the Indians.”

“We were everywhere before the Indians,” he assured her, and smiled. His teeth were white, perfect, and ever so slightly pointed, even the front teeth that should be square-edged like chisels.

“Then you're Indian yourself,” she suggested, but he shook his head.

“Shonokins are not Indians. They are not —” He paused, as if choosing his words. “We are not like any race you know. We are old, even when we are young. We took this country from creatures too terrible for you to imagine, even though they are dead and leave only their fossil bones. We ruled well, in ways you can't understand.” That sounded both sad and superior. “For reasons that you can't understand, either, we were once tired of

ruling. That is when we allowed the Indians to come, retaining only limited domains. This is one of them."

"This farm?" prompted Berna. She still held the pencil, so tightly that her fingers were bruising against it.

"This farm," said her visitor. "The Indians never had any right to it. It is ground sacred to the Shonokins, where their wisdom and rule will continue forever. And so any deed dating back to Indians is not lawful. I told your father that, and it's the truth, however stupid and furious he may be."

"Suppose," said Berna, "that you say to my father that you think he's stupid. Tell him to his face. I'd like to see what he does to you then."

"I did tell him," replied the man they knew as Mr. Shonokin. "And he did nothing. He was frozen into silence, as you were just now, when I held up —" His strange-shaped hand moved toward his side pocket, where he had put that strange sheaf of tapers.

"Suppose," went on Berna, "that you get out of this house and off this property."

It was bold, fierce talk for a quiet girl like Berna, but she felt she was managing it splendidly. She took a step toward him. "Yes, right now."

His pointed teeth smiled at her again. He backed smoothly toward the open door and paused on the sill. "You're hasty," he protested gently. "We want only to be fair. You may enjoy this place — enjoy it very much, as Old Monroe did — if you simply and courteously make the same agreement."

"Sell our souls?" Berna snapped, as she had never snapped at anyone before in all her life.

"The Shonokins," he said, "do not recognize the existence of any such thing as a soul."

He was gone, as abruptly as he had gone from the end of the path last night.

Berna sat down, her heart stuttering inside her. After a minute, her father came in. He, too, sat down. Berna wondered if she were as pale as he.

"That — that — that trick — playing, sneering skunk," he panted. "No man can try things like that on Ward Conley." He looked around. "Did he come in here? Is he still here? If he is, I'm going to get the shotgun."

"He's gone," Berna replied. "I made him go. But who is he? Did he tell you that preposterous story?"

As she spoke, she knew she had believed it all, about the Shonokins who had ruled before the Indians, who wanted to rule again, and who claimed this land, on which nobody could live except as their tenant and vassal.

"He put some sort of a trance or spell on me," said Conley, still breathing hard. "If he hadn't been able to do it, I'd have killed him — there's a

hayfork out there in the barn. And he wanted me to believe I'd do some hocus-pocus for him, to be allowed to live here on my own land. Berna," said Conley suddenly, "I think he'll be sneaking back here again. And I'm going to be ready for him."

"Let me go to town when you go," she began, but Conley waved the words aside.

"You'll drive in alone and shop for whatever we need. Because I stay right here, waiting for Mr. Smart Aleck Shonokin." Rising, he walked into the front room, where much of the luggage was still stacked. He returned with his shotgun, fitting it together. It was a well-kept repeater. Ponderously he pumped a shell into the chamber.

"We'll see," promised Conley balefully, "how much lead he can carry away with him."

And so Berna drove the car to the village. At the general store in front of which loiterers had mocked the evening before, she bought flour, potatoes, meat, lard, tinned goods. Her father had stipulated nails and a few household tools, and on inspiration Berna bought two heavy new locks. When she returned, Conley approved this last purchase and installed the locks, one at the front door and one at the back.

"The windows can all be latched, too," he reported. "Let him jimmy his way inside now. I'll give a lot to have him try it." When he had finished his work, Conley picked up the shotgun again, cradling it across his knees. "Now we're all ready for a call from Mr. Shonokin."

But he was tense, nervous, jumpy. Berna cut herself peeling vegetables for supper, and dreaded the dropping of the sun toward the western horizon.

At Hanksville, several townsfolk had ambled out to see the afternoon train arrive. They stared amiably at the one disembarking passenger, a broad giant of a man with a small mustache, who addressed them in a voice that sounded purposeful and authoritative.

"Old Monroe's," they echoed his first question. "Lookee, mister, nobody ever goes there."

"Well, I'm going there at once. A matter of life and death. Will anybody let me rent his automobile?" Nobody answered that at all.

"How do you get there?" he demanded next, and someone told about the crossing, the sanded road, the stone bridge, the clump of willows, the side trail.

"And how far?"

Ten miles, opined one. A companion thought it might be nearer twelve.

John Thunstone looked up at the sinking sun. "Then I have no time to waste," he said, "for I'll have to walk it."

He strode off through Hanksville. Those who had spoken with him

now watched him go. Then they turned to each other, shook their heads, and made clicking sounds with their tongues.

It was not easy for Conley to explain to Berna all that had passed between him and Shonokin. In the first place, Conley had been both furious and alarmed, and was still so. In the second, there was much he could not understand.

It seemed that the visitor had bobbed up at Conley's elbow, with that talent he had for appearing and disappearing so quickly. He had courteously admired the growing fields of corn and beans, and when Conley had repeated his complaint that someone was making free with the ground, had assured Conley that these things had been planted and were growing for the Conleys alone. He, Shonokin, took credit for the putting in and advancement of what looked like a prize crop.

"And then," Conley told Berna, "he took up the question of payment. I said, of course, that I'd be glad to give him something for his trouble. Whatever was fair, I said. And he out with an idea you'd never believe — not even though I swear to every word he said."

Shonokin wanted the Conleys to live comfortably, pleasantly, even richly. He was willing to give assurance that there would never be anything to limit or endanger their material prosperity. But, here and now, Conley must admit by signed paper his indebtedness and dependency.

"Dependency!" Conley fairly exploded, describing the scene to his daughter. "Dependency — on that young buck I never even saw before last night! I just stood there, wondering which word to say first, and he went on with the idea that he and his bunch — whoever the Shonokins might be — would make themselves responsible for the crops and the profits of this place, deciding what would be raised and see that it succeeded. Then I blew up."

He paused, and his face went a shade whiter. He looked old.

"I told you what came after that. I grabbed for the hayfork. But he held up his hand, that hand he carries that gives off light."

"The little candles?" prompted Berna.

"It's a hand, I tell you, a sort of skinny hand. It has lights on the fingers. I froze like a wooden Indian in front of a cigar store. And he grinned that ugly way he has, and told me that I now had time to think it over quietly; that I'd better be a good tenant, and that he and we could be a wonderful help to each other if we didn't lose any energy by quarreling. I couldn't move until he walked away out of sight."

Conley shuddered. "What," he demanded savagely, "is he driving at? Why does he want to run our affairs?"

That question, reflected Berna to herself, had been asked countless times in the world's history by people who could not understand tyranny.

Tyrants alone could understand, for they lived tormented by the urge and appetite and insistence to dominate others.

"He won't come back," she said, trying to be confident and not succeeding.

"Yes, he will," replied Conley balefully, "and I'll be ready for him." He patted the shotgun in his lap. "Is supper about done?"

It was, but they had little appetite. Afterwards Berna washed the dishes. She thought she had never felt such cold water as gushed from the faucet. Conley went into the front room, and when Berna joined him he sat in a solid old rocking chair, still holding the shotgun.

"The furniture's nice," said Berna lamely.

"Reminds me of another thing that skunk said," rejoined Conley. "That his Shonokins had made all the furniture, as well as the house. That it — the furniture — was really theirs and would do what they said. What did he mean?"

Berna did not know, and did not reply.

"Those new locks weren't made by him," Conley went on. "They won't obey him. Let him try to get in."

When Conley repeated himself thus aimlessly, it meant that he was harassed and daunted. They sat in the gathering gloom, that the hanging lamp could not dispel successfully. Berna wished for a radio. There was one in the car, and this was a night for good programs. But she would not have ventured into the open to meet the entire galaxy of her radio favorites in person. Later on perhaps they'd buy a cabinet radio for this room, she mused; if they lasted out the evening and the next day and the days and nights to follow, if they could successfully avoid or defeat the slender dark man who menaced them.

Conley had unpacked their few books. One lay on the sideboard near Berna's chair, a huge showy volume of Shakespeare's works that a book agent had sold to Berna's mother years ago. Berna loved Shakespeare no more and no less than most girls of limited education and experience. But she remembered the words of a neighbor, spoken when the book was bought; Shakespeare could be used, like the Bible, for "casting sortes." It was an old-country custom, still followed here and there in rural America. You opened the book at random and hastily clapped your finger on a passage, which answered whatever troubled you. Hadn't the wife of Enoch Arden done something like that, or did she remember her high school English course rightly?

She lifted the volume into her lap. It fell open of itself. Without looking at the fine double-columned type, she put out her forefinger quickly. She had opened to, *Macbeth*. At the head of the page was printed: *Act I, Scene 3*. She stooped to read in the lamplight;

*Were such things here as we do speak about,
Or have we eaten on the insane root,
That takes the reason prisoner?*

That was close enough to what fretted her and her father. Shakespeare, what she knew of him, was full of creepy things about prophecies, witches, phantoms, and such. The "insane root" — what was that? It had a frightening sound to it. Anyway, Shonokin had momentarily imprisoned their minds with his dirty tricks of hypnotism. Again she swore to herself not to be caught another time. She had heard that a strong effort of will could resist such things. She took hold of the book to replace it on the sideboard.

She could not.

As before, her eyes could not blink, her muscles could not stir. She could only watch as, visible through the hallway beyond, the front door slowly moved open and showed the dead pale light that Shonokin could evoke.

He glided in, white-clad, elegantly slender, grinning. He held his light aloft, and Conley had been right. It was shaped like a hand. What had seemed to be a joined bunch of tapers were the five fingers, each sprouting a clear flame. Berna saw how shriveled and shrunken those fingers were, and how bones and tendons showed through the coarse skin of their backs. Shonokin set the thing carefully on a stand by the door to the hallway. It was flat at the wrist end, it stayed upright like the ugliest of little candlesticks.

Shonokin walked closer, gazing in hushed triumph from the paralyzed Conley to the paralyzed Berna.

"Now we can settle everything," he said in his gentle voice, and stuck a terrible little laugh on the end of the words. He paused just in front of Berna's fixed eyes. She could study that white suit now, could see the tiny pore-openings in the strange integument from which it was tailored. His slender hands, too, with their abnormally long ring fingers — they did not have human nails but talons, narrow and curved and trimmed most carefully to cruel points, as if for better rending.

"Mr. Conley is beyond any reasonable discussion," the creature was saying. "He is an aging man, harsh and boastful and narrow from his youth upwards. But Berna — " His eyes slid around to her. Their pupils had a lean perpendicularly, like the pupils of a cat. "Miss Berna is young," he went on. "She is not reckless or greedy or violent. She will listen and obey, even if she does not fully understand, the wise advice of the Shonokins."

He rested his hands, fingers spread, on the heavy table. It seemed to stir at his touch, like a board on ripply water.

"She will obey the better," said their captor, "when she sees how simply we go about removing her father, with his foolish opposition. Conley," and

the eyes shifted to the helpless man, "you were so mannerless today as to doubt many of the things I told you. Most of all you seemed to scorn the suggestion that this furniture can move at my bidding. But watch."

The slender hand was barely touching the table-top. Shonokin drew together his spread fingertips, the sharp horny talons scraping softly on the wood. Again the table creaked, quivered, and moved.

Spiritualism, Berna insisted to herself. Mediums did that sort of illusion for customers at paid seances. Men like Dr. Dunninger and John Mulholland wrote articles in the newspapers, explaining the trickery. This Shonokin person must be a professional sleight-of-hand performer. He made as if to lift the hand. The table shifted again, actually rising with the gesture, as if it were of no weight and gummed to his fingers.

"You see that it does obey," the gentle voice pointed out. "It obeys, and now I give you the full measure of proof, Conley. This table is going to kill you."

Shonokin stepped toward Conley's rocking chair, and the table stepped with him.

"It is heavy, Conley, though I make it seem light. Its wood is dark and ancient, and almost as solid and hard as metal. This table can kill you, and nobody can sensibly call the death murder. How could your law convict or punish an insensible piece of furniture, however weighty?"

Again he stepped toward Conley. Again the table kept pace. It was like some squat, obedient farm beast, urged along by its master's touch on its flank.

"You will be crushed, Conley. Berna, do you hear all this? Make careful note of it, and tell it to yourself often; for when things are all over, you will realize that you cannot tell it to others. Nobody will believe the real nature of your father's death. It cannot appear otherwise than a freak accident — a heavy table tipped over upon him, crushing him. What narrow-brained sheriff or town marshal would listen if you told the truth?"

Even if she had been able to speak, Berna could not have denied this logic.

"And after your father is dead, you will be recognized as mistress here. You will have learned to obey my people and me, recognize our leadership and guidance. This farm is both remote and rich. It will form our gathering point for what we wish to do in the world again. But first —"

Once more his hand shifted. The table began slowly to rear its end that was closest to where Conley sat.

It was long and massive, and it creaked ominously, like an ancient draw-bridge going up. The thick legs that rose in air seemed to move, like the forefeet of a rearing, pawing horse. Or was that a flicker of pale light from the candle-hand yonder?

"Nearer," said Shonokin, and the table pranced forward, its upper legs

quivering. They would fall in a moment like two pile-drivers. "Nearer. Now —"

Something moved, large and broad but noiseless, in at the front door. An arm darted out, more like a snake than an arm. The candle-hand flew from where it had been placed, struck the floor, and a foot trod on it. All five of its flames went out at once.

Shonokin whirled, his hand leaving the table. It fell over sideways, with a crash that shook the windows. One second later came a crash still louder.

Conley had risen from his chair, jammed the muzzle of the shotgun against Shonokin's ribs, and touched the trigger. The charge almost blew the slender man in two.

It took all of John Thunstone's straining thews to set the table right again. Then he sat on its edge, speaking to Conley and Berna, who sagged in their chairs too exhausted for anything but gratitude.

"The magic used was very familiar," Thunstone was saying. "The 'hand of glory' is known in Europe and in old Mexico, too." He glanced at the grisly trodden-out thing, still lying on the floor. "You'll find it described in Spence's *Encyclopedia of Occultism*, and a rhymed tale about it in *Ingoldsby Legends*. The hand of a dead murderer — and trust people like the Shonokins to be able to secure that — is treated with saltpeter and oils to make it inflammable. We needn't go into the words that are said over it to give it the power. Lighted by the proper sorcerer, it makes locks open, and all inside the house remain silent as death."

"You were able to move," reminded Conley.

"Because I came in after the hand had laid the spell. I wasn't involved, any more than your visitor himself," and Thunstone glanced at the silent, slender body covered by a blanket on the floor.

"Is the hand of glory also Shonokin magic?" asked Berna. "Did they perhaps learn it first, and teach it to those other peoples?"

"About the Shonokins I know very little more than you yourselves seem to have heard. It seems evident that they do exist, and that they plan to be active in the world, and that they do feel a claim on this land of yours, and so on. But the death of one of them may deter the others."

"How?" asked Conley.

"You and I will bury him, under the flagstones at the far end of your walk. His body will keep other Shonokins from your door. They are a magic-minded lot, and a dangerous one, but they fear very few things more than they fear their own dead."

"What will the law say?" quavered Berna.

"Nothing, if you do not speak, and how can you speak? From outside I heard this one say, very truthfully, that the real story would never be believed, even in this superstitious district. Let it go with what I suggest. Justice has certainly been done. I doubt if you will be bothered by more

Shonokins, though they may be heard from elsewhere."

"But what are they?" cried Berna. "What?"

Thunstone shook his great head. "My studies are anything but complete. All I know is that they are an old people and clever, very sure of their superiority, and that the ways they hope to follow are not our ways. Mr. Conley, are you ready?"

Conley departed to fetch spade and pick. Alone with Thunstone and the body under the blanket, Berna spoke:

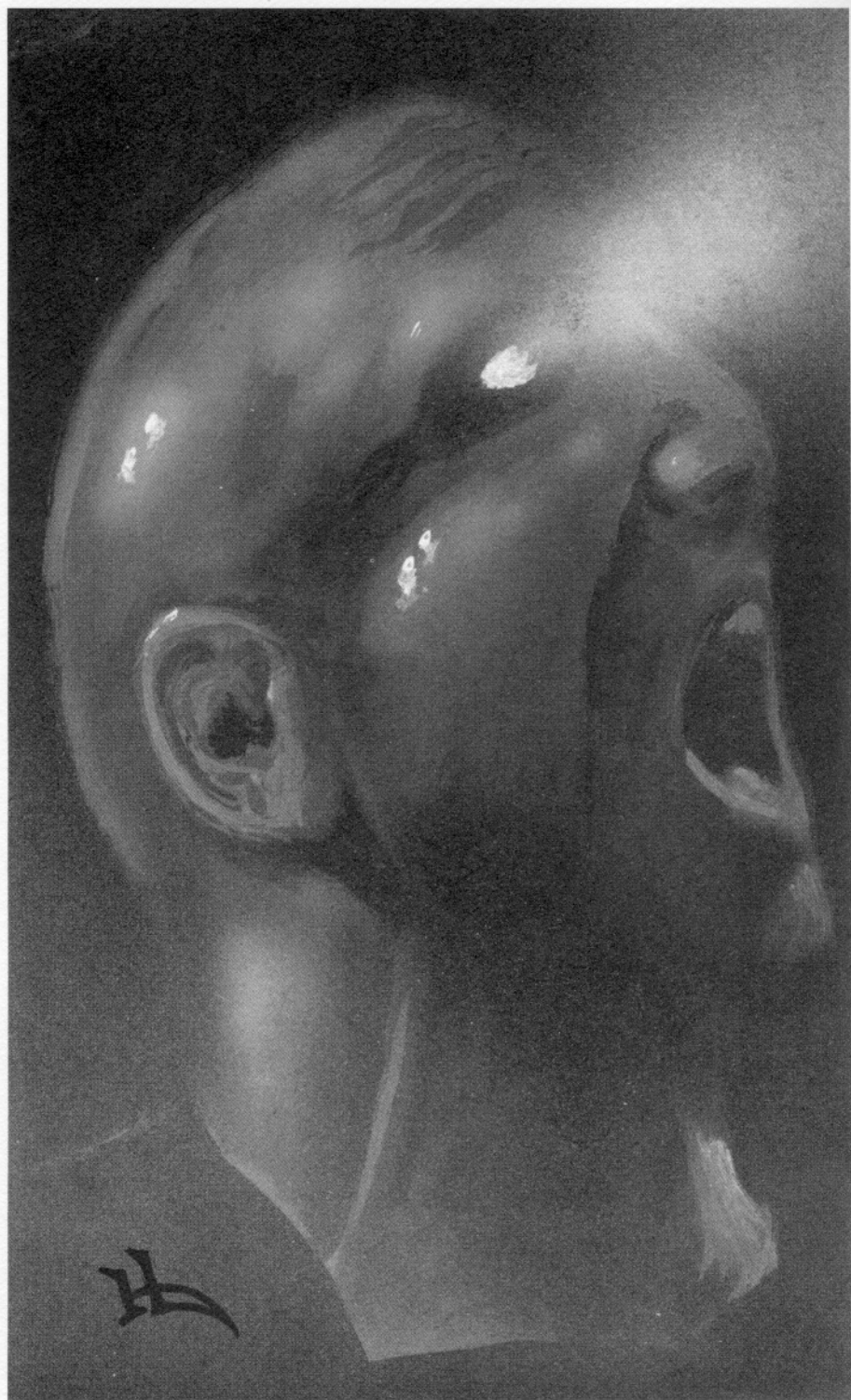
"I don't know how to say how thankful I am — "

"Then don't try," he smiled. Berna laid her little hand on his huge arm.

"I will pray for you always," she promised.

"Prayers are what I greatly need," replied Thunstone, very thankfully on his own part.

For he remembered how, at the moment of his leaving New York, he had heard that one Rowley Thorne had been discharged as cured from an insane asylum.



Thorne on the Threshold

DR. GALLENDER, AS SUPERINTENDENT of an asylum for the insane, was by training hard to daunt or embarrass. But he was not enjoying this final interview with a newly discharged patient. His round, kind face showed it.

"You are the second name on my list, doctor," Rowley Thorne told him across the desk in the office. "It is not a large list, but everyone implicated in my unjust confinement here shall suffer. You are second, I say, and I shall not delay long before giving you my attention." Thorne's lead-colored tongue moistened his lead-colored lips. "John Thunstone comes first."

"You're bitter," said Gallender, but neither his tone nor his smile were convincing. "It'll wear off after a day or so of freedom. Then you'll realize that I never bore you any ill will or showed special discrimination. You were committed to this institution through the regular channels. Now that you've been re-examined and certified cured, I feel only happiness for you."

"Cured!" snorted Thorne. His great hairless dome of a head lifted like the turret of a rising submarine. His eyes gleamed above his hooked nose like the muzzles of the submarine's guns. "I was never insane. False testimony and stupid, arbitrary diagnosis landed me here. It's true that I had time in your institution to perfect various knowledges by meditation. Those knowledges will help me to deal with you all — as you deserve."

His eyes gleamed palely. Dr. Gallender drew himself up.

"You're aware," said the doctor, "that this kind of talk may well land you back in the ward from which you're being released if I call for yet another board of examination —"

Thorne sprang up from his chair. He was big and burly in his shabby clothes. He straightened to his full height, six feet and a little more. No, decided the doctor, six feet and considerably more. Six feet and a half — perhaps six feet seven —

"You're growing!" Gallender cried, his voice shrill with sudden baffled alarm.

"Call in your examiners." It was Thorne's voice, though his tight-clamped gash of a mouth did not seem even to twitch. "Call them in to see — to judge if I am crazy when I claim powers beyond anything you ever —"

He towered up and up, as if his wide slab shoulders would hunch against the ceiling. Dr. Gallender, cowering in his chair despite himself, thought a mist was thickening before his eyes in that quiet, brilliantly-lighted room. Rowley Thorne's fierce features churned, or seemed to churn and blur and writhe.

Next moment, abruptly, the illusion of height and distortion—if it was an illusion—flicked away. Rowley Thorne was leaning across the desk.

"Give me my release." He picked up the paper from in front of Dr. Gallender, who made no sound or motion to detain him. "If you're wise, you'll pray never to see me again. Except that prayer won't help you."

He tramped heavily out.

Left alone, Dr. Gallender picked up his telephone. Shakily he called Western Union, and shakily he dictated a wire. Then he rose and went to a wall cabinet, from which he took a glass and a bottle. Flouting one of his most rigid customs, he poured and drank whiskey in solitude, and it was a double drink at that. Then he poured another double drink.

But he collapsed before he could lift it to his mouth.

When John Thunstone returned to New York from the south, his air would have puzzled even his few close friends. The drawn, wondering expression around deep dark eyes and heavy jaw was contradicted by the set of the giant shoulders and the vigorous stride that took him about the business he must now transact.

"Dr. Gallender's still in a coma," said the interne at the hospital. "Half a coma, anyway. He rouses to take nourishment when it's put to his mouth. He turns over from time to time, like a healthy sleeper. But his pulse and his involuntary reactions are feeble, and he doesn't voluntarily respond to voices or other stimuli more than once or twice a day. Diagnosis not yet complete."

"Which means that the doctors don't know what's the matter with him," summed up Thunstone. "Here's my authorization from his attending physician to see Dr. Gallender."

The interne reflected that he had heard somewhere how John Thunstone could secure authorization to do almost anything. He led the way along a hospital corridor and to the private room where the patient lay, quiet but not utterly limp. Gallender's face was pale, his eyes closed tightly, but he opened his mouth to allow a nurse to introduce a spoonful of broth.

Thunstone looked, a long strong forefinger stroking his cropped black mustache. Then he bent his giant body, his dark, well-combed head close to Gallender's.

"Dr. Gallender," said Thunstone, quietly but clearly. "Do you hear?"

It seemed that Dr. Gallender did hear. He closed his mouth again and lifted his head a dreamy, languid hair's-width from the pillow. Then he relaxed again.

"You can understand me," said Thunstone. "You sent me a warning wire. It was forwarded to me from New York. I hurried here at once, to learn about Rowley Thorne."

"Thorne," muttered Gallender, barely louder than a faint echo. "Said I would be second."

"You sent me a wire," repeated Thunstone, bending still closer. "I am John Thunstone."

"Thunstone," said Gallender, an echo even softer than before. "He will be first."

And Gallender subsided, with the gentlest of sighs. He did not open his mouth for more broth.

"He does not rouse more than that," volunteered the nurse. "It's like anesthesia of some sort."

"He will be first, I will be second," said Thunstone under his mustache, as if to record the words on his memory. To the interne he said, "What's the full report on him?"

They stepped into the corridor again. "He was found unconscious in his office at the asylum," said the interne. "He had just released that man you mentioned, Rowley Thorne. Later a clerk came in and found him. There was some spilled liquor and at first they thought intoxication. Then poisoning. Now nobody knows. Thorne was checked by New York police, but there's no evidence to hold him."

"Did Thorne leave New York?"

"He gave a Greenwich Village address. The police have it. Apparently he's still there. Did you ever see a case like this, Mr. Thunstone? It's not quite human, somehow."

Thunstone glanced back through the doorway, eyeing the quiet form on the cot. "No, not quite human," he agreed slowly. "More like something similar among — insects."

"Insects, Mr. Thunstone?"

"Tear open a wasp nest."

"Not while I'm in my right mind," demurred the interne, smiling slightly.

"In such nests," went on Thunstone, mildly lecturing, "you find other insects than wasps. Sometimes caterpillars, sometimes grubs, in some cases spiders. These strangers are always motionless. They've been stung into control by the wasps."

"Because the wasps lay their eggs in them," replied the interne. He shrugged his shoulders to show that he disliked the idea. "When the eggs hatch, the young start eating."

"But in the meantime," Thunstone said, "the prey remains alive but helpless, waiting the pleasure and plans of its conqueror." He looked at Gallender, once again. "I won't talk about hypnosis in its very derived forms, or about charms, spells and curses. You're studying medicine, and you'd better remain an empiricist. But don't worry about the patient unless you hear that I've been destroyed. And don't wait with your breath held to hear that, either. Goodbye, and many thanks."

He left. Outside it was evening, and he sought his hotel.

Knowing in a general sort of way what might be at the door of his room, Thunstone found it. A tiny fresh white bone from a toad or a lizard, bound with a bow of red silk floss and emitting a strange sickening smell, had been pushed into the keyhole. His key, thoughtlessly inserted, would have crushed the bone. Carefully Thunstone pried the grisly little object out, catching it in an envelope.

"Standard obeah device," he decided under his breath. "Some day I'll have time to do a real research and decide whether this is a primitive African method, as Seabrook and Hurston say, or a modification of European diabolism. Rowley Thorne will try anything."

Now he studied the jamb and threshold for possible smears of black liquid or scatterings of gray-white powder. He found neither, sighed with relief, and finally unlocked the door and let himself in.

He made two telephone calls, one to a police executive of his acquaintance who gave him Rowley Thorne's Greenwich Village address, the other to room service for dinner and a drink to be sent up. The waiter who brought the tray brought also a folded newspaper. "Left for you downstairs, sir," he told Thunstone. "Room clerk asked me to bring it to you."

"Thanks," said Thunstone. "Put it on the table."

When the man was gone, Thunstone took the salt shaker from the dinner tray and lightly sprinkled a few grains on the paper, watching closely, then took it up and unfolded it. On the upper margin was written a name he knew and which reassured him. He turned to the classified advertisements. Under "Personals" an item was circled:

NEW THRESHOLD OF SPIRIT. You may glimpse truths beyond imagination. Demonstrations nightly, 8:45. Admission \$1.

This was followed by an address, the same Thunstone had just learned from his friend of the police.

"Mmmm," said Thunstone, softly and slowly. He put the paper aside and turned to his dinner. He ate heartily, as always, but first he salted every mouthful. He even sprinkled a few grains in the brandy with which he finished.

When the waiter had taken away the dishes, Thunstone relaxed in his easiest chair. From a bureau drawer he produced a primitive-looking pipe with a bowl of dark blue stone, carved carefully with figures that looked like ideographs. It had been given him, with reassurances as to its beneficent power, by Long Spear, a Tsichah Indian, a Phi Beta Kappa from a Southern university, and a practicing medicine man of his tribe. Thunstone carefully filled the ancient bowl with tobacco mixed with kinnikinnik and, grimacing a bit — for he did not like the blend — smoked and smoked, blowing regular clouds in different directions.

When the pipe was finished, Thunstone wrote a letter. It began with the sentence: "If anything fatal or disabling overtakes me within the next few days, please act on the following information," and went on for several pages. When he had done and signed his name, he placed it in an envelope addressed to one Jules de Grandin at Huntington, New Jersey.

Now, from his lower drawer he produced a rectangular box the size of a dressing case, which showed neither keyhole nor draw-catch. By pressing at the middle of the lid, Thunstone made it fly open. Inside were several objects, closely packed, and from among them he selected a reliquary no more than two inches by three. It was of ancient brick-red clay, bound in silver, and its lid, too, must be pressed in a certain way to open.

From it Thunstone took a tiny silver bell, that clanged once as he lifted it, with a voice that might have deafened had it not been so sweetly clear. The bell was burnished white, but anyone could judge its age by the primitive workmanship. It had been carved, probably, from a block of metal, rather than cast or hammered. Upon it were carved two names, St. Cecelia and St. Dunstan, the patrons of music and of silversmithing; and a line of Latin, in letters almost too fine to read:

Est mea cunctorum terror vox daemoniorum.

"My voice is the terror of all demons," said Thunstone aloud.

Muffling the little thimble-sized object in his handkerchief, he stowed it in an inside pocket. By now it was nearly eight o'clock. He went out, mailed the letter, and signaled a taxi.

Once there had been two rooms in the apartment, one behind the other, perhaps for parlor and dining room. By the removal of the partition, these had become one room, a spacious oblong. Its dull walls were hung with gloomy-colored pictures and two hangings with crude but effective figures of men and animals embroidered upon them. At the rear had been built a platform a few inches above the floor level, in boards painted a flat brown. Upon this stood a square table covered with a black velvet cloth that fell to the platform itself. The front part of the room was filled with rows of

folding chairs, as for a lecture audience, and fully fifty people sat there. Two candles on the velvet-covered table gave light enough to show the faces of the audience, some stupid, some rapt, some greedy, some apprehensive. There were more women than men, and more shabby coats than new ones.

A rear door opened and a woman appeared and mounted the platform. She was youngish and wore many bangles and scarves. In the candle light her hair appeared to be rather blatantly hennaed. From the open door behind her stole soft, slow music, from a little organ or perhaps from a record on a phonograph. The woman faced the audience, her dark eyes big and questioning.

"Do you know why you are here?" she asked suddenly. "Is it for curiosity? Then you may wish you had not come. For worship? But you may not be ready. Because a call came to you that was more direct than what you have read or heard? That will be true for some of you."

Her wide eyes fluttered shut. "I am a medium, sensitive to spirits both alive and dead. I feel influences, and not all of them honest. In this room is a spy. He calls himself a journalist. Will he speak?"

There was some fidgeting and muttering, but nobody spoke. The woman's eyes opened, and fixed coldly on a young man in the rear of the room. "You," said the woman. "You came here to find something sensational or ridiculous to write about. Get out."

"I paid my dollar —" began the reporter.

"It is returned to you," she interrupted, and he flinched, then stared at a crumpled bit of paper that had sprung into view in his empty hand. "Go, I tell you."

"I have a right to stay," insisted the newspaperman, but even as he spoke he rose. It was an involuntary motion, as though he had been drawn erect by a noose of rope. Stumbling a little, he went to the door, opened it, and departed.

"Does anyone else come with enmity or a sneer?" challenged the woman on the platform. "I see a girl on the front row. She thought she would see or hear something tonight that would amuse her bridge club. She has her dollar back. Let her leave."

There was no protest this time. The girl rose and hurried out, clutching in her hand the bill that had come from nowhere.

"To the rest of you, I think, came a clear call," resumed the speaker. "Why else, do you think, you read a vague advertisement, and on the strength of it made a journey and paid money? I know your hearts — or enough of them to feel that you will listen. All I have said is mere preparation, as though I had swept humbly with a broom before the man who will now show himself."

She turned toward the door and nodded, or perhaps bowed a little in

reverence. Rowley Thorne appeared, and took her place on the platform. The music stopped. There was absolute silence.

Rowley Thorne stood behind the table, leaning a little forward with his hands on the velvet cover, so that he had a candle on each side of him. He held himself rigid, as if to photograph himself on the attentions of those who watched — a man in dark clothes, of great width, with a chest like a keg and a squat-set hairless head. The candle-glow from beneath his face undershot him with light and made strange shadows with the jut of his chin and brows, the beaky curve of his big nose above his hard-slashed mouth. His eyelids did not flutter, but his gunmetal eyes roved restlessly, as though searching every face in the audience.

"Watch me," he bade after some seconds.

To those who watched he seemed to be floating closer. But that was only an illusion; he had spread his shoulders and chest, so that they filled more closely the space between the candles. His features, too, broadened and turned heavy like the memorial sculptures sometimes carved gigantically on granite bluffs. Like a face of granite his face maintained a tense immobility, as though Rowley Thorne must strive to keep it still. He grew. He was size and a half now, and swelling. Abruptly his face lost control, writhing and blurring, and he lifted his hands from the table to straighten himself.

There were those in the audience who wanted to move — toward Thorne, or away from him, or to fall on the floor. But none moved, and none felt that they could move. Thorne rose like a magnifying image on a cinema screen, higher and more misty, seeming to quiver and gesture madly as though in a spasm of agony. One person, or perhaps two, thought he was being lifted on an elevator apparatus concealed behind the velvet-draped table. But then he had stepped sidewise into full view. No doubts were possible now, he stood upon great columns of legs, a gigantic and grotesque figure out of proportion beyond any acromegalic freak in a side show. His eyes glared as big as peeled eggs, his mouth opened like the gaping of a valise, and his hand like a great spading fork moved toward the candle flames. At its slap they went out, and there was intense darkness in the room.

Quiet in that darkness, save for a woman in the audience who was trying to stifle sobs. Then the candles blazed up again. The henna-haired opener of the program had come back through the rear door and was holding a twisted spill of paper to light the two tags of radiance. Rowley Thorne leaned against the wall at the rear of the platform, gasping and sagging as though after a staggering effort. He was back to his own proportions again.

"I did that, not to startle you, but to convince you," he said between great gulps of air. "Does anyone here doubt that I have power? I have

stood on the threshold of the unthinkable — but from the unthinkable I bring knowledge for anyone who cares to ask. Question, anyone? Question?”

The woman who had sobbed stood up. “I came to learn what happened to my sister. She quarreled with her parents and left, and we couldn’t trace —”

“Write to Cleveland,” bade Rowley Thorne, his breathing even now. “Write to Dr. J. J. Avery, on East Twenty-third Street. He will tell you how your sister died.”

“Died!” echoed the woman faintly, and sat down abruptly.

“Next question,” said Rowley Thorne.

It came from another woman, who had lost an emerald-set bracelet that she called a family heirloom. Thorne directed her to search in a locked trunk in her attic, looking for a discarded red purse which held the jewel. After that came a question from a grizzled oldster about Bronx politics, which Thorne settled readily but with patent disdain. A young man’s query as to whether he should marry the girl he had in mind drew from Thorne a simple “Never,” staccato but leering. There were other questions, each answered readily, convincingly, and more than often the reply was discouraging. But Rowley Thorne was plain telling each questioner the truth, the truth that he had dredged up from somewhere unknown.

When no more voices ventured, Rowley Thorne permitted himself to show one of his smiles, all hard mouth and no eyes. “This has been a first meeting of what may be a communion of help and knowledge,” he said, vague and encouraging. “All who stayed had belief and sympathy. You will be welcome another time, and perhaps more things will be revealed.”

He paused on exactly the proper note of half-promise. He bowed in dismissal. The people rose from their seats and filed out, murmuring to each other.

When the door closed, Thorne turned to his henna-haired companion. “You got the names?”

“Each as they stood up to speak,” she nodded, above a penciled list. “I took each name as the person came in, and checked them in their seats. Nobody saw me writing. Their attention was all for you.”

“Good.” He took the paper from her. “I count eleven who brought up private matters they might better have kept to themselves. And even the smallest inquiry was admission of —”

He broke off, glaring into the remote rear corner, where lounged a human bulk as great as his own.

“Continue,” said the voice of John Thunstone. “I am listening with the deepest interest.”

Thorne and his companion faced savagely toward the big man. The red-haired woman drew herself up. “How did you come here?” she de-

manded tremulously. "And how did you remain without my knowledge?"

"Your mind-reading powers are not as perfect as you think," replied Thunstone, rising from where he sat. "When I was a boy I learned to think behind a wall. The untrained minds of the others were open to you, you could detect mockery and enmity and banish those who felt it. Meanwhile I had slipped in with the crowd and sat in this dimmest corner." He addressed Thorne. "Why did you break off. You were going to say you had a hold on all who listened to you here."

Thorne's lips twitched thinly and moistly. "I venture to remind you that you are a trespasser in a lodgings leased by myself. If something tragic happened to you, the law would reckon it no more than justified by your intrusion."

"Law!" echoed Thunstone, walking toward him.

He and Thorne were very much of a size. Each grinned with his lips and gazed with hard, watchful eyes. The red-haired woman glanced from one to the other in plain terror.

"Law, Thorne!" said Thunstone again. "You have a sound respect for such as help you. I know of nobody more bound by rules than yourself. A hold, I was saying, on those who heard and saw your performance tonight. That checks almost exactly with what I foresaw."

"You know so little that we pity you," taunted the red-haired woman.

"Store up your pity for your own needs," Rowley Thorne told her. "Thunstone does not consider himself a pitiable figure. I permit him to go on talking, for a little while."

"The classic demonologists," Thunstone continued, "agree that those who attend evil ceremonies and do not protest or rebel are therefore sealed communicants of black worship. You've collected the beginnings of a following, haven't you, Thorne? You're already planning how to rivet your hold on every person — on this one by fear, on that one by favor, on the other by blackmail."

"I'm able to stand alone," growled Thorne deeply.

"But those you serve demand worshippers, and you must see to the supply. You have failed before. I know, because I caused the failure. I have disrupted your ceremonies, burned your books, discredited and disgraced you." Thunstone's hard smile grew wider. "I am your bad luck, Thorne."

The red-haired woman had stooped, twitching up her skirt. From a sheath strapped to her leg she drew a slim dagger, but paused, staring at it. "It's broken," she muttered.

"Even your tools fail you," pronounced Thunstone.

Thorne, still standing on the dais, drew a deep breath. It swelled him like a hollow figure of rubber.

The woman stared at him, gasped, and drew away. She could not accustom herself to the phenomenon. Thunstone smiled no longer as he

stepped up on the dais, close to Thorne.

"I'm not afraid of you in any size or shape," he said.

Around Thunstone the air was close and hot, as though he had entered a cave in the side of a volcano. The dimness of the room seemed to take on a murky red glow. But in that glow Thorne's face and outline grew no clearer. He only swelled. He was already a head taller than Thunstone.

"Moloch, Lucifer, Pemeoth," Thorne was saying, as though to someone behind him, "Anector, Somiator, sleep ye not."

"It is the unknown that terrifies," rejoined Thunstone, as though speaking a rehearsed line in response to a cue. "I know those names and for what beings they stand. I am not afraid."

"Awake, strong Holaha," chanted Thorne. "Powerful Eabon, mighty Tetragramaton. Athe, Stoch, Sada, Erohye!"

Thunstone felt around him the thickening, stifling heat, sensed the deepening of the red glow. There was a crackle in the air as of flames on the driest day of summer. How true, mused Thunstone while he fixed his eyes on the burgeoning form of his enemy, was the instinct of the primitive priest who first described hell as a place of gloomy fires...

Hands were reaching for Thunstone, hands as large as platters. Thunstone smiled again.

"Do you think I am afraid?" he inquired gently, and stepped forward within reach of the hands.

A chorus of voices howled and jabbered, like men trying to sound like animals, or like animals trying to sound like men. Thorne's great gouty fingers had seized Thunstone's shoulders, and swiftly released their grip, while Thorne cursed as if in sudden pain. For Thunstone had seized the crumpled sleeves upon the mighty ridged arms, twisting them so that they bound and constricted like tourniquets. Thunstone's clutch could not be broken.

Thorne's hugeness above him heaved and struggled. But it did not seem to have gained weight in proportion to its size. Thunstone's own solidity anchored it down. "To me!" Thorne was blaring. "To me, you named and you nameless!"

They rallied to his call. Thunstone felt blinded, and at the same time dazzled, by that hot redness; but beings were there, many and near, around him. He clung to the sleeves he had grasped, and Thorne could not break away. Stifled, numbed, Thunstone yet summoned his strength, and with a mighty wrench toppled Thorne's overgrown form to its knees. That was enough for the moment. He let go and drove a hand under his coat to the inside pocket.

With a full-armed sweep, he swung the little silver bell.

Its voice, unthinkable huge as the master chime of a great carillon, rang joyously in that dark lost corner. It drowned the voices that howled at it. It

clanged them into dismayed silence, and they shrank from it. Thunstone knew that they shrank, though mercifully he could not see them plainly. They retreated, and with them ebbed the redness and the numbness, and the breathless heat. Thorne was trying to say something, either defiant or pleading, from farther away and farther still. The bell drowned his speech, too. Things became plainer to the eye now, the room was just an ordinary dim room. Thunstone looked for Thorne, and saw him and saw through him, just as the giant outline faded like an image from a screen when the projector's light winks out.

Thunstone stood quiet a moment, breathing deeply. He cuddled the little bell in his palm to muffle its voice, and gazed at it with gratitude.

"I remember part of the old Hymn of the Bell," he said aloud. "I call the people, I summon the clergy; I weep the departed, I put the pestilence to flight, I shatter the thunderbolts, I proclaim the Sabbaths." "He looked around for the red-haired woman. "A holy man whom once I helped gave me this bell as a gift. It was made long ago, he told me, to exorcise evil spirits. This is the third time I have used it successfully."

Carefully he returned the bit of silver to his pocket. Stepping from the dais, he walked across the room and switched on a light that threw white brilliance everywhere. Turning his head, he looked hard for some sign that Rowley Thorne had been there. There was none. Tramping a few steps more, John Thunstone opened two windows.

"This place smells most unoriginally of burning," he commented.

The red-haired woman crouched motionless in the farthest corner from the dais where Thunstone and Thorne had stood together. Stooping above her, Thunstone touched her shoulder. She looked up at him, and rose slowly. Her face was as pale as tallow.

"What will you do with me?" she managed to ask.

"Leave you to think how narrowly you escaped," he replied. "You were not a lieutenant of Thorne, only his servitor. Plainly you know little or nothing of what he was really trying to do. I recommend that you review the story of the sorcerer's apprentice, and keep clear in the future of all supernatural matters. For you have used up a good deal of your normal luck in escaping tonight."

"But what — what —" she stammered.

"The explanation is simple, if you care to accept it. Thorne was on the threshold of — something. Science calls it another dimension, mysticism calls it another plane, religion calls it another existence. He could communicate with entities beyond, and claim them for allies. He was able to draw some powers and knowledges, such as his ability to prophesy to those dupes who came. Such powers might have been useful to him, and rankly terrible to the normal world." Thunstone produced his pipe. "By the way, I am heartily in favor of the normal world."

Nearby stood a telephone on a bracket. Without asking permission, Thunstone picked it up and dialed a number. The nurse who answered told him jubilantly that Dr. Gallender had suddenly awakened from his trance, very lively, cheerful and hungry.

"Congratulate him for me," said Thunstone, "and say that I'll join him in a late supper."

He hung up and continued his explanation.

"Thorne gambled everything when he called his allies into this normal region of life to help him. I wanted him to do that. Because, when defeated, they would go back. And with them they would take Thorne. I don't dare hope that he's gone for good, but he'll have considerable difficulty in returning to us."

"But where?" pleaded the woman. "Where did he go?"

"The lesson to be learned from all I have said and done," Thunstone assured her gently, "is not to inquire into such things."



The Shonokins

LESS THAN FIVE PERSONS have ever seen John Thunstone frankly, visibly terrified, and less than two have lived through subsequent events to tell about it. Fear he knows and understands, for it is his chief study; but he cannot afford it very often as a personal emotion.

And so he only smiled a little that afternoon in Central Park, and the hand at which Sabine Loel, the medium, clutched was as steady as the statue of Robert Burns under which she had asked him to meet her. A few snowflakes spun around them, settling on their dark coats. "I say that you are in more than mortal danger," she repeated breathily. "I would not have dared recall myself to your attention for anything less important."

"I believe that," smiled Thunstone, remembering when last they met, and how he had demonstrated to her complete satisfaction the foolish danger of calling up evil spirits without being ready to deal with them. Not one ounce of his big powerful body seemed tense. His square face was pale only by contrast to his black eyes and black mustache. Not even his restraint seemed overdone.

"Whatever you think of my character, you know that I'm sensitive to spirit messages," she went on. "This one came without my trying for it. Even the spirit control that gave it was in horror. The Shonokins are after you."

"I might have known that," he told her. "After all, I acted with what they might consider officious enmity. I stopped them, I hope, from a preliminary move back toward the world power they say they held before human history began. A Shonokin died, not by my hand but by my arrangement, and his body was buried at a place where I want them never to come — living Shonokins, it seems, avoid only dead Shonokins. Their very nature forces them to strike back at me. But thank you for the warning."

"You think," ventured Sabine Loel, "that I want to be your friend?"

"You do, though your purpose is probably selfish. Thank you again. Now, I never had any malice toward you — so, for your own safety, won't

you go away and stay away? Avoid any further complication in — in what's to happen between me and the Shonokins."

"What precautions — " she began to ask.

"Precautions against the Shonokins," explained Thunstone patiently, "are not like precautions against anything else in this world or out of it. Let them be my problem. Good-by."

Going, she looked back once. Her face was whiter than the increasing snowflakes. Thunstone filled his pipe with tobacco into which were mixed one or two rank but significant herbs. Long Spear, the Indian medicine man, had told him how much such things did to fight ill magic.

Thunstone was living just then in a very comfortable, very ordinary hotel north of Times Square. He entered the lobby confidently enough, and rode up in the elevator without seeming to be apprehensive. But he paused in the corridor outside his own door as cautiously as though about to assail an enemy stronghold.

He bent close to the panels without touching them. Earlier in the day he had closed and locked that door from outside, and had dripped sealing wax in three places at juncture of door and jamb, stamping the wax with the crusader's ring he habitually wore. The wax looked undisturbed, its impress of the cross of Saint John staring up at him.

With a knife-point he pried the blobs away. They had not been tampered with in the least. Inserting his key in the lock, he let himself in and switched on the lights in the curtained sitting room.

At once he started back against the inner side of the door, setting himself for action. His first thought was that two men were there, one prone and one standing tensely poised. But, a hair-shaving of time later, he saw that these were dummies.

The reclining dummy was made of one of Thunstone's suits and a pillow from the bed in the next room. It lay on its back, cloth-stuffed arms and legs outflung. A tightly looped necktie made one end of the pillow into a headlike lump, and on this had been smudged a face, crudely but recognizably that of John Thunstone. Ink from the stand on the desk had been used to indicate wide, stupid eyes, a slack mouth under a lifelike mustache — the expression of one stricken instantly dead. The other figure stood with one slippered foot on the neck of the Thunstone effigy. It was smaller, perhaps a shade under the size of an average man. Sheets and towels and blankets, cunningly twisted, rolled and wadded together, made it a thing of genuinely artistic proportion and attitude. A sheet was draped loosely over it like a toga, and one corner of this veiled the place where a face would be.

"Substitution magic?" said Thunstone under his breath. "This is something that's going to happen to me..." He turned toward the desk. "What's

that?"

On the desk seemed to crouch a little pixy figure. Made from a handkerchief, like a clever little impromptu toy to amuse a child, it looked as though it pored over an open book, the Gideon Bible that is an item in every hotel room. Stepping that way, very careful not to touch anything, Thunstone bent to look.

The book was open to the Prophet Joel, second chapter. Thunstone's eye caught a verse in the middle of the page, the ninth verse:

They leap upon the city; they run upon the wall; they climb up into the houses; they enter in at the windows like a thief.

Thunstone has read many books, and the Bible is one of them. He knew the rest of the frightening second chapter of Joel, which opens by foretelling the coming of terrible and ungainsayable people, before which no normal creature could stand. "They enter in at the windows like a thief," he repeated, and inspected his own windows, in the sitting room and the adjoining bedroom. All were closed, and the latches still bore blobs of wax with his seal.

These phenomena had taken place, it remained to be understood, without the agency of any normal entry by normal beings. Movement and operation by forces at a distance — telekinesis was the word for it, fondly used by Charles Richet of France, and tossed about entertainingly by the Fortean and other amateur mystics. Thoughts crossed Thunstone's mind, of broken dishes placed in locked chests by Oriental fakirs and taken out mended; of Harry Houdini's escapes and shackle-sheddings, which many persons insisted were by supernatural power; of how the living body of Caspar Hauser had so suddenly flicked into existence, and of how the living body of Ambrose Bierce had so suddenly flicked out. There were a variety of other riddles, which many commentators purported to explain by the overworked extra-dimensional theory. Somebody or something, it remained, had fashioned a likeness of his own downfall in his own sitting room, without getting in. Again approaching the desk without touching the Bible or the little figure crouched beside it, Thunstone drew out a drawer and produced a sheaf of papers.

The top sheet was a second or third carbon of his own typescript. Other copies of this sheet were sealed in various envelopes with equally interesting documents, placed here and there in the custody of trusted allies, each envelope inscribed *To be opened only in the event of my death — John Thunstone*. The knowledge that such collections existed was a prime motive of some of Thunstone's worst enemies to keep him alive and well. There was Sabine Loel's warning, for instance... Sitting down well away from the grotesque tableau, Thunstone glanced over his own grouping of known

and suggested facts about the Shonokins.

Those facts were not many. The Shonokins were, or said they were, a people who had been fortuitously displaced as rulers of America by the ancestors of the red Indians. A legend which they themselves insisted upon was that ordinary human evolution was one thing and Shonokin evolution another. They hinted here and there at tokens of long-vanished culture and power, and at a day soon to come when their birthright would return to them. To Thunstone's carbon were appended the copy of a brief article on the "Shonokin superstition" from the *Encyclopedia of American Folkways*; a letter from a distinguished but opinionated professor of anthropology who dismissed the Shonokins as an aboriginal myth less well founded than Hiawatha or the Wendigo; and Thunstone's own brief account of how someone calling himself a Shonokin had made strange demands on the Conley family on a Southern farm, and of what had befallen that same self-styled Shonokin.

Finishing the study of his own notes, Thunstone again regarded the grouped dummies, which he had thus far forborne to touch.

The standing figure, with its foot on the neck of the Thunstone likeness, had hands that thrust out from under its robe. They had been made of a pair of Thunstone's own gloves, and on closer scrutiny proved to be strangely prepared. The forefinger and middle finger of each had been tucked in at the tip, so that the third fingers extended longest. The only Shonokin that Thunstone had ever met had displayed third fingers of that same unnatural proportion. Thunstone nodded to himself, agreeing that this was plainly the effigy of a Shonokin. He turned his mind to the problem of why the images had been thus designed and posed.

A simple warning to him? He did not think so. The Shonokins, whatever they really were and wanted, would not deal in warnings — not with him at least. Was the group of figures then an actual weapon, like the puppets which wizards pierce with pins to torture their victims? But Thunstone told himself that he had never felt better in his life. What remained? What reaction, for instance, was expected of him?

He mentally put another person in his place, a man of average mind, reaction and behavior. What would such a person do? Tear up the dummies, of course, with righteous indignation — starting with that simulation of the Shonokin with a conquering foot on its victim's neck. Thunstone allowed himself the luxury of a smile.

"Not me," he muttered.

Yet again he went to the desk, and returned the paper to the drawer. He opened another drawer. Catching hold of the Bible, he used it to thrust the little handkerchief-doll into the drawer, closed and locked it in. Then, and not until then, he approached the two full-sized figures. They were arranged on a rug. For all its crumpled-fabric composition, the simulated

Shonokin seemed to stand there very solidly. John Thunstone knelt, gingerly took hold of the arm of his own image, and with the utmost deliberation and care eased it toward him, from under the foot of its oppressor. When he had dragged it clear of the rug, he took hold of the edge of the rug itself and drew it smoothly across the floor. The Shonokin shape rode upright upon it. He brought it to the door of the empty sitting room closet, opened the door, and painstakingly edged the thing, rug and all, inside.

This done, he closed and locked the door. From the bedroom he brought sticks of sealing wax, which he always kept in quantity for unorthodox uses. After some minutes, he had sealed every crack and aperture of the closet door, making it airtight. He marked the wax here and there with the Saint John's cross of his ring. Finally returning to his own likeness, he lifted it confidently and propped it upright in a chair, and sat down across from it. He winked at the rough mockery of his own face, which did not seem so blank and miserable now. Indeed, it might be said to wink back at him; or perhaps the fabric of the pillowslip was folded across one of the smudgy eyes.

A little quiver ran through the room, as though a heavy truck had trundled by somewhere near. But no truck would be operating in the sealed closet.

Thunstone lighted his pipe again, gazing into the gray clouds of smoke he produced. What he may have seen there caused him to retain his smile. He sat as relaxed and motionless as a big, serene cat for minutes that threatened to become hours, until at last his telephone rang.

"Hello," he said into the instrument. "This is John Thunstone."

"You danger yourself," a voice told him, a voice accented in a fashion that he could not identify with any foreign language group in all his experience.

"And you are kind to warn me," replied Thunstone with the warmest air of cordiality. "Are you going to offer me advice, too?"

"My advice is to be wise and modest. Do not try to pen up a power greater than hurricanes."

"And my advice," returned Thunstone, "is not to underestimate the wit or determination of your adversary. Good day."

He hung up the receiver, reached for the Bible, and turned from the Prophet Joel to the Gospel of Saint John. Its first chapter, specified by the old anti-diabolists as a direct indictment of evil magic's weakness, gave him comfort, though he was reading it for perhaps the four hundredth time. The telephone rang again, and again he lifted it.

"I deplore your bad judgment in challenging us," said the same voice that had spoken before. "You are given one more chance."

"That's a lie," said Thunstone. "You wouldn't give me a chance under

any circumstances. I won't play into your hands." He paused. "Rather unusual hands you have, don't you? Those long third fingers —"

This time it was his caller who hung up suddenly. Musing, Thunstone selected from his shelf of books a leather-bound volume entitled *These Are Our Ancestors*. He leafed through it, found the place he wanted, and began to read:

Stone-age Europe was spacious, rich and uncrowded, but it could acknowledge only one race of rulers.

Homo Neanderthalensis — the Neanderthal Man — must have grown up there from the dim beginning, was supreme and plentiful as the last glaciers receded. His bones have been found from Germany to Gibraltar, and his camps and flints and fire-ashes. We construct his living image, stooped and burly, with a great protruding muzzle and beetling brows. Perhaps he was excessively hairy — not a man as we know men, but not a brute, either. Fire was his, and the science of flint-chipping. He buried his dead, which shows he believed in an after-life, probable in a deity. He could think, perhaps he could speak. He could fight, too.

When our true forefathers, the first Homo Sapiens, invaded through the eastern mountain passes or out of the great valley now drowned by the Mediterranean, there was battle. Those invaders were in body and spirit like us, their children. They could not parley with the abhorrent foe they found. There could be no rules of warfare, no truces or treaties, no mercy to the vanquished. Such a conflict could die only when the last adversary died.

This dawn-triumph of our ancestors was the greatest, because the most fundamental, in the history of humanity. No champion of mankind ever bore a greater responsibility to the future than that first tall hunter who crossed, all aware, the borders of Neanderthal country.

The book sagged in Thunstone's hands. His eyes seemed to pierce the mists of time. He saw, more plainly than in an ordinary dream, a landscape of meadow and knoll and thicket, with wooded heights on the horizon. Through the bright morning jogged a confident figure, half-clad in fur, with his long black hair bound in a snakeskin fillet, a stone axe at his girdle and a bone-tipped javelin in one big hand. If the frill of beard had been shaved from his jaw, he might have been taken for John Thunstone.

He was trailing something — the deer he had waylaid and speared earlier in the day. There it was up ahead, fallen and quiet and dead. The hunter's wise eyes narrowed. Something dark and shaggy crouched beyond it, seeming to drag or worry at the carcass. A bear? The javelin lifted in the big tanned fist, the bearded mouth shouted a challenge.

At that the shaggy thing rose on two legs to face him, and it was not a bear.

Thunstone's eloquent fancy had identified the hunter with himself. It

was as if he personally faced that rival for the dead prey, at less than easy javelin-casting distance. It stood shorter than he but broader, its shoulders and chest and limbs thatched with hair. Its eyes met his without faltering, deep bright eyes that glared from a broad shallow face like the face of a shaggy lizard. Its ears pricked like a wolf's, it slowly raised immense hands, and the third fingers of those hands were longer than the other fingers.

Thunstone rose from his chair. The fancied landscape of long ago faded from his mind's eye, and he was back in his hotel sitting room. But the hairy thing with the strange hands was there, too, and it was moving slowly forward.

Thunstone's immediate thought was that he had expected something like this. The Neanderthal man, says H. G. Wells, was undoubtedly the origin of so many unchancy tales of ogres, trolls, mantacors and similar monsters. Small wonder that such a forbidding creature had impressed itself on the night memories of a race... It was not coming toward him, but past him, toward the sealed door. Its strange-fingered hands pawed at the sealed cracks.

Thunstone's pipe was still in his hand. It had not gone out. He carried it to his mouth, drew strongly to make the fire glow, and walked across the carpet to the very side of the hairy thing. When he had come within inches, he blew a thick cloud of the herb-laden smoke into the ungainly face.

Even as it lurched around to glare, it was dissolving like one scene in a motion picture melting into another. It vanished as the smoke-cloud vanished. The telephone was ringing yet a third time.

Patiently he answered it.

"You are now aware," he was told by the same accented voice, "that even your own thoughts may turn to fight you."

"Any man may dismiss his own thoughts," replied Thunstone at once. "I have a special hell to which I send thoughts that annoy me. Can you afford to go on blundering? Why do you not call on me in person? My door is unlocked."

"So is mine," replied the other coldly. "On the floor below yours. Room 712. Come down if you dare."

"I dare, and do defy you for a villain," quoted Thunstone from Shakespeare, who also made a study of supernormal phenomena. Hanging up, he took from his smoking stand a glass ash tray. In this he painstakingly built a gratelike contrivance from paper clips, and upon the little grate kindled a fire of wooden match sticks. When it blazed up, he fed upon it some crumbs of his blended tobacco and herbs, and when these caught fire he poured on a full handful of the pungent mixture. It took the flame bravely. He carried it across the room, setting it in front of the sealed closet. The smoke curled up as from an incense burner, shrouding the entire wall from any magical intruder. Thunstone nodded approval to him-

self, went out, down one flight of stairs, and knocked on the door marked 712.

The door opened a crack, showing a slice of sallow brown face. A deep black eye peered at Thunstone, and then the door opened. A hand with a too-long third finger waved as if inviting him in. He crossed the threshold.

The room was dim, with curtains drawn and a single crudely molded candle burning on a center table. Three Shonokins were there — one motionless under a quilt on the bed, one at the door, the third sunk in the armchair. They might have been triplets, all slender and sharp-faced, with abundant shocks of black hair. They all wore neat suits of gray, with white shirts and black ties, but to Thunstone it seemed that they were as strange to such clothing as if they had come from a far land or a far century. The door closed behind him.

"Well?" he said.

The Shonokin by the door and the Shonokin in the chair gazed at him with malignant eyes of purest, brightest black. Their hands stirred, rather nervously. Their fingernails appeared to be sharp, perhaps artificially cut to ugly points. The Shonokin on the bed neither moved nor stared. Toward him Thunstone made a gesture.

"I guessed more correctly about you than you about me," he said. "Your languid friend yonder — would it be tactless, perhaps to suggest that he lies there without any soul in him? Or that his soul is upstairs, animating a certain rude image which I have sealed carefully away?"

"We," said the seated Shonokin, "have never been prepared to admit the existence of souls."

"Tag it by whatever name you like," nodded Thunstone, "this specimen on the bed seems to be without it, and worse for being without it. Suppose we establish a point from which to go on with our discussion. You were able to fabricate, in my room, a sort of insulting tableau. I, for my part, was to enter, be surprised and angry, and attempt to tear it to pieces. Doing that, I would release upon myself — what?"

"You do not know," said the standing Shonokin tensely. It was his voice, Thunstone recognized, that had given the various telephone messages.

"Oh, it might have been any one of several things that hostile and angry spirits can accomplish," went on Thunstone with an air of carelessness. "I might have become sick, say; or have gone mindless; or the cloth, as I loosened it, might have smothered me strangely, and so on. Strange you went in for such elaborate and sinister attacks, when a knife in the back might have done as well. You intend to kill me, don't you?"

He looked at one of his interrogators, then the other, then once more at the figure on the bed. That Shonokin's face looked as pale as paper

under its swarthinness. The lips seemed to quiver, as if trying feebly to gulp air.

"I think that it has been well established," Thunstone resumed, "that when a body sends forth the power that animates it, for good or for evil, it will die unless that power soon returns. But this doesn't touch on why you dared me to come down here. Did you dream that I wouldn't call your bluff. For it was a bluff, wasn't it?"

The eyes of the two conscious Shonokins were like octopus eyes, he decided. The Shonokins themselves might be compared to the octopus people, whose natural home was deep in ocean caves, from which specimens ventured on rare occasions to the surface when man could see and divide his emotions between wonder and horror...

"Thank you for giving us another thought to turn against you," said the Shonokin in the chair.

The dark room swam, swam literally, for to Thunstone it was as though warm rippling waters had come from somewhere to close over his head. Through the semi-transparency writhed lean dark streamers, like a nest of serpents, their tips questing toward him. At the ends furthest from him they joined against a massive oval bladder, set with two eyes like ugly jewels. An octopus — and a big one. Its eight arms, lined with red-mouthed suckers, were reaching for Thunstone.

By instinct, he lifted his hands as though in defense. His right hand held his pipe, and its bowl emitted a twirl of smoke. Smoke under water! — But this was not water, it was only the sensation of water, conjured out of his chance thought by Shonokin magic. As the wriggling, twisting tentacles began to close around him, Thunstone put his pipe to his lips and blew out a cloud of smoke.

The room cleared. It was as it had been. Thunstone tapped ashes from his pipe, and filled and lighted it as before.

"You see," said the seated Shonokin, "that any fancy coming into your mind may blossom into nightmare. Is it a pleasant future to foresee, John Thunstone? You had better go up and open that sealed door."

Thunstone's great head shook, and he smiled under his mustache. "Just now," he said, "I am thinking of someone very like you, who died and was buried at the Conley farm. Why not make him appear out of my meditations?"

"Silence!" snarled the Shonokin who had opened the door. His hand lifted, as if to menace Thunstone with its sharp nails. "You do not know what you are talking about."

"But I do," Thunstone assured him gently. "Living Shonokins fear only dead Shonokins."

"Shonokins do not die," gulped the one in the dark.

"You have tried to convince yourselves of that by avoiding all corpses

of your kind," Thunstone said, "yet now you are in dread of this dying companion of yours. His life is imprisoned upstairs. Without it he strangles and perishes. I learn more and more about your foolish Shonokin ways."

"You learn about us?" snapped the standing one. "We are ancient and great. We had power and wisdom when your fathers were still wild brutes. When you understand that —"

"Ancient?" broke in Thunstone. "Yes, you must be. Only an unthinkable old race could have such deep-seated folly and narrowness and weakness. Do you really think that you can swarm out again from wherever you have cowered for ages, to overthrow mankind? Human beings at least dare look at their own dead, and to move over those dead to win fights. You vain and blind Shonokins are like a flock of raiding crows, to be frightened away by hanging up a few carcasses of your own kind —"

"I have it!" cried the Shonokin who had stood by the door.

Weasel-swift and weasel-silent, he had leaped at Thunstone, snatched the pipe, and leaped away again. A wisp of the smoke rose to his pinched nostrils, and he dropped the pipe with a strange exclamation that might have been a Shonokin oath.

"Without that evil-smelling talisman," said the seated one, "I leave you to your latest fancy — raiding crows."

The room was swarming full of them, black and shining and clatter-voiced. A whirl of many wings, a cawing chorus of gaping bills, churned around Thunstone, fanned the air of the room. Then, of a sudden, they were swarming — where?

"Now do you believe that your kind can die?" said Thunstone bleakly, his voice rising above the commotion. "The crows believe it. For they attack the dead, not the living."

The crows, or the vision of them, indeed thronged over and upon the bed, settling into a black, struggling mass that hid the form that lay there.

"I thought on purpose of carrion-birds," said Thunstone. "Your power to turn thoughts into nightmares has rebounded."

He spoke to the backs of the two living Shonokins. They were running. He wondered later if they opened the door or, by some power of their own, drifted through it. He followed them as far as the hall, in time to see them plunging down the stairway.

Stepping back into the room, he retrieved his pipe and drew upon it. At the first puff of smoke the crows were gone, leaving him alone with the silent figure on the bed.

Now he made sure, touching the chill wrist and twitching up a flaccid eyelid, that the Shonokin was dead. He made a tour of the room, in which there seemed to be no luggage — only a strange scroll of some material like pale suede, covered with characters Thunstone could not identify, but he pocketed it for more leisurely study. Out into the hall he strolled, smok-

ing thoughtfully. He was beginning to like that herb mixture, or perhaps he was merely grateful to it.

Back in his own quarters, he opened the sealed closet door without hesitation. On the floor lay a crumpled heap of sheets, garments and other odds and ends, as if something had worn them and had shaken them off. Thunstone carried them into his bedroom, then dismantled the image of himself. He telephoned for a chambermaid to make the bed and a tailor to press the suit.

At length he departed to find a favorite restaurant. He ordered a big dinner, and ate every crumb with an excellent appetite.

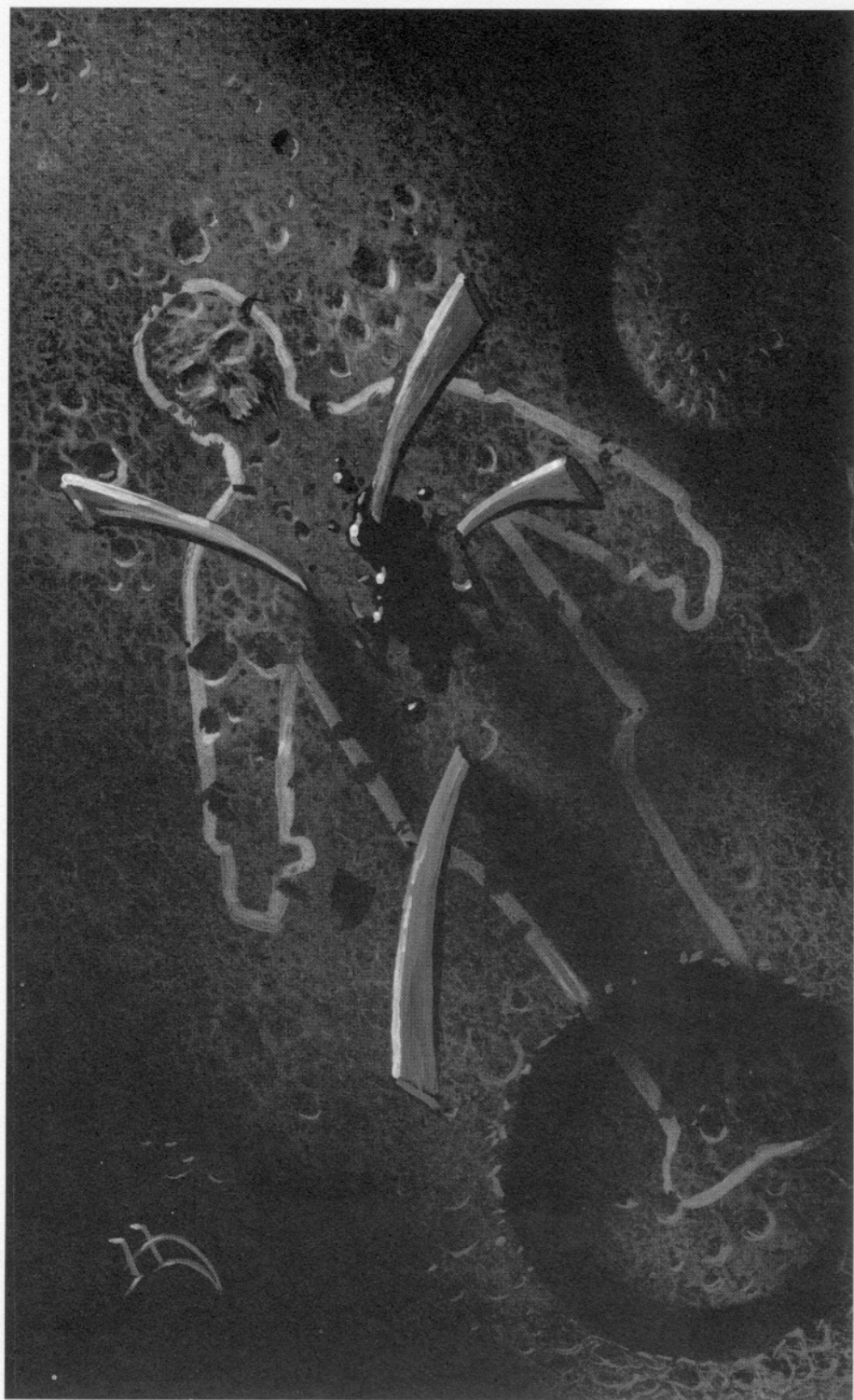
When he returned to the hotel late that evening, the manager told him of the sudden death, apparently from heart disease, of a foreign-seeming man in Room 712. The man had had friends, said the manager, but they could not be found. He was about to call the morgue.

"Don't," said Thunstone. "I met him. I'll arrange funeral details and burial."

For a Shonokin corpse, buried in the little private cemetery on the farm he had inherited, would make that refuge safe from at least one type of intruder.

The manager, who knew better than to be surprised at Thunstone's impulses, only asked, "Will you notify his relatives?"

"None of his relatives will care to come to the funeral," Thunstone assured the manager, "or anywhere near his grave."



Blood from a Stone

THE DOCTOR TOLD JOHN Thunstone that nothing was wrong with him, and for the time they were together in the examining room it was apparently true; but Thunstone had felt dizzy and faint as he entered, and as he left he had to call on the final ounce of power in his big body to keep from falling on the sidewalk.

"This tells me what I had to know," he assured himself. "Only one sort of illness comes and goes so conveniently for those who hate me. And evils other than germs bring it on."

A taxi returned him to his hotel, and during the ride he mastered his weakness of limb enough to enter the lobby and ride up in the elevator without being noticed by any guests or attendants, whose impulse to help would have been useless and embarrassing. His key weighed a ton as he unlocked the door of his suite. Once inside, he leaned against the jamb as though he had been shot through the body. Then, walking leadenly to his desk, he fumbled out a worn, dingy little book entitled *Egyptian Secrets* and bearing, perhaps inaccurately the name of Albertus Magnus and author.

Inside the back cover his own hand had jotted down a sort of index. Under the heading *Persons bewitched and punishment of sorcerers* were listed some twenty page numbers. He sought the first, but it included an invocation to something called "bedgoblin," which he did not feel like performing just then. Instead he leafed through to the fifty-fourth page, where the third paragraph was headed *To cite a witch*.

"Take an unglazed earthen pot," began the instructions, and John Thunstone reached for a cylindrical clay vessel with a tight-fitting cover and an Indian pattern. From various containers in his desk drawers he measured in the substances called for in the formula. Finally he plugged in the connection of an electric grill, clamped the lid tightly on the clay cylinder, and set it upside down on the glowing wires. "Summon the sorcerer," he muttered, reading from the book.

Every audible word seemed to drain away one more drop of his strength.

"Summon the sorcerer before me."

He turned to page 16:

When a Man or Beast is Plagued by Goblins or Ill-Disposed People

Go on Friday or Golden Sunday, ere the sun rise in the East, to a hazelnut bush. Cut a stick therefrom with a sympathetic weapon, by making three cuts above the hand toward the rise of the sun, in the name of...

Thunstone numbly congratulated himself in following these instructions some years before. His head swam, his eyes seemed oppressed by alternate flashes of light and blotches of gloom, but he staggered to the closet and groped in it for a package. Tearing away the wrapping of stout paper, he produced a rough-trimmed piece of hazel wood, the length and thickness of a walking stick. As his hand grasped its thicker end, he felt better, and turned toward the grill.

Vapor of same sort rose around his clay jar. In it he saw, or thought he saw, movement. As he walked toward that part of the room, his feet steadier and stronger, the moving object grew large and plain.

Somewhere a man in a gray gown or robe was busy at a rough table. Thunstone saw him, like a dimly-cast image on a motion picture screen, bending over his work, his hands shifting here and there in nimble manipulation. On the table had been outlined a little figure at full length, a man of powerful proportions that might be copied after Thunstone's own. The gray-robed one held a sheaf of sharp metal slivers, thrusting their points, one by one, into the pictured arms, throat, body.

"A Shonokin," said Thunstone. "I thought that. And I thought he would be doing just what he is doing. Now —"

His big hand took a firmer grip of the hazel cane, and he stepped forward and swung it.

The wood swept into the cloud of vapor and the image there cast. It swished through, without seeming to disturb the misty cloud, and the figure in the gown sprang convulsively back from the table. A face came into view at the top of the gown, a face framed in longish black hair, with sharp fine features. The mouth opened as if to cry out, a hand lifted, and Thunstone struck through the vapor again.

The figure cowered. Its arms crossed in front of the face, trying to ward off an attack that must have seemed incomprehensible. The hands were frail and lean, and the third fingers longer than the middle fingers.

With increasing strength and precision, Thunstone lashed and smote. He saw the gowned body going down now, and poked it once, as with a sword-point. Finally he swept his stick at the reflected table-top and saw the slivers flying from their lodgments in the outlined body there. Stepping back, he turned off his electric grill. The vapor vanished instantly, and with

in the images. Thunstone drew a deep, grateful breath of air. He was no longer weak, unsteady or blurred in his mind.

His first act was to open his pen-knife, cut a rally notch in the hazel stick. Carefully he rewrapped it, and carefully he stowed it away. A weapon that has defeated enchantment once is doubly effective in defeating it again — that is a commonplace of sorcery. He sat at the desk and from the top drawer drew the sheets of paper on which he was writing, as he found it out, all that could be said about the strange things called Shonokins.

“Their insistence upon an ancestry far more ancient and baleful than anything human may have a solid foundation of fact,” wrote Thunstone. “Whenever paleontologists have probed the graves of the past on this continent as thoroughly as they have probed in Europe, perhaps remains of a species resembling man, though interestingly not man, may be turned up to support the Shonokin claims. More and more do I incline to believe that here in America once lived such things, developing their own culture and behavior — just as in Europe fifty thousand years ago lived the Neanderthal race, also non-human as we know humans (not that the first Shonokins were Neanderthaloid or like any other ancient manlike creature yet discovered in fossil).

“And, just as the Neanderthals were wiped out in some unthinkable desperate warfare with the first invading *homo sapiens*, so the ancestors of the Red Indian race must have swept away the fathers of the Shonokins — though not all of them. It would have been a war horrible beyond thought, with no sparing of vanquished enemies at the end. Somehow, a few survivors escaped, and our evidence is the existence of Shonokins today. How those beaten people lived, and where, cannot be even guessed until we learn from what place their modern children venture forth among us, in their avowed attempts to recover rule of their old domain.

“The Shonokin enchantments, or attempts at enchantments, I shall discuss at another place. What remains is to cite certain definite racial traits that set these interesting creatures apart from us as human beings. True, they resemble men at first glance. This may be deliberate imitation of some sort, and more may be said on this part of the subject when an unclad Shonokin is examined. Their heads, though habitually covered with long hair, perhaps in disguise, betray strange skull formations that betoken a brain not inferior to the human but of a much different shape. Here may be the basic reason for differences in Shonokin ethics and reactions to all things, physical and spiritual. Again, the third finger of the Shonokin hand is the longest, instead of the middle finger as with true men. To what remote ancestry this may trace is impossible to say, as even the lower beasts as we know them have in the forepaw a longer middle toe than — ”

His telephone rang. It was the clerk at the desk. A gentleman wanted to see Mr. Thunstone. Might he come up?

"I'll come down," said Thunstone, rose and put away his unfinished manuscript. He left the suite, locked it carefully, and rode down in the elevator, whistling under his breath.

His visitor was lean, just shorter than Thunstone's own lofty self, and wore a long light coat and a pulled down hat. He bowed and held out a hand with a very long third finger. Thunstone failed, or pretended to fail, to see the hand.

"Come and sit in the lobby," he invited, and led the stranger to a brace of comfortable chairs in a far corner. They sat down. At once the Shonokin took off his hat and leaned his gaunt, fine face close to Thunstone.

"How much?" he demanded.

Thunstone leaned back, and from his pocket drew pipe and tobacco-pouch. He filled the pipe and lighted it. The Shonokin ducked his head sidewise in disgust.

"That filthy habit, learned from American savages!" he growled; and Thunstone remembered that tobacco mixed with herbs had been considered in old Indian days an incense to the Great Spirit and a near-fatal fumigation to evil beings. Had not Kalaspup — or Kwasind or Hiawatha, whatever his real name was — sat in enjoyment of the thick tobacco-fumes in the lodge, while his attackers, the water-goblins, turned sick and vomiting? Such evidence as he, Thunstone, uncovered tended more and more to prove that all monsters and devils of Indian legend were identifiable with the Shonokins.

"How much?" said his visitor again. "We know you well enough, Thunstone, to know that you are not a slave to money. But there are other things you value. Name them."

"You want to buy me off," replied Thunstone. "Is this an admission of defeat?"

"An admission of irritation," was the reply. "Being tormented by a stinging insect, which it is irksome to brush away, one spills honey in another place to attract it."

"My sting is not drawn as easily as that," Thunstone assured him. "Your journey is for nothing. Go back and tell that to the other Shonokins. Just now I am more than irritating. Haven't I seen two of you die?"

"No more of that!" The Shonokin lifted his left hand, its long third finger extended in what Thunstone judged to be a gesture averting ill omen. No Shonokin cares even to speak of the death of his own kind.

"You used magic against me," went on Thunstone, "magic so old as to be trite — poking and piercing my likeness. Men were successfully averting that sort of sympathetic hocus-pocus as long ago as Salem witchcraft days."

"It is not the extent of our power," was the harsh reply. "But you have not answered my question. Again, how much?"

"Again, you are wasting your time. Even a Shonokin's time must be

worth something to himself. Good day." The strange-shaped left hand dipped into a pocket of the long coat.

"I make a last attempt, Thunstone. Here is something you will find interesting."

The hand reappeared. Between its fingertips was a great glitter of light.

"Jewels? I do not even wear them," said Thunstone, but then his eyes were fixed on the thing.

He saw it was no jewel he knew. For an instant he fancied it was a bit of phosphorescence, or some sort of lamp — but no lamp, no phosphorus, gleamed like that. Its glare possessed his whole vision, seemed to beat through his eyes and pierce his skull behind them. Like a Brahmin looking into the sun, he was blinded; like a Brahmin looking into the sun, he could not look away.

"Rise," the Shonokin said, "and come with me."

Thunstone leaned in the direction of the voice, and blew out all the tobacco smoke in his lungs.

A cry, terrible and strangled, rang in his very ears, and the light seemed to flash off. There was an abrupt clink on the floor, as though a half-dollar had dropped, and he sat up, alone. The tobacco smoke hung in the air around him, a little blue misty swaddling through which he saw two figures — the scurrying long-coated Shonokin, the approaching hotel manager.

Thunstone put the pipe back in his mouth, shutting his eyes a moment to cleanse them of their blur. He would have smiled, but decided not to. The manager was questioning him.

"What happened to that man, Mr. Thunstone?"

"He was taken suddenly ill," replied Thunstone. "It's really nothing for us to worry about."

"You're all right?"

"I'm all right," nodded Thunstone.

The manager's eyes dropped floorward. "Careful! You dropped a coal from your pipe — step on it."

Thunstone, too, glanced down to a little crumb of radiance paler and brighter than any tobacco fire. "No, don't. That's a piece of cut-glass jewelry — rather skillful cutting and polishing — I'll take care of it."

He whipped the handkerchief from his breast pocket, dropped it over the glaring object and gathered it up in his big hand.

"You've cut your finger," said the manager. "There's a spot of blood on your handkerchief."

"Not my blood," Thunstone told him, "but this thing needs careful handling." With the cambric-swaddled lump still in his hand, he levered his bulk out of the chair. "I think I'll have dinner in my suite this evening. What's good?"

Again in his sitting room, Thunstone laid a china plate on his desk. Then he chose a drinking glass from the tray beside his carafe, and struck match after match, painstakingly smudging its interior. Finally he flipped the gleaming thing upon the plate and quickly covered it with the dulled glass. He was able to look at it then without agony to his eyes.

The object was the size of an almond, smoothly curved on its entire surface. Not a single facet could he detect. But its light, even though impeded by the soot on the glass, was steady and strong. He drew his shades and turned out the electric lights in the room. Still it shone, illuminating objects to the farthest walls. Inside the object was some source of radiance, steady and insistent and tense.

Muffling it still more by dropping his handkerchief over the upturned glass, Thunstone sat back, smoked and thought. After some minutes, he took up his telephone and called a number which he did not have to look up.

The woman who answered was tremendously interested in the questions Thunstone asked, and had many questions of her own. Thunstone evaded the necessity of direct replies, and finally when she recommended another informant thanked her and hung up. His second call was long distance to Boston, where a retired professor of American folklore greeted him warmly as an old friend and gave him further, more specific information, finally naming a book.

"I have that book right here," said Thunstone. "And I should have thought of the reference without bothering you. Thanks and let's see each other soon. I may have about half of a story to tell you."

He hung up again, and went to his shelf. The book he chose was slim and green, like a cheap textbook. It was John M. Taylor's *Witchcraft Delusion in Colonial Connecticut*, published in 1908 as an item of the Grafton Historical Series.

Almost idly Thunstone leafed through the restrained but fascinating account of a multiple charge of diabolism and its evidence and trial, almost forgotten today though it made grim history full thirty years before the more familiar Salem incidents. Chapter 10 began with notes on the trial of Goodwife Knapp in New Haven during May of 1654, a trial that included evidence by a dozen neighbors and ended with the defendant's death on the gallows. But it was not the adventures of Goodwife Knapp so much as those of a witness, Mary Staple, Staplyes, or Staplies, that drew Thunstone's attention:

...she, ye said Knapp, voluntarily, without any occasion given her, said that goodwife Staplyes told her, the said Knapp, than an Indian brought vnto her, the said Staplyes, two little things brighter then the light of the day, and told the said goodwife Staplyes they were Indian gods, as the Indian called ym; and the Indian withall told her, the said

Staphyes, if she would keep them, she would be so big rich, all one god, and that the said Staphyes told the said Knapp, she gaue them again to the said Indian, but she could not tell whether she did so or no.

Thunstone savored the quaint spelling and syntax as he read. "...so big rich, all one god..." What did that mean? He turned two more pages, the evidence of one Goodwife Sherwood, and a story set down at fourth hand — the same story as before:

...goodwife Baldwin whispered her in the eare and said to her that goodwife Knapp told her that a woman in ye towne was a witch and would be banged within a twelue moneth, and would confess herselfe a witch and cleere her that she was none, and that she asked her how she knew she was a witch, and she told her she had reeived Indian gods of an Indian, wch are shining things, wch shine lighter than the day. Then this depont asked goodwife Knapp if she had said so, and she denyed it; goodwife Baldwin affirmed that she did, but Knapps wife againe denyed it and said she knowes no woman in the towne that is a witch, nor any woman that hath received Indian gods, but she said there was an Indian at a womans house and offered her a couple of shining things, but the woman neuer told her she took them, but was afraide and ran away...

There was more beyond of Mary Staplies. The book called her a "light woman," shrewd and shrewish, who spoke in Goodwife Knapp's defense. Later she too was on trial and released, and her husband sued her accusers. She did not sound timid, by all accounts, yet on her own showing she had run fearfully from the "Indian" who offered her something shining brighter than daylight.

"Shonokins look like Indians," muttered Thunstone, "if you do not notice their third fingers."

He took time to feel sorry for the Puritan elders, not versed in demonology and not even well versed in grammar or law, who were faced with whatever faced them three hundred years ago.

Well, then: The wife of a New England colonist had fled refusing from a bright talisman that would make her "big rich." He, Thunstone, was in possession of such a thing. The Shonokin had fled this time, losing his charm — or had he? Was this, perhaps, a device to make Thunstone accept a bribe or wage?

Thunstone laid down the book and raised the handkerchief. There was a fleck of blood on it, as the manager had said; and on the dish, too, seeping from under the imprisoning glass. Within, the shining object seemed to float, like a gleaming bit of ice on a dark sea.

Thunstone took from a cabinet some chemical vessels, tubes and flasks of liquid. Carefully he secured a portion of the blood, diluted it, made frowning tests. He wound up shaking his head over the precipitation in his

solution.

Blood, yes. Mammalian, surely. Human, no. What creature could be matched with that blood he could not say. Perhaps no scientist could say. He felt his eyes drawn again to the thing under the glass.

It was no longer a jewel, or anything like a jewel. In the little wallow of blood lay a skull the size of his thumb, pallid instead of glaring, its cranium shaped strangely, bulging here and pinched in there. Its black eye-sockets seemed to meet his gaze and challenge it. Its wee, perfect jawbone stirred on its hinge, and two rows of perfect, pointed little teeth parted, then snicked together as if in hunger or menace.

Thunstone watched, as closely as when the Shonokin had first dipped the mystery from his pocket, but with all his defenses, mental and spiritual, up. Skulls of any size and shape must not frighten him, he decided. And — his memory flashed back to the Indian tales of Kalaspup — magical skulls had been employed before this by Shonokins against mankind, and had been defeated.

It was only the size of a thumb, anyway. No, a trifle larger, the size of an egg. A big egg. And the glass that covered it was smaller than Thunstone had thought, the skull-appearance crowded it.

As Thunstone gazed, the jawbone moved, the teeth gnashed, a second time. The movement stirred the glass, tilted and upset it. The glass rolled to the floor, broke with a muffled clash of fragments. The egg-sized skull was suddenly orange size. Its sockets were no longer dark but glowed greenly, as with some sort of phosphorescent rot. With a waggle of its jawbone it hunched itself from the plate, a little nearer to Thunstone. Yet again its teeth, big enough to show their pointed formation, snapped hungrily.

Thunstone argued with himself that worse things than this had come to him in the past, that a skull so small would be easily crushed — but already it was bigger, bigger still. It flipped over, rolled from the table, swam through the air at him. As it snapped its jaws, he batted it away, palm outward, as if playing handball. The thing was as cold as a flying snowball, and as he deflected it, it almost sank its sharp teeth into his finger. It struck a wall, bounced and caromed back, so that he ducked only just in time. The wall where it had touched so briefly bore a spatter of blood. On its new course the skull flew into the bedroom, and Thunstone pulled the door shut.

At once something was bumping, shoving, demanding entrance to the parlor. The panels of the door creaked, but held. The blows grew heavier, more insistent. Was the thing growing still more — would it grow and grow, to the size of a boulder, a table, a house? Thunstone, eyes on the closed door, mustered his wits for something new in defense. He thought quickly of the Connecticut visitation of terror, of witnesses at the witch-

trials who had spoken of enchantments that smacked of hypnotism or hallucination and of grimmer things — “firy eies” with no head to contain them, and a brief glimpse of something “with a great head and wings and noe boddy and all black.” Well, if Shonokins had not triumphed there, they would not triumph here.

The knockings had ceased, and there was a questing flash of light at the lower chink of the door, then something began slowly to pour out.

Thunstone thought at first it was some slow, pale-gray liquid, but it held its shape. The forepart of a flat, ugly skate or ray sometimes steals into view like that from hiding in shallow water — a blunt point like a nose, a triangle of pale tissue as flat as though hammered down. This trembled a bit, as if exploring the air by smell or feel. It came out more, and more.

It was not a flattened skull, for bone would have splintered; but had a skull been modeled in softness, then pressed as thin as paper, it might be like that. It still had a jointed jaw, the semblance of needle teeth, and eye-sockets that looked up at Thunstone with a deep glow. The glow was more knowledgeable than menacing. Thunstone saw no sign of the effort to terrify which characterizes most attacks by things natural or supernatural. It thought it had him, and that there would be little or no trouble about doing what it wanted to do with him. Those flattened jaws opened, and he could see the inner bare bones of them.

It slid out, out, thin and broad as a bathmat. Thunstone’s great hand fell on the back of a chair, and he brought this forward, as a trainer offers a chair to a truculent lion in a cage. The teeth closed on a hardwood leg and bit off the tip of it like a bit of celery. A little waggle of the flat muzzle cleared away the splinters. With a sort of protozoic surge, it began to clear of the chink under the floor. Its forepart swelled as if to regain its skull-shape, a shape that would be larger than a bushel.

There was a door behind Thunstone, a door to the outer corridor; but Thunstone does not run from evil. He knows that others have turned their backs, and what has happened to those others. He tossed the whole chair for the teeth to catch and mangle, dropped back as far as the closet and made a quick snatching motion inside for an ebony cane. With this he thrust, swordsmanslike, at the enemy, and thought it checked — perhaps because the ferrule of the stick was of silver, abhorrent to black magic. He gained a moment to grab with his other hand at the bookshelf and throw books like stones at the thing.

Those were valuable books, some of them irreplaceable, others old friends that had nourished his mind and stood his allies in moments almost as unlucky as this. Thunstone felt like cursing as the skull, now lifting itself three-dimensional against the bedroom door, caught in its mouth and ripped to shreds a first edition of Thompson’s *Mysteries and Secrets of Magic*. Spence’s heavy *Encyclopedia of Occultism*, enough to smash a skull, bounced impo-

tently from the misshapen brain-case. The thing was lifting now, lifting into the air in a slow, languid flight, like a filling balloon, to drift toward him. Its jaw dropped, exposing a mouth that could take his head at one gulp.

"Not this time!" Thunstone defied it, in a voice he wished was not so hysterical, and threw yet another book. This came open as it flew through the air, smiting the noseless face and dropping on its back, widespread, just in front.

The skull, too, dropped back and down. Thunstone could have sworn that its face-bones writhed, like frightened flesh. It seemed to turn away.

He stood there, breathing as if from labors that had exhausted even his giant body, and saw it sag, spread, flatten. It wanted to creep back the way it had come.

"No!" he yelled at it again, and, stooping, caught the edge of the carpet. Frantically he bundled the skull and the book together.

It took both his brawny hands to hold that package together, for what was inside thrashed and churned as convulsively as a great cat in a bag. Thunstone hung on, it was all he could do, and brought his thick knee into play, bearing down. That skull had grown so large and abhorrent — but not quite to bushel size. It was more pumpkin size now — or did he imagine it was like a football, the size of an ordinary human head? It still strove and wallowed, straining for freedom. A human head of those dimensions would be dwarfed, really; perhaps a child's; perhaps a monkey's.

"It's shrinking," he growled exultantly. "Trying to get out that way." Now it did not struggle at all, or it was too small to make its struggles felt. Thunstone clung to his improvised trap, counting to thirty, and dared to let the fabric fall open.

The skull was gone. The blinding bright jewel was there, in a fold of the rug as far removed as possible from the still open book.

Thunstone smiled. Deliberately and with all his strength, he set his heel upon the glow and ground down. He felt disintegration, as of very old fire-weakened brick. A whiff of bad odor came up, and was gone. The glow departed, and when he took away his foot, there was a blood-stain and nothing more.

Breathing deeply once again, Thunstone picked up the book. It was his *Egyptian Secrets* that, earlier in the day, had shown him a way to another victory. By some chance it had fallen open to the sixty-second page:

A Most Excellent Protection

Write the following letters upon a scrap of paper:

Thunstone read them, a passage so seasoned with holy names that it might have been a prayer instead of a spell. And, finally:

Only carry the paper with you; and you will then perceive that no enchantment can remain in the room with you.

Thunstone closed the book, then reopened it to the quaint preface which promised that "to him who properly esteems and values this book, and never abuses its teachings, will not only be granted the usefulness of its contents, but he will also attain everlasting joy and blessing." The thought came that to some scholars such tomes of power were considered in themselves to be evil. But is not every weapon what the wielder makes it? He decided to disallow the element of chance in the falling open of *Egyptian Secrets* to the very passage that had won his late struggle.

Someone was knocking at the door. Thunstone started violently, then recovered himself.

"Yes?"

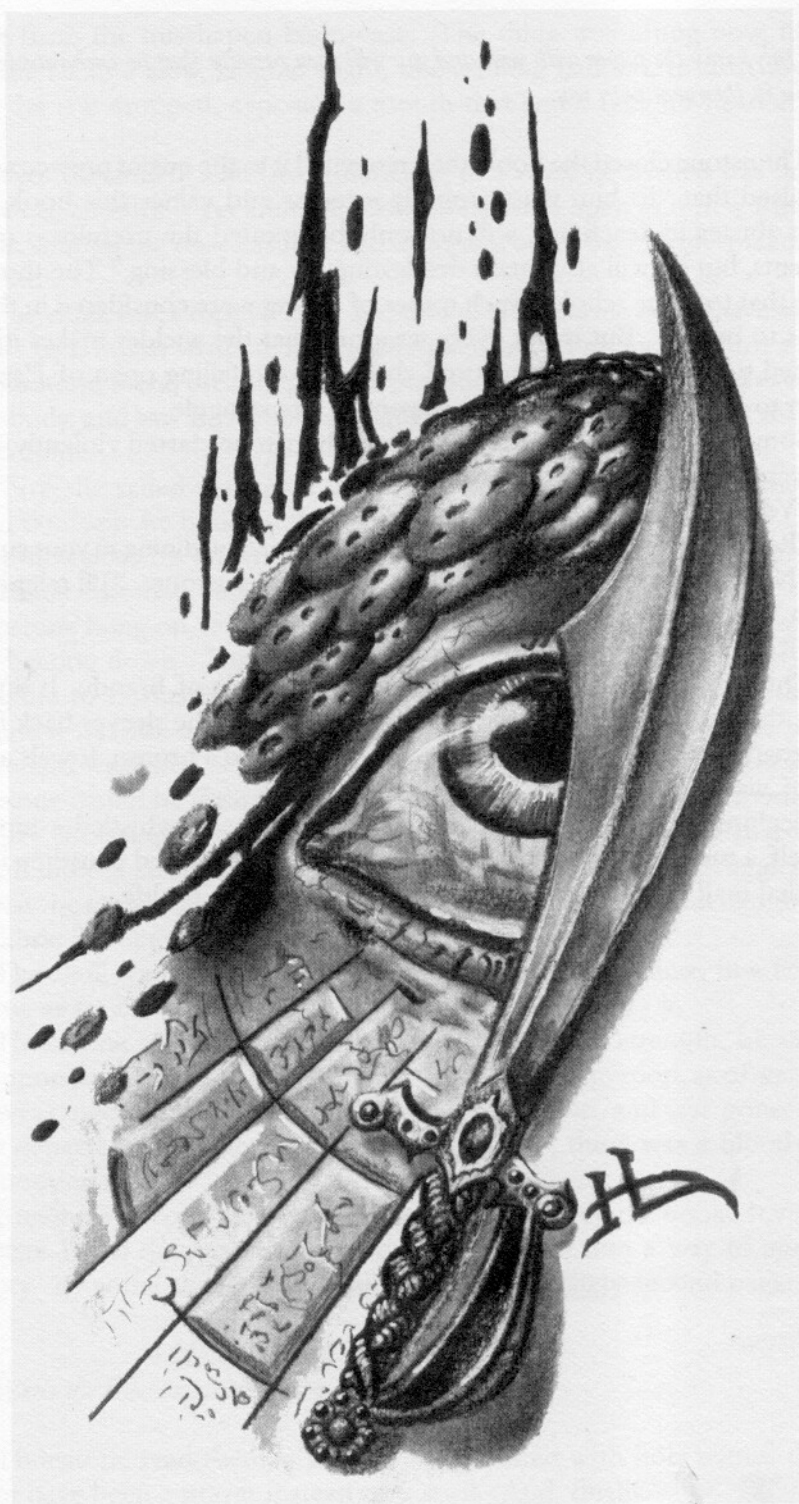
"Room service, Mr. Thunstone. You said you'd be dining in your suite?"

"Not for three-quarters of an hour," said Thunstone. "I'll telephone down."

"Right." The man outside was walking away.

Thunstone poured himself a drink from a bottle of brandy. It tingled in his throat. Then he stripped off his jacket, rolled the sleeves back from his broad forearms, and from the bathroom fetched a broom, towels and a pail of water.

Beginning the task of cleaning his own room, he whistled a tune to himself, a tune old and cheerful. And when he had finished whistling it, he whistled it all over again. He had never felt better in his life.



The Dai Sword

LOTS OF SHOPS, LOTS of private collectors would like to bid on it," the little straw-tinted man assured Thunstone, "but I felt that you — the sort of man you are, with occult knowledge and interests — ought to have first refusal."

In his comfortable chair by the club window, Thunstone was almost as tall sitting down as was the straw-tinted man standing up. Thunstone's long broad hand took the pipe from under his clipped dark mustache, Thunstone's wide gloomy eyes studied the curved sword that had been laid on the magazine stand. From the chair opposite, young Everitt was leaning forward to look, too.

"Arabian sword?" asked young Everitt. He liked to slide himself into private discussions. His father had been a director of this club, and an acquaintance of Thunstone. Young Everitt wanted to be a personal friend, or anyway said so. Thunstone was slow about admitting men and women to his personal friendship. He hated to be prejudiced about things like eyes being too close together, but he was. And young Everitt's bright, small eyes were very close together indeed.

"It is a sword from Nepal," the straw-tinted man was informing Everitt. "A sword of the warrior class, peculiar to the Dais. They are an offshoot, a schism one might say, of the Gurkhas."

"I thought Gurkhas were those little pickle things," smirked Everitt at Thunstone, who smiled back but not very broadly. "Why is this sword worth so much?"

"Because it is a thing of ritual," replied the straw-tinted man. "Because there are so few such swords ever offered for sale. Because," and his pale little forefinger tapped the wire-bound hilt, "it is set with precious jewels."

At the word "jewels," young Everitt bounded eagerly out of his chair and bent to look more closely.

"Jewels, all right," he agreed, as if he had been requested to pass judgment. "Not awfully good ones, though. There's a flaw in the ruby. And

those emeralds, I'm not very wrought up about them." He scowled, and his close-set eyes seemed to crowd each other even more. "The one on the pommel, the dull one set in silver — what is it?"

"A Dai stone," said the straw-tinted man. His eyes, which were also straw-tinted, turned to seek Thunstone's. He did not seem to like Everitt.

"Dai — dye?" echoed Everitt. "You ought to dye it, some brighter color."

Again he chuckled over his own pun. "Never heard of one."

"From the name of that stone the Dais take the name of their sect... I wouldn't draw the sword, not now."

But Everitt had already cleared the blade from its scabbard of brass-studded leather. The steel shone as with frantic scrubbing and polishing. Thunstone, returning his pipe to his mouth, fancied that he could mirror his own square face in that brightness. The curve of the blade was double-edged, not only on the outer arc but the inner curve, which was almost as abrupt as that of a fish hook. And the point itself looked deadly sharp, like the sting of a wasp.

"I am afraid," said Thunstone gently, "that I'm not a good prospect for the sale. May I ask where you got such a specimen?"

The straw-colored man shook his head. He might have been deploring Thunstone's refusal, or declining to tell the history of his acquisition. "I had hoped," he said after a moment, "that you would be interested in the history of the Dais."

"I know a little about the Dais," Thunstone replied, still gently. "Not much, but a little. I am not of their faith, and I have no use for so peculiar a part of it as a Dai Sword."

Everitt suddenly squealed out an oath, not proper language in that quiet and conservative club room. Still holding the drawn sword in one hand, he furiously wrung the fingers of the other.

"I was just going to put it back in the sheath," he told them, "and — but you can see for yourself!"

Had he been years younger, you would have said that Everitt pouted. He thrust his hand under Thunstone's nose. The quivering thumb had been punctured at the center of the ball, and blood trickled in a shiny thread. Thunstone meditated that no artificial scarlet can come near the brightness of fresh blood.

Drawing his hand back, Everitt sucked the thumb scowlingly, like a bad-tempered baby.

"Of course," said the straw-tinted man, taking the sword and sheathing it without mishap, "the Dais would find that accident a fortunate one for you."

"Fortunate?" repeated Everitt thickly, past the thumb in his mouth.

It was Thunstone who said: "As I understand it, a Dai blade must never

be drawn except for the shedding of blood. The sect insists that bloodless drawing is the worst of ill luck."

"And, should they draw for polishing or sharpening only, or for exhibition only," amplified the straw-tinted man, "they will prick themselves deliberately, just as you did just now inadvertently, to avert the ill luck." He weighed the sheathed weapon in his hand. "I'm sorry, Mr. Thunstone, that you are not interested. As I suggested before, perhaps I should show it to a collector or —"

"Wait," said Everitt.

He had taken his thumb out of his mouth. His narrow-set eyes watched a new bead of blood as it slowly formed on the wet skin. When he spoke again, he sounded ill-humored. "If Thunstone doesn't want the thing, maybe I do. How much for it, Mister?"

Thunstone, refilling his pipe, watched. The straw-tinted man remained silent for a moment. Finally he named a sum, and he sounded as though he were trying to ask too much. Everitt snorted.

"That's pretty steep," he said. "What about —"

"I cannot bargain."

"Then I'll take it." With his unwounded hand, Everitt produced a wallet of dark brown leather, and opened it. "Prefer cash, do you." He flipped out some bills. "Keep the odd six dollars for your trouble in coming up here."

"I never accept tips," the straw-tinted man said tonelessly. From his own wallet, a foreign-looking fold made to accommodate notes of another size and shape than American money, he counted out a five and a one. He gazed for a moment at the sword, at Thunstone, and at Everitt. He bowed, or rather nodded, like a toy with a moveable head.

"May I wish you good luck with this purchase," he said, and passed the sword to Everitt. "It is very rare and curious in this part of the world. Thank you."

When he had departed, Everitt looked sharply at Thunstone.

"I suppose," he said, "you want to know why I bought this little gimmick."

"I don't believe in requiring explanations from people," replied Thunstone.

"Well, I'm a rationalist and an empiricist," announced Everitt, who was neither. "I'll show you, and show everybody, that this isn't any magic tool — it's just so much metal and bad jewelry, put together in a funny shape." He studied his thumb again. "The bleeding's already stopped. This time I won't be so clumsy."

Picking up the sword, he drew it with a rather stagey flourish. Even in Everitt's fist, unschooled to swords, it balanced perfectly. Its blade again caught silvery lights. Thunstone speculated as to what alloy had gone to its

smelting and forging. Everitt smiled rather loftily, and dipped the curved point back into the sheath, smacking the blade smartly home. An instant later he had dropped the sword, swearing more loudly than before.

"I've cut myself again!" he cried sulkily.

Mr. Mahingupta, when visited that evening by John Thunstone, made him welcome in his study as he would have welcomed less than ten other Occidentals. Mr. Mahingupta was smaller even than the straw-tinted man, with a youthful slimness and spryness utterly deceptive; for he was old and wise, nobody this side of the seas knew quite how old and how wise. His brilliant eyes slanted a bit in the finest of brown faces, and his clothes were exquisitely tailored without extremity of cut. He offered cigarettes and a little silver cup of brandy that must have been quite as old as he himself.

"To call the Dais an offshoot of the Gurkha cult is pure ignorance," he answered Thunstone's query, in accents more Oxonian than Herbert Marshall's. "We Gurkhas aren't a cult at all, sir. In faith we are Hindu, and in blood mixed Aryan and Mongol. As Rajputs — men of the warrior caste — we maintain a certain individuality, of course. You know that Gurkha record in many wars." Mr. Mahingupta sighed, perhaps remembering campaigns and stricken fields of his distant youth. "Far too many people misunderstand the East and, misunderstanding, loudly persuade others to misunderstand also."

"Then there is no different quality to the way the Gurkha worship?" prompted Thunstone. "Different, that is, from orthodox Hinduism?"

"The difference is in descent and training only," Mr. Mahingupta assured him. "In the remote beginning, great Brahma fathered the various castes. From his mouth issued the first of the priests, hence their wisdom. From his right arm was born Shatria, first of my warrior forbears, hence our strength. Merchants sprang from his thighs, laborers and mechanics from his feet."

Thunstone had heard all that years before. "The Dais," he pursued. "Are they also of warrior caste?"

Mr. Mahingupta's mouth-corners turned up briefly and thinly. "Who can say whence they came? In Nepal exist many of them, in towns close to the Himalayas. For all I know, or anyone knows, they may descend from the abominable ice-devils. As to their claims of power I may not judge. I do not like them, and neither would you, I hope."

"I told you of the Dai jewel in the hilt of the sword. What is it?"

"Jewels," said Mr. Mahingupta, "should be cleanly dug up from under ground, not evoked by magical formula. I do not have patience with such strange chemistry or alchemy or whatever. From what I hear, every Dai stone is of artificial origin, or anyway of preternatural origin. I saw but one in my life." The lips pursed, still harshly. "It served as the single eye of an

excessively unpleasant little statue. I dug it out as a gesture of defiance toward those who worshipped the thing. This happened more than your lifetime ago, but see." He extended a slender, delicate hand. The brown forefinger was crooked as from a bad fracture, and seamily scarred as from deep burns. That was all Mr. Mahingupta said about the adventure, and probably not even Everitt would have urged him to say more. Mr. Mahingupta lifted his brandy cup.

"Though I despise and denounce the Dai worship and all it claims," he went on, "yet I am afraid that the unhappy young man you mention is as good as dead now, for his idiocies. Be comforted that civilization will advance unhampered by such a clumsy fool and boor. I regret, my dear friend, that I can help you no further."

"You mean that you can't," asked Thunstone, "or that you won't?"

"Both," said Mr. Mahingupta.

The night was not too far spent when Thunstone left Mr. Mahingupta, and he called on young Everitt.

Everitt's quarters were what might stand for the popular idea of a bachelor apartment. It was a place in the eighties, with a large living room, two bedrooms to one side, and a kitchen with a long-idle range, an electric refrigerator, and rows and rows of liquor bottles. On the walls of the living room hung various consciously male paraphernalia — crossed foils, boxing gloves, hockey sticks, none of which Everitt knew how to use. Higher up were fastened the stuffed heads of animals Everitt had not himself killed. Everitt wore a wine-dark robe with a luxuriantly folded white scarf, and greeted Thunstone with a cordiality overwarmed by drink.

"So you found the way up here at last," he said. "What'll you have? Cocktail? Swizzle? Name it and I'll fix it."

"Nothing, thanks," demurred Thunstone, who would rather savor in retrospect the brandy Mr. Mahingupta had given him. "I was in the neighborhood, and I thought I'd see how your hand was doing. That second cut was pretty bad."

Everitt drew from the pocket of his robe the hand in question. It was taped over the ball of the thumb, and most of the palm was swaddled in criss-crossed gauze.

"The doctor asked me if I'd been bitten," he said. "It got kind of inflamed or infected — Lord! How he hurt me with that germicide stuff!" Everitt bit his lip at the memory.

Thunstone looked closely at the hand. The fingers were flushed and a bit swollen, but he could not judge if they were dangerously sore. Everitt slid the hand back into his pocket, and nodded at the wall.

"Anyway, there it hangs. How does it look?"

He had racked up a square of figured Indian cloth, and on this was

displayed the Dai sword, drawn and slanted across its own sheath. Again Thunstone remarked the silvery glow of the metal, almost like the glow of great heat. Thumb tacks held blade and sheath in place, and one of these at the pommel was red. No, that was the stone that had seemed so dull in the club. It gave off a color tint both flushed and gloomy like — well, like a drop of blood gone a little stale.

"That jewel on the hilt does catch the light funny, doesn't it?" said Everitt, watching Thunstone. "And I thought it was dull."

Thunstone took a step nearer the wall. "You drew it again, I see. Maybe you're wise not to return it to the sheath."

"I think it looks better displayed like that," explained Everitt, lighting a cigarette. "I'll sheathe it again, though, any time I feel like it. Right now, if you like, just to show you I'm not afraid."

"I wish," said Thunstone, "that a man I know were here to look at the thing. His name's E. Hoffmann Price."

"The writer?" Everitt's scorn for all who wrote was manifest.

"He's more than that," replied Thunstone. "For one thing, he's an accomplished fencer and understands swords thoroughly. He's likewise a recognized student of the Orient, and as for occult matters, he's an expert."

"Bring him around some time if you like," granted Everitt, "but don't let him think he could buy the thing back from me. At first I felt I was overpaying; but didn't somebody or other say that it isn't what you pay for anything that sets its value — it's whether you still want it after you've bought it —"

"Apparently you still want it, then," suggested Thunstone.

"Wouldn't be without it," Everitt assured him airily. "And, just to show that I'm perfectly ready to sheathe it at any time —"

He extended a hand toward the hilt with the flushed jewel. At that instant the doorbell rang.

Everitt went to open the door. There stood the straw-tinted man.

"I am sorry to call so late," he greeted them, "but I wish to rectify a mistake. It seems," and he gulped, "that I had no right to sell that Dai sword."

His straw tint was paler than it had been, as though straw had been coated with frost. His eyes caught the sheen of the weapon on the wall. "There it is," he said eagerly. "May I return the money and have it back?"

"You may not," Everitt told him.

"I say that I should not have sold it."

"You've found that out a trifle late," Everitt reminded, mixing himself a new drink. "Anyway, the sale's completed. Thunstone here was a witness to the transaction. I paid you money, which you put in your pocket, and that was that."

"I'll pay you a difference of —"

"No," said Everitt.

"I'll double the sum — "

"If it's worth that much for you to buy back, it's worth that much for me to hang onto." Everitt grinned and squinted. "I don't need money, Mister, but I've a liking for the sword."

The straw-tinted man lifted his shoulders wearily. Very narrow, thin shoulders they seemed just then. He faced Thunstone appealingly. "Persuade your friend," he begged.

"Thunstone knows that I won't change my mind," said Everitt. "Some people call me stubborn, some that I'm just determined. Take your choice, but I won't sell you your sword again. If you stole it, or otherwise acted illegally, that's your funeral, not mine. Now, how about a drink? Drinking's a good way to end any argument."

The straw-tinted man shook his head and turned back to the door.

"Wait," Thunstone called to him. "I'm coming with you." To Everitt he said, "Promise me that you'll leave that Dai sword alone until I see you again."

"I'll make no such idiotic promise," snickered Everitt. His manner was the sort that Thunstone was apt to resent, even violently. But the big man said no more, not even a farewell. He followed the straw-tinted stranger out and down to the street. It was a fine night, without a moon.

"I suggest that you tell me enough to help me save Everitt," ventured Thunstone after a little silence. But the straw-tinted man shook his head slowly.

"I dare not," he almost moaned. "I'm in a sad enough situation as it is."

"Have the Dais been after you?"

"I know of no Dais in this hemisphere."

"That doesn't answer my question," insisted Thunstone. "Have they been after you? ...You don't answer, which means that they have."

"I do not deny it," said the straw-tinted man. "Once among the Dais, you are forever touched with something of their influence, even from a great distance. You, sir, have been considerate of me, and I would rather not afflict you with — with what afflicts me."

"You are not a Dai?" Thunstone prompted.

"Once I might have become one. I sought out their scholars and teachers, went a little way into their lore. Why not? An American has become a lama in Tibet, which is harder by far to do. Anyway, I progressed far enough to have the sword. I had won the right to possess it, but not the right to relinquish it. That truth I realized tonight — the thought came into my heart, it was put there from somewhere far off. Now I feel doom growing near and dense around me."

He shuddered, and Thunstone steadied him with a massive hand on his shoulder.

"Come home with me," bade Thunstone.

At Thunstone's hotel, there were books to study, as usual. One was a translation by Gaster of that manuscript *Sword of Moses* which is believed by many to date from earlier than the fourth century and which has been called by Oxford scholars a connecting link between old Grecian mysteries and the magical works of the Middle Ages.

"Know that the man who wishes to use the sword must free himself for three days from accidental pollution," read Thunstone, "and from every unclean thing..."

Like the ceremony of knighthood, he mused as he read, wherein the aspiring youth must fast, bathe, pray and keep vigil before being vouchsafed the weapon which would be his badge of gentility and prowess. Were not the swords of heroes rated in the old stories as having special power and personality, even bearing names like living beings — Gram, Durandal, Excalibur? Thunstone gazed at his silent guest, wondering what sort of initiation he had undergone. Undoubtedly none that Everitt would endure.

Thunstone took a second volume, the *Key of Solomon*, as translated by "H. G. on April 8, 1572." It was a sizable work divided into ten parts, and plainly had been well thumbed before Thunstone had gained possession of it. Especially worn were the pages of the last section, entitled *Of experiments extraordinary that be forbidden of good men*.

Thunstone found references to swords from almost the first pages, and there was a sub-section: *Of swords and knives*.

It is necessary in operation of artes to have swords and knives and other instruments of which circles may be made and other necessary operations... If swords be necessary, let them be scoured and clean from the first hour...

There followed diagrams to show the "form and fashion" of such instruments. Two of the many outlines, entitled *cuttellus niger* and *cuttellus albus*, were reminiscent of the curved, double-edged Dai blade. There was mention also of other magical weapons, including lance, scimitar, sickle, dagger, poignard, and a knife called Andamco. Thunstone reached for a third book.

This, a massy tome bound in red cloth, was a beautifully printed English work, by a man whom Thunstone had often opposed and once or twice damaged. Here and there little gatherings and cults use it as a veritable bible, taking to heart its startling teachings and going through the forms of its rather pompous rituals. It is a slipshod work, containing some passages of startling beauty as well as masses of carelessly written and wordy nonsense. On the next to the last page Thunstone found what he was looking for:

...Let the scholar take steel, smelted according to the previous formula, and by his understanding skill beat, grind and sharpen it into a sword. Let it be engraved with the

words and symbols ordained, and employed in the performance of mysteries. Let none touch, save those deserving...

Thunstone slammed shut the book and put it away.

"So," he said aloud, "you made the weapon yourself?"

"I did," replied the straw-tinted man, with an air of tragic resignation.

"Each Dai makes his own? Even to the Dai jewel on the pommel?"

"That is given us." The desperate eyes of strange color sought Thunstone. "Do you think I sold because I needed money? No — only to rid myself of the sword and all memory of the Dais. But they know, far off in their own country, and send me their thoughts." The eyes closed. "I hear them now. They say to return to Everitt and demand the sword tomorrow."

"Then we did wrong to leave him tonight," said Thunstone at once, and got quickly to his feet. "Go back to him now — wait, we both go back."

He put on his hat, and from a corner took a rather heavy walking stick of Malacca, with a silver band around its balance. "This was a gift from an old friend of mine, a Judge Pursuivant," he explained. "I'm ready to go if you are."

This time there was no response to their ringing at Everitt's door. Thunstone pushed at the panel with the ferrule of his stick, and it creaked inward on its hinges. They walked in.

The lights were on, and showed them Everitt, lying in his crumpled robe against the wall beneath the square of cloth on which the Dai sword had hung. Quickly Thunstone strode to his side and knelt. Everitt did not move when Thunstone touched him. He was dead, with his throat slit neatly as if by a razor-sharp edge.

Clutched in Everitt's unbandaged hand was the sword, snugly set in its sheath. The stone at the pommel gleamed red and baleful as fire in mist.

"A third time he tried to sheathe it unblooded," the straw-tinted man was babbling. "The third time, as in so many cases, was the finality-time. It turned in his hand and killed him."

Thunstone put a hand toward the weapon, but the straw-tinted man was before him, snatching at the hilt. Everitt's dead hand remained closed on the sheath, and the sword came clear as the straw-tinted man pulled at it. Its blade gleamed silver-white and spotless.

"No blood on it," said Thunstone.

"Because it drinks the blood in, as sand drinks water. Only the stone shows what has happened," and a pale-tan finger tapped the pommel. "Now, how to sheathe it once more?"

The strangely colored eyes gazed calculatingly at Thunstone, who straightened his bulk and, standing erect, gazed back.

"I can explain to the police," he said. "At least, there are certain high officials of the police who are ready to accept any explanation I care to make about anything. But that thing you hold must be disposed of quickly. I suggest that we drive into the country and bury it deeply in some field or woods." Stooping, he pulled the sheath from Everitt's inert fingers. "How shall we put it back into this?"

"It will not go in without bloodshed," the straw-tinted man said, weighing the curved sword with practiced grip. "The thing has a spirit of its own. It is like the *Yan* — the devil — they say lives in that sword owned by the Fire-King. Probably you never heard of it."

"I've heard," Thunstone assured him. He held his stick horizontally across his body, right hand at the knob, left hand lightly holding it near the ferrule. "Frazer refers to it in *The Golden Bough*. Isn't that the sword owned by a ruler in the Cambodian jungle, of which it is claimed that if it is drawn the world will come to an end?"

"It may not be so powerful, but it has power, from the blood it has drunk," said the straw-tinted man. "This, too, must drink blood. Mr. Thunstone, I regret what I must do. Perhaps I need only make a slight wound, if you do not resist."

Thunstone cleared his throat harshly. "I give no blood to that thing. It has had victory enough, over you and over poor Everitt."

"You are unarmed, you cannot refuse." By a slight alteration of the position of his wrist, the straw-tinted man brought the point into line with Thunstone's broad chest. He sidled gingerly in.

Thunstone twisted the stick in his hands. The lower part seemed to slip away, baring a slim straight blade, bright as the Dai sword. He dropped both the hollow loose part and the sheath he had taken from Everitt.

"I expected something like that," smiled the straw-tinted man. "Of course, neither of us are being personal about this. Your sword cane cannot help you. This is a sword of power. It must be wetted with blood."

"Come on," invited Thunstone, his great body easily assuming the attitude of a fencer.

The curved blade swept fiercely at him, clanged against his own interposed stop of metal, and bounded back like a ball from a shutter. The straw-tinted man exclaimed, as though an electric shock had run up his arm. He fell back, reassumed position and lunged again, this time with the point.

A single movement of Thunstone's lighter blade engaged and deflected the attack.

"I too have a sword of power," he said. "I had not time to warn you, but watch."

He feinted, coaxed his opponent into trying another slash. This he parried and, before the straw-tinted man could recover, darted in his own

point. It struck solidly at the pommel of the Dai sword, projecting beyond the fist that held it. There was a sharp *ping*, and the red-flushed jewel bounced away across the floor like a thrown marble. Next instant Thunstone had dipped his blade under, engaged again, and with a quick press and slap had beaten the heavier weapon from the straw-tinted man's grasp.

A warning jab with the point made his disarmed opponent drop back. Then, "Watch," said Thunstone again, and pointed his own blade at the fallen Dai sword.

There was responsive movement in the thing, like the furtive retreating rustle of a frightened snake. As his point approached it, it shifted on the floor, moving on the planks with a little grating tinkle. For a moment it seemed to set its point hungrily toward the straw-tinted man, but Thunstone's weapon struck it smartly, and it faced away. Like a bit of conjuror's apparatus dragged by an invisible thread on the stage it moved, at first slowly and jerkily, then with more speed and smoothness. He herded it painstakingly toward the fallen leather sheath.

"How — how —" the straw-tinted man was stammering in absolute incomprehension.

Urged inexorably by a last touch of Thunstone's blade, the sword seemed fairly to scurry the last distance. It slid into the sheath with an abrupt *chock*, and lay quivering.

Thunstone picked it up and laid it carefully on a table.

"My blade is silver, a great specific against black magic," he now had time to say. "Look at the inscription. It's old, a little worn, but perhaps you can make out the Latin."

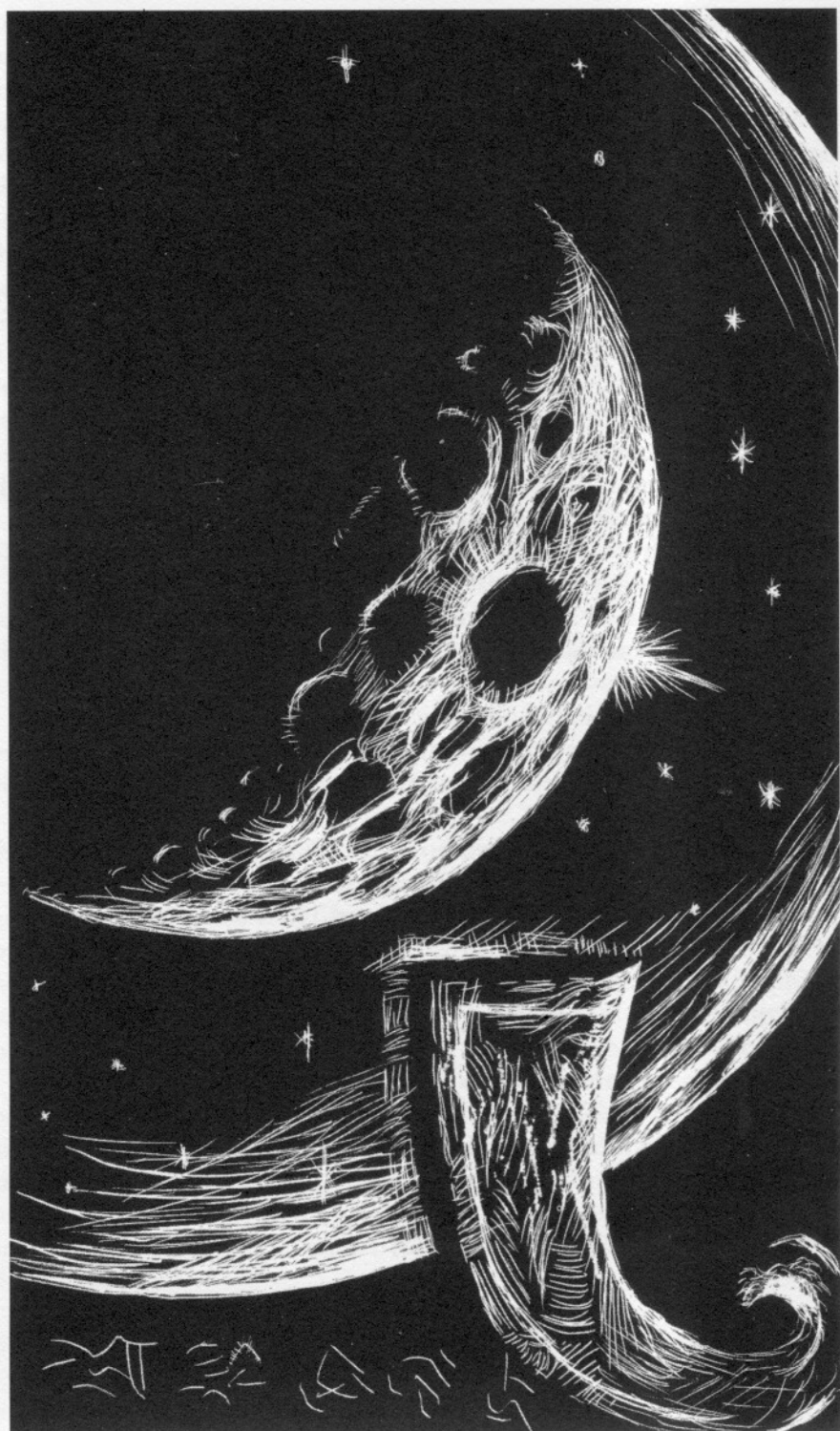
The pale straw-tinted face bent to read. "*Sic pereant omnes inimici tui*," he repeated slowly. "My Latin is not as good as it might be."

"So perish all thine enemies," translated Thunstone. "From the Song of Deborah, in the book of Judges. Pursuivant said that this silver sword was forged by St. Dunstan himself, and he was able to conquer no less an enemy than Satan. Pick up the Dai stone in your handkerchief. We can bury it along with the sword."

The straw-tinted man knelt to retrieve the jewel.

"It is dull again, as though all the blood had run out of it," he said, and rose, facing Thunstone hopefully. "And I have no sense of any more thought-commands from far away. Am I free? Why do you interest yourself in matters like these?"

"I sometimes wonder," replied John Thunstone, fitting his sword cane back together.



Twice Cursed

. . . see by this image, which is thine own, how utterly thou has murdered thyself.
— (Edgar Allan Poe), *William Wilson*

I

BUT EVERYTHING WAS A wonder now that I was in New York again, and pleasantly wonderful, too — not horribly wonderful, like the sniper-haunted jungles and bullet-tipped beaches I had striven for in the war I hoped would be the last forever. I still wore my uniform, since I had no other clothes, with on the right breast a discharge device in bright yellow thread and on the left my color-mixture of campaign ribbons. A sandy-haired civilian bought me a drink in a bar near Union Square and assured me that battle-fears weren't as terrible as fears of the unknown. He argued that you knew what to expect in war. What could you tell someone who had never heard a shot fired in anger, a shot fired in anger straight at him? Of that nothing is more unknown than the outcome of the battle you are in, with Joe and Mac and the other friends you love dropping limp and dead beside you or trying to stuff back their insides that have been blown out, and the thought coming to you a dozen times a minute that perhaps your side is losing? I plastered on a smile, thanked him for the drink, and went out to walk down Fourth Avenue among the bookshops. And there it was, not far from Tenth Street, rather different because it hadn't a table in front with shabby old volumes for a dime or a quarter, but with its windows jammed with interesting things and its sign:

THE SPOORN, BOOKSELLERS

I have never decided if the bizarre arrangement in those windows was an arrangement at all, but it was impressive. The biggest book was bigger than a volume of the *Congressional Record*, bound in some pale leather, with strange printing that might be Arabic or Urdu, and a colored picture of something ten-armed and scowling and staring. Near this, a Summers' *Geography of Witchcraft*, flanked by paper-bound *Albertus Magnus* and *The Long Lost Friend*. There were some recent publications — *Tell My Horse* by Hurston, *Hex Marks the Spot*, by Ann Hart, and poor William Seabrook's *No Hiding*

Place. One shabby book looked like a pasted-up collection of scraps and manuscript notes, entitled in ink *The Jersey Devil*. This was like old times, when I found all my thrills and chills in strange writings about ghosts and devils.

I walked in. The shop itself couldn't have been more perfect if it had been built as a set for one of those B-picture scaries at the Rialto. All the lights were close to the door, quite glaring, and the shelves that stood end-wise to us at the back had no lights at all, so that the spaces between them were like gloomy caves. Under the lights were some counters and tables, with cards saying things like: RARE AND CURIOUS — ASK CLERK — COLLECTOR'S ITEM. On the wall hung a painting, one of those clutters that can be put with any edge up and be something different and startling.

From one table I took up a book. On its fly-leaf was written in pencil: *Of Brownys and of Bogilis full is thys Buke*. I'd read that somewhere — Gawain Douglass or Robert Burns? Or had Burns quoted Douglass at the head of some poem? *Tam O'Shanter*, maybe?

"Yes, Sergeant?" someone was half whispering at my elbow, evidently with eyes on those three stripes I wore. I put down the book and turned.

The Spooon's proprietor was smaller and slighter than I, though I am hardly a big man. His clothes did not look expensive, but they fitted him beautifully, there is no other word for it. Some figures are like that, any cheap suit in their size arrays them as though brilliantly tailored. He was long-jawed and sharp-nosed, smiling harshly, with bracket-lines all around his mouth and his tin-colored eyes. His hands, with their great long fingers and great long nails, rubbed together rather like Uriah Heep's. "What would you like to see?" he was prompting.

To tell the truth, I could hardly buy anything worth money. I had received only part of my separation pay and had spent most of it. "I'm not exactly a customer," I ventured, smiling back.

"I see," said the proprietor, and rubbed his hands faster. "A job, then. What's your name, Sergeant?"

The thought of working in a bookshop was brand new to me, and intriguing. I wondered why I hadn't considered it before. "I'm Jackson Warren," I told him, "and I'm not a sergeant any more."

"Yes, I know. We hadn't really planned on your being here until tomorrow morning, but —"

This was where training and experience in strange and surprising situations helped. The fellow was actually hiring me, pretending some kind of second sight or other sympathy that had prepared him to do so. I hadn't expected to be employed so soon, or in any field I liked so well. Even as I decided not to act mystified or stupid, he was naming a salary not too small, and discussing hours of work. "One day you can open the shop in the

morning and stay until six," he said, "and the next come at noon and remain open until nine at night. Since you're here today, sit down in the office back there read what I've written about the job. You're intelligent and liberal-minded. I know. Tomorrow morning you'll be ready to start."

I went past those dark bookshelves at the rear of the room, and into a little cell not much larger than a telephone booth, with its walls solidly lined with old, curious and strangely-titled books. There was room for a chair, a little table with a typewriter and a telephone. I sat down with the pencilled sheets of paper he indicated, and began to read and puzzle.

Plainly those instructions had been written lately and hurriedly. My name was at the top, and the first sentence was enough to make my eyes pop. "I expect great things from you, on the word of your sponsor..."

"My name," said the proprietor, "is, of course, the Spoon."

"The Spoon?" I repeated. "It's a Scotch name?"

"Yes," and he was gone. I reflected that the heads of Scottish clans used the definite article to name themselves — the MacDonald, the MacLead, and so on. I had never heard of Clan Spoon, or of the head of a clan who ran a bookshop in a foreign country. As I returned to my written pages, the telephone purred on the table, and I picked it up. "The Spoon Bookshop," I said briskly.

"This is Jackson Warren." That was not a question, but a confident statement.

"Jackson Warren speaking," I told the transmitter.

"Hmmm," said the man at the other end, in a way I sometimes use myself. "You don't understand. I'm Jackson Warren. I wanted to call about the job —"

"But I have the job," I assured him. "I've just been hired. What can I do —"

"Hmmm," he said again, and hung up. I shook my head over it, all by myself in that tiny office, and resumed my reading.

"As an ex-soldier and an ex-sergeant, you know without being instructed what is meant by loyalty and discretion," the Spoon had written for me. "Any good employee will keep his council while learning —"

The telephone rang again, and again I picked it up. "The Spoon Bookshop," I announced into it.

"Did I hear you right?" said the same voice as before. "You called yourself Jackson Warren."

"Ex-Sergeant Jackson Warren," I replied. "Just out of the service and into the retail book trade. What can I do for you?"

"You can explain," was the sharp rejoinder. "It so happens that I'm Ex-Sergeant Jackson Warren."

"Is this a gag?" I laughed, not very heartily. "There can't be two of us."

"I wonder." There was a moment of moody silence. "Will you do me

a favor?"

"Such as?" I prompted.

"When you leave there, will you meet me?" He sounded eager and a little shaky. "Somewhere near there?"

I frowned over it, then told him the name of the bar where the civilian had instructed me about known and unknown fears. "I'll be there as soon after six as possible," I informed him. "Right?"

"Right, and thanks."

I hung up. The Spoorn had come to the door.

"Why," I asked him, "should anybody know I was working here?"

"Why shouldn't he know, if he's a friend of yours?" asked the Spoorn. "Wasn't it arranged some time ago?"

To those questions I had no answer to give. I took up the sheets. "May I take these with me? I'll absorb them between now and opening time tomorrow." He nodded his head to grant the request, and I folded them and slid them into my shirt pocket. I left almost at six, and went to the bar.

But as I sat on a stool and ordered a beer, it came to my mind that neither I nor the strange man on the telephone had offered any basis for recognition. There were half a dozen men at that bar, and unless I asked each in turn if he had taken part in a strange conversation that day —

But someone came in at the door, and toward me. I stared straight into the questioning eyes of myself.

II

The man was young, twenty-six years old or so. He was perhaps five feet nine inches tall, sparsely made, a little wide in the shoulders.

His hair was dark and short, with a square face and wide-set brown eyes and a creasy dimple in his chin. He wore an army uniform, a little worn but neat, with the three stripes of a sergeant and the device that betokened honorable discharge. All these things I recognized instantly. I had seen them so often before, in mirrors.

He and I smiled at the same moment and with the same perplexity. He spoke first: "You look enough like me to be my twin brother."

"I haven't any twin brother," I said. That was out of Wodehouse.

"Neither do I. This is a funny thing. I came here to meet somebody with the same name as I have."

"I'm Jackson Warren," I told him.

He put out a hand just the size and shape of mine. "So am I. Let's start talking."

I picked up my beer and we went to a booth. A waiter brought him a beer like mine, and he began talking rapidly.

"Let's get it straight at once," he said. "That's my job. Rowley Thorne

— my friend — knew I was looking for work, and called up the Sporn shop and fixed it for me to start there tomorrow. What are you doing with my job and my name and my face?”

It never took me too long to get angry. “The job you can have, because apparently the Sporn thinks I’m you,” I told him. “But I grew up with the name and face and they’re as much mine as yours. I won’t change the name, and I don’t think you’ll get far changing the face.”

For a moment he glared back. His expression must have been a mirror-replica of mine. Then he relaxed a little, and the hardness became mystification. “We’re going at this wrong,” he said. “I don’t blame you for being sore if you’re as rattled as I am. Maybe it’s not too much that we look alike — we’re only a little more than average size, and we both have the usual Anglo-Celtic face. As to the name, Warren’s not uncommon, but Jackson is — for a Christian name, anyway.”

“I was born in Lynchburg, and my people named me for Stonewall Jackson,” I explained, also a little less heatedly.

“And I’m Carolinian, though I haven’t kept much of the accent,” said my companion. “I was named for the other Jackson, Andrew. Let’s go back to the last remark but one, as somebody says in *Alice*. I thought you’d been pretty elaborate about gnawing under me into that job. But you said you didn’t want it.”

“Oh, I want it. I’m not very rich or anything. But,” and I drew the Sporn’s instruction sheets from my pocket, “I haven’t really started, and I won’t start where I don’t really belong. You can have these, study them — they tell what your duties will be — and go in there tomorrow. The Sporn won’t know the difference.”

The other Jackson Warren took the sheets, but did not glance at them for a moment. “You know, I’ve heard of a case like this before. At Leavenworth Prison it was, I think — two men sentenced there, the same size and with faces alike enough to fool their mothers. Both named West, and I can’t remember the first name, but they both had it. Fingerprints were the only difference. I wonder if ours are alike, or anywhere near alike.”

“I was born in Lynchburg,” I said again, “May 8, 1921 — ”

“Me, too!” he cried, so sharply that one of the two customers glanced our way. And now neither of us spoke for a moment, until I tried to say something.

“There’s too much coincidence here. Too much.”

“There’s no coincidence,” he said harshly. “This was planned some way or other. But how? Why? I wonder if the two of us aren’t in a jam.”

“Read those instructions,” I suggested. “Since you’re the right man for the job, they may make sense to you.”

He began to read, and I sipped at my beer. After some minutes he

folded the papers carefully, picked up his own glass and drank deeply.

"They make sense, all right," he said. "Who do Rowley Thorne and the Spoon think they're fooling?"

I couldn't answer that, so I waited for him to go on. He was studying my campaign ribbons. "Pacific Theater," he said. "Well, we're different there. I was in Europe, and for a while in Iceland. I had time on my hands, and dug into witchcraft and demonology —"

"For which Iceland is famous," I added.

"I'm not very surprised that you know that," he said. "Somebody up there gave me the name of Rowley Thorne in the States, and when I came back here he and I got together. He suggested that I take this job, and I was grateful for it. Wait a second, are you part of whatever his scheme is?"

"I'm part of no scheme that I know of, and everything I told you is true." I dug out papers and orders I had been given at the separation center, and he took them and read my name on them. He passed them back as though they weighed a ton. Then he tapped his fingers on the Spoon's written pages.

"Here's the payoff. The Spoon is running a funny bookshop, a very funny bookshop indeed. What Rowley Thorne sent me there for, and what the Spoon hired me — or you — for, was the stuff I studied in Iceland. But I don't want anything to do with it."

"It's a shop full of peculiar books," I said, and told him a little about it. He heard me silently, nodding a little as if I was telling him a lot.

"I have a notion," he said when I finished. "Let's both go up there and wreck the place. Wish we had some grenades."

"Is it that bad?"

"Worse. What little I know — and I don't want to know any more — wait. We'll have to talk this over. Where are you staying?"

I had no place, and said so. My baggage was checked at the Pennsylvania Station.

"Come to my place, then. I've got a big room, with a bed and a couch, on West Nineteenth. I meant what I said a moment ago, this is no coincidence. We've both been put into this as duplicate cogs in some sort of machine. Let's talk and think and get the machine running the right way."

"That's a deal," I said, and our identical right hands grabbed at each other again. "Come up with me to get my bag. But what'll we call each other? We can't both be Jackson."

"We're different Jacksons," he reminded. "I'll call you Stonewall."

"You be Andy," I said, and he grinned. I liked that grin, perhaps because I'd seen it so often in my shaving mirror. We finished our beer and started out together.

A man turned from the bar to stare at us. His eyes grew as big as dollar watches, and he set the highball he was holding back on the bar.

"Not another drop," he stammered to the bartender. "Never again. Not when I see 'em in twos —"

Andy and I went out laughing at the tops of our voices. I mention that because we had so little to laugh at in the days that followed.

III

Andy's lodging was on West Nineteenth Street, and we went there after eating dinner in the Village. His street was full of immense, loud trucks, but the rooms — he had two, part of a widow's apartment — were at the back. We took more beer up with us, and sat talking, more about ourselves than about The Spoon's shop.

It kept adding up to a case of complete duplication. We found we were both orphans, reared by aunts. We'd both been half-mile runners in high school, we'd both gone to college — he at Chapel Hill, I at University of Virginia — and left in junior year to enlist. Even our studies and grade-levels were alike. We both liked to read about the supernatural; he'd logically poked into Icelandic demon-lore, just as I'd tried to learn something about devil-devil and praying to death when I was stationed in the Solomons.

"I wonder if we aren't both avoiding one consideration," said Andy, pouring beer into my mug.

"You mean the doppelganger business," I nodded. "The way I used to hear it, everyone has his replica, either a spirit or a living creature. You come face to face with it, and you fall dead. But I never felt better in my life, Andy."

"Me, too," he informed me. "If we wrote all this down it wouldn't be convincing."

"It sounded convincing enough when Edgar Allan Poe wrote it," I argued. "Remember *William Wilson*?"

"I've been remembering all evening. Likewise Charles Dudley Warner — *My Double and How He Undid Me*. Probably we ought to decide which of us is the victim and which the nemesis. Toss a coin —"

"Roger," and I pulled a dime from my pocket, flipped it in the air and let it fall. It rolled, struck a wide crack between two floor boards, and remained on edge.

"There's our answer," said Andy, handing the dime back to me. "We're both in this thing together. Let's keep on drinking, or we'll not get much sleep."

We didn't, anyway. The reveille habit was strong in both of us, and we woke before dawn. Andy pulled open a closet.

"I'm a little up on you," he smiled. "I've got some civvies, two or three suits. Pick one out. Shirts in the drawer. You'll buy some for yourself today or tomorrow."

His clothes fitted me nicely. I helped him with breakfast, eggs and rolls and coffee, whipped up over an electric grill on his bureau. "Now what?" he asked.

"Go to the Spoon's, and meet me for lunch at noon. We'll powwow some more. Don't let on about this double business. Maybe it's an ace in the hole for us."

"Right." We decided on a cafeteria not far from the shop, and he went away.

Even then my chief reaction was of fascinated wonder that I had stumbled upon so complete a twin to myself. I spent the morning in clothing stores of the Twenties, getting a gray suit and some shirts and ties of different style from Andy's. This was deliberate. I even considered growing a mustache, or wearing spectacles, but the clothes were enough of a difference.

I was at the cafeteria a quarter of an hour before noon, and so was Andy. He had begged off early, saying he must buy some cough medicine. I put plenty of lunch on my tray, but Andy's appetite, at least, was different from mine. He led the way to a semi-remote table, gulped at his coffee, and began lecturing me.

"It's a little more disgusting than I thought possible," he began. "That sounds funny, from an old frontline infantryman who knows what the score is on disgust; but I mean it. They don't want me to sell books — they don't sell books themselves, except as a front —"

"They?" I interrupted. "Who are they? Are there two Spoon's, too?"

"Lots of 'em," said Andy. "He's one of a bunch of wrong guys, Stone-wall. All wrong guys. You and I read about witches and devil-worshippers for fun and think it's fiction. They *are* witches and devil-worshippers, and think — and know — it's real."

"Then they're mad," I began, but he waved me quiet.

"With rotten method in their madness. Think of all the dirt you've ever heard or suspected about black magic. Nasty ceremonies, baby sacrifices, death spells, cowardly sneaky organizations to fight anything that's normal and pleasant and friendly. Think of it as actual, or at least studied and done by all sorts of little cabals and societies everywhere — thick in New York, because this is a big town and full of funny doings. And think of a sort of library-meeting place for those people, or anyway their leaders, their miserable wry-faced wry-minded leaders. Did you notice the bookshelves without any lights at the back of the room?"

"I wondered how anybody could even read the titles there," I remembered, watching Andy closely and nervously.

"Don't look at me as if you wanted to call for a straitjacket. Some people can read the titles, because they have special eyes. Or perhaps they

know the books by touch or instinct — anyway, the Spoor has nothing there that he offers for sale. Odd customers look only at the stuff on the tables and counters. The Spoor's real business is with people who come in and borrow those dark-shelf volumes."

"Get to some sort of starting point," I begged him, and he drew a long breath.

"You saw those instructions, and didn't understand them. I read them a bit more clearly, because they referred to a wish to use my studies in Iceland, and because they were building up to some kind of oath of secrecy." Again Andy drew a long breath, as if to clean some sort of bad air out of his lungs. "When I arrived, this morning, the Spoor was waiting for me. He had me into that little cubby of an office, and gave me a book to translate. It was all in handwritten letters of a funny jagged sort — runes, I think, and Icelandic. When I said couldn't read Icelandic, only talk a little, he wasn't at all disappointed. He said I'd pick it up soon, and left me alone. He was right. After I was alone a while, that writing began to make sense."

"What was it about?"

"Magic. Power. All the wrong sort. There were spells to bring up devils — I stopped reading one in the middle, because I had a sense of something getting ready to crawl out from under the table. There was quite an essay, sneering because the investigators of the Moira-Blockula witchcraft seem to have missed the boat on its real leaders. And a lot of instruction for novices coming into the outfit. That's when I paused and shut it up and told the Spoor I wasn't having any."

"What was he doing while you were letting those runes seep into you?" I asked.

"He waited on a customer or two, and greeting several of his ugly friends. Twice men came in with what I think was food — lots of food — and he unlocked a door and let them go downstairs to deliver it — somewhere." Andy licked his lips. I do that, too, when my lips are dry from excitement. "But when I said I'd had enough of his runic book, he turned on one of those hard smiles of his. He said it was too late. By reading the book at all, I was practically past my first initiation into a very unorthodox but very interesting fellowship. Those were his words. He tried to get me to go downstairs through that door he keeps locked. Finally I pretended to agree, but asked for a chance to go to lunch first. He made me swear, by some names I never heard, that I'd tell nobody about it except myself."

Andy told me the names, and it will shortly be apparent in this account why I do not mention them here.

"You're breaking your oath," I reminded him. "You're telling me — but, when it comes to that, I'm really yourself, or your other face and mind. Look here, you're upset. Let me go back there instead of you."

"Neither of us will go back," he said firmly.

"We can't let it sweat us out, Andy," I argued. "We're onto something that needs to be investigated. We're the guys to do it. Go back to the room and I'll sit in for you this afternoon."

But he shook his head. "We're dressed differently now. He'd wonder about that. I'll go myself — you're right about finding out more things. Meet me at the corner after quitting time."

And I let him arrange it that way. I went back to West Nineteenth Street, washed my face — it was hot and feverish — and subwayed up to the public library to track down something I seemed to remember.

I found it in Reginald Scot's *Discouerie of Witchcraft*, Book Eight, Chapter Fifteen. I copied it down in modern spelling: "...and they have so frayd us with bull-beggars, spirits, witches, urchins, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, Pans, fauns, sylvans, Kitt-with-the-candlestick, tritons, centaurs, dwarfs, giants, imps, calcars, conjurers, nymphs, changelings, incubus, Robin Goodfellow, the spoorn, the man-in-the-oak, the hellwain, the fire-drake, the puckle, Tom Thumb, Hobgoblin, Tom Tumbler, Boneless and such other bugbears, that we are afraid of our own shadows, insomuch that some never fear the devil but on a dark night; and then a polled sheep is a perilous beast, and many times is taken for our father's soul, specially in a churchyard, where a right hardy man heretofore durst not to have passed by night but his hair would stand upright."

That catalogue of frightening monsters held its riddles. The man-in-the-oak must be a forest devil, the hellwain perhaps Hellequin — harlequin? — but what were Kitt-with-the-candlestick, Boneless, and the spoorn?

I had used to wonder about that last. Now it was a name I knew.

Going back to the room, I smoked too much and made myself some coffee. The landlady came and knocked and said there was a visitor. "John Thunstone, he says his name is," she told me.

I knew no John Thunstone, but Andy might. "Tell him to come in," I said, and he entered, stooping to get through the door. He was inches over six feet, and unusually broad even for that height. All his clothes must have been made specially for him, suit, shoes, shirts. He had a face like a rectangle, with a broad brow and jaw, a small dark mustache and black hair combed close to his great cranium.

"Are you Jackson Warren?" he asked, and when I nodded his big face lighted up with relief.

"Thank heaven for whatever made you fail to go back to work at that book shop this afternoon," said John Thunstone. "Because if you had, I might never have brought you out again."

I sat down hard, without the thought or manners left to invite him to take a chair. He stepped closer and towered over me like some statue of heroic size.

"You know a little something, I think, about demonology," he began. "Enough to appreciate what I mean when I tell you that the Spoor and his shop are a front for a rankly wicked group of —"

"I know a little about it," I broke in, not too politely. "But how do you know? What makes it your business?"

He smiled down, as from calm summits. "So many people think I meddle where I have no right or motive," he said. "Let me say at once that such people are the sort whose good will I reject, and whose destruction I practice. I found out about you the same place that Rowley Thorne found out, from someone in Iceland. That someone said you were being referred to Thorne in New York, and that Thorne would try to use you in a way you'll find decidedly unsatisfactory —"

"Mr. Thunstone," I interrupted again, "You've got the wrong Jackson Warren. You're talking about my double, Andy."

I was probably foolish to trust him on his own showing, but I told him everything, as quickly and simply as I could. He listened calmly and politely, and without the slightest indication that he found the story unusual.

"I like what your friend — Andy, as you call him — said about this being no coincidence. Only deliberate and cosmic plan could make you duplicates in all things, and bring you together at this time and in this situation. I have an explanation — but no time to make you understand it. Later, perhaps. We have to get your friend Andy out of a dangerous mess."

"What kind of mess?" I demanded.

He picked up his gray felt hat, a hat big enough for even Daniel Webster's spacious cranium. "Come along, and I'll talk as we get a taxi."

He did, while we rode to Tenth Street. He said that Rowley Thorne was one of many who patronized the Spoor's back shelves full of evil books, and that the shop was a sort of rendezvous for diabolists and psychic scoundrels, just as a certain corner drugstore draws the adolescents of a neighborhood, or a certain bar is a hangout for prize fighters and their managers, or a certain restaurant gets the artistic trade to the exclusion of most others. It was not only an unofficial reference library for them, but a place to receive mail — lots of them, said Thunstone, did not dare stay at one address for any length of time for a variety of reasons. And there was something going on in the basement that he, Thunstone, was trying to learn about.

"Andy told me something at lunch," said I. "About food being sent down through a locked door."

"Food?" echoed Thunstone. "In other words, not only is there activity in that basement — there's a set of living quarters. Here's where we get

out.”

It was not at the Spoon shop, not even on the same street, but around the corner. Thunstone led me to a door flush with the sidewalk, a little stationery stand. The proprietor greeted him with a smile of warm welcome that used the mouth, the eyes, the whole face. Thunstone led me to a telephone booth with a sign that said “out of order,” and pulled open the door. He squeezed his big body in and through. His hand came back to twitch me by the sleeve, and I followed him. As I entered, I saw that the back of the booth was hinged, and when it swung before us we went into a chamber beyond.

“My busybody activities have gathered me friends and helpers like the fellow out there,” Thunstone told me. “People give me information and shelter and weapons and — no time to tell all about that. I’ve spent months arranging to slip quietly along here,” and he led me through another door to a room still rearward, “to a point directly behind the bookshop.”

This last room we entered was completely bare of furniture, rug or pictures. Its walls were drab, covered with that stuff they call — very accurately — distemper. The one window was covered with a blind, and a single naked light bulb hung from a cord overhead. Thunstone moved silently as a foraging cat for all his size, coming to the wall and placing his ear against it. At his gesture, I did the same.

At once I heard something, muffled at first, then separating itself into sounds, words. They were words in a language I did not know — or did I not? The sense, at least, of what was being said behind the wall was clarifying in my ear and my brain. It was like a prayer: *Saya Salna Elenke Serna, give us the wisdom which only we can endure, having strength by humility...*

Thunstone had caught my shoulder, pulling me away from the wall and through the door into the first hidden room. There were chairs, and he pushed me into one, then sat down himself. “How many were reciting?” he asked.

“Several. More than one, anyhow.”

“It’s the school,” he muttered, to himself more than to me. “And the poor kid’s being matriculated — ” He paused, looking at me: “Tell me something again. I think you said that Andy spoke of giving a promise of some sort to the Spoon.”

“That’s right,” I remembered. “He pretended to agree to a suggestion — ”

“Pretended — and put himself in danger!” exploded Thunstone. “The very nursery tales are full of things like that. A chance word or action, not meant at all, becomes binding when the dark powers are interested. Willing or not, deliberate or not, your friend Andy has made an act of allegiance. The book he began to read was another point. A glance at it showed him it was downright evil. He should have walked out then and

there, and all they could have done was try to kill him."

"But you spoke of a school," I said unsteadily. "You think Andy's being put into that."

"I do, and I believe it will change him completely. Up to now he's been normal, decent, sane. But three years underground —"

I whistled sharply. "Three years! In that basement?"

"Others have done that course of study. I knew one, who died wretchedly and whose only hope was that he could repent enough before death. I'm sure of the school now, the Icelandic tie was the final bit of evidence." He told me a story, out of the history of Iceland. It can be read in almost any library of the United States, for he quoted largely from the sagas of Eric the Red and Leif the Lucky. The beginning was with Eric's voyage to Greenland, after he had been exiled for murder from Norway, then from Iceland, and gave to his bleak new home what he thought was a good name to attract colonists.

To Greenland and Eric's colony came the sorceress Thorbiorg at the invitation of the pagan settlers, to prophesy for them the fate of their venture. Even her description descends to modern time — a dark blue cloak, a hood made of the fleece of a black lamb, a necklace of glass beads, a jewel-headed staff, a leather pouch full of charms. On her second evening she asked for help, someone to sing the chants of power, and nowhere in that colony were there sibyls or warlocks.

Gudrid, a girl of the colonists, said: "Although I am neither skilled in the black art nor a sibyl, yet my foster-mother, Halldis, taught me in Iceland that spell-song, which she called Warlocks."

"Then are thou wise in season," applauded Thorbiorg, but the girl demurred. "This is an incantation and ceremony of such a kind that I do not mean to lend it any aid," she said, "for that I am a Christian woman."

But her friends and relatives pleaded with her until she consented to help, and Gudrid sang, "so sweet and well" that the sorceress thanked her for the song. "She has indeed lured many spirits hither," said Thorbiorg, "those who were wont to forsake us hitherto and refuse to submit themselves to us." She prophesied glibly about an end to famine and disease; but the following year, the winter after Leif's first voyage to shores which must have been Canadian, there was an epidemic in Greenland that had horrible aspects. One woman who died and was buried rose and walked in the night, so that only a spell involving the holding of an axe before her could make her return to her grave. Thorstein, son of Eric, also returned after death to say that Christian burial rites must be practiced for all funerals to prevent such phenomena.

Thunstone paused in his story, looking at me significantly. "You have, then, the story of Gudrid — a sane and honest and well brought up young person — being prevailed upon to perform a rite of black magic she had

learned in Iceland and which she did not particularly believe. After that came supernatural terror. What's the thought in your mind?"

"My friend Andy," I said at once. "He was sane and normal, and in Iceland he learned —"

"Exactly," broke in Thunstone, slapping his great hand down on his knee. "Using him in what they're doing will be a triumph to them. A thousand years ago in Greenland, magic was used to start a whole series of ugly events."

"Including the discovery of America before Columbus?" I put in. "Was that ugly?"

"It was a failure, at least. They went to Vineland the Good only a few times, and lost touch. America was found for us by Columbus and his Spaniards, who while sailing called on the saints, not the devils, with almost every breath. But to get back to the sagas and their accounts —"

He told about the voyage to Vineland of Karlsefni, of how the pagan prayers of Thorhall brought a whale to the hungry voyagers and of how eating that whale made them sick. There was fighting with the swarthy, broad-faced natives the Norse called Skraelings, who had a weapon that sounded like a bomb — a black ball that exploded loudly when flung. The women of the voyage waited behind a fence while their men fought. Among them was Gudrid, to whom suddenly appeared a woman like herself, with chestnut hair, pale white skin and large eyes.

"What is thy name?" demanded the apparition.

"My name is Gudrid," replied the girl who once had allowed herself to be argued into singing of black magic. "But what is thine?"

"Gudrid!" cried the strange being, and vanished with a crash like that of the Skraelings' strange weapon.

When Thunstone had made an end, I did not wait to be asked a question.

"Gudrid met her doppelganger," I said. "Someone like her in appearance, even in name. It's the story of Andy and myself."

"Exactly," said Thunstone again. "Well, after the battle the explorers sailed back to Greenland. A Christian bishop sailed for Vineland later, and never was heard of again. The Greenland colony itself vanished. But Icelandic magic remained, and now it makes its return to the shores of this continent once called Vineland."

"You make it sound baleful," I ventured.

"And so it is. A bad beginning's been made, and your friend Andy is involved without knowing why or how. You and I are going to get him out of it, I say, and at once."

I kept wondering about the school. Three years underground — it seemed incredible, impossible. Thunstone must have read my thoughts, as a surprising number of clever people can.

"The institution's old enough in its beginnings," he said. "I can give you even a reference in medieval history — the career of Saemund inn Frodi Sigfusson, Iceland's great teacher and poet of the eleventh and twelfth centuries."

"All that I can remember," I said, "is that he's credited with writing the Elder Edda."

"He spent years of study on the continent," Thunstone told me. "His friends lost track of him, and a very good priest — St. Jon Ognurdson, later bishop of Holar — went to find him. Saemund bobbed up, but so changed that St. Jon barely recognized him. He even had a new name — Kol. You change your name when you go diabolist, you know."

"I know," I nodded, for I had read about that in Summers, Wickwar, and Margaret Alice Murray.

"He'd attended the *Svartaskoli*, the Black College," went on Thunstone. "It took prayers and holy water and other things — St. Jon's white magic — to restore him. And after that, a nip-and-tuck flight from those who wanted to hang onto him. But he got away, was an ornament in the crown of Iceland's cultural history, and by his escape we know about that school, its terrors, and the way to fight it. Well, the *Svartaskoli*'s right on the other side of the wall from us now, or a branch of it, anyway. Are you game for —"

He broke off, and we both stared. Something was happening on that drab wall.

You can see such things over a period of days or weeks, where damp and decay darkens and cracks and disintegrates a stretch of plaster. But this happened fast, in moments.

All at once a great patch went rotten and porous, and through it seeped a cloud of something.

"Freeze, Stonewall," muttered Thunstone, not even his lips twitching. "Don't move a muscle until I speak. Then —"

I made a statue of myself. My eyes stung with a desire to blink. I fixed them on the vapor. It was dark, oily-seeming, here and there clotting as if with particles of moisture coming together. It made a figure, vaguely human, the halfman-form that is the most terrifying thing of which imagination is capable.

We'd been detected from beyond the wall, then. It had been too much to hope that we would go unguessed. And this that had been sent — it must have power to destroy, or it would not have come. Something else, more terrible, would —

My dry throat convulsed in spite of me. I had kept silent in my time,

within touch almost of scouting enemy infantry, but I could not now. I made a noise, a sort of choking rattle. And the cloud turned to me, turned its lumpy half-shaped headpiece as if it had a face and eyes and could see. Its arms, like two streamers of oil smoke, lifted, then paused. It was afraid, or surprised. It shrank back toward the wall from which it had cleared.

"No!" yelled Thunstone.

I never saw a big man move so fast, not even the ex-wrestler who'd taught us his rough-and-tumble school of fighting and killing with bare hands. Thunstone was down on hands and knees, between the thing and the wall, and one fist shot out with a lump of something pale red. He scraped the floor — a mark — he was drawing with chalk, seemingly speeded up like the decay of the wall. He slashed here, angled off there, and was back. The vapory thing turned back to him, and he scrambled off around it. A big rough star of chalk-lines showed all around the bottom of it, where real figures would have feet.

"Recite," said Thunstone. "The beginning of the Gospel of St. John. Do you know it?"

I did know it, or something put the words into my mind and my mouth. "In the Beginning was the Word," I stammered, "and the Word was —"

Between the points of the star, Thunstone was dashing in signs, or perhaps letters in an alphabet I had never seen. As I quoted the Gospel, the thing in the center of his diagram quivered and writhed, but did not move. It was rooted, I thought, to the worn floor-boards. Rising to one knee, Thunstone fairly whirled a circle outside his star and the signs. He stood up, panting.

"It's in prison," he told me exultantly. "See what I've done? Instead of drawing the pentacle and circle around us, I got it around it — and there's no passing that set of lines and figures."

"I'm afraid I almost bungled it," I managed to say, and my voice and my knees trembled.

"You didn't mean to, and neither of us knew that the best way to surprise the thing was to rivet its attention on you," Thunstone assured me. "You're the image of Andy, who's the last human being it expected to find here. Its dark mind, or what it uses for a mind, was taken aback, and gave me my chance. Look!"

The thing wavered here and there, but shrank back from the chalk lines, as from electric wires. I half understood that it was confined as stone walls and iron bars could never confine such a thing. "What is it?" I became bold enough to ask. "Where did it come from?"

"From a bottle, in which nasty things were mixed. Men like those we're fighting can make their own crude ghosts and demons. We'll stop that, along with some other things."

Thunstone pointed to the rotted space of plaster. "It would have re-

treated through there, and warned them in ways they'd understand. Since it's helpless here, we can use its passageway. Best defense is a good offense."

"Get there first with the most," I glibly quoted Bedford Forrest, and Thunstone's great hand clapped my shoulder in approval.

"Pay attention," he bade me solemnly. "We can get in there easily now; but we'll find ourselves among things you can't imagine, and I can't explain. I speak of a school in a cellar — it won't be a cellar. Once for a few moments I slid into the other world they make, and none of its mysteries are pleasant to solve. But remember this, Stonewall; *the only way they can defeat and destroy you is to ave you into helplessness.*"

"We're both quoting a lot," I replied, as solemnly as he. "I'll give you something from John Bunyan: 'For here lay the excellent wisdom of him that built Mansoul, that the walls could never be broken down nor hurt, by the most mighty adverse potentates, unless the townsmen gave consent thereto.'"

"*The Holy War*," Thunstone identified the passage, and clapped my shoulder again. "And it's true. The most evil spirit is powerless unless you give it power over you. A werewolf shifts his shape back to human if you speak to him boldly, if you even look levelly. A vampire runs from the simple sign of the cross, made with two fingers. The devil's afraid of music, and the Angry Gods died, the whole leash of them, from the negative cause of having no more worshippers. Will you follow my lead? Then come on."

He stepped forward and with a sweep of his hand as at a curtain struck away the decayed plaster. It fell to dust, and if there had been lath or siding beyond, that vanished too. He stooped, strode through, and struck hard at something beyond. As I followed him in, I saw his target lying on the floor in a shadowed little corridor — a man almost as tall as Thunstone, but scrawny and with evil lines in his stunned face. The man wore a star-spangled garment like a gown, and from his untidy head had fallen a cone-shaped cap, like the archaic costuming of a sorcerer.

"One of the least important of our opposition," said Thunstone quietly. "He was posted here just to guide that vapor-creature in and out." His left palm massaged his right fist. "When I hit men like that, they don't get up for an hour. It should be enough."

Down the corridor was a single door, marked with a looped cross like an Egyptian sign. Thunstone turned the knob, and the door swung inward with a whispery creak. He went down stairs into darkness as black as a pond of ink, and I went with him.

VI

No, it was no cellar. If you choose not to believe me, probably you are

going to be easier in mind. We came down the steps, and I am sure that if I had turned to look for them they would have vanished.

I had done what I once learned to do in night operations, closed my eyes tightly to dilate the pupils, and so when I opened them I was able at once to see a little. Every moment I saw a little plainer, and quite plainly enough to suit me.

We were in the open somewhere. The strange ground underfoot was flat, and the flatness extended far. There may have been hills or cliffs in the distance. Here and there grew what I shall call trees, and lower brushy clumps, without a leaf on them. I thought some of them quivered, thought it might have been a conscious blind writhing, like the writhing of half-sleeping snakes.

In the empty dark overhead, what passed here for sky, rode a round moon, and it was the color of blood, as if foretold of the moon at the world's destruction in the Book of Revelations. It gave only the faintest bloody light, outlining nearby banks of dark, filthy clouds. I chose not to believe that those clouds were gigantic vapor-forms of life, bigger and grosser and more grotesque than the mansize entity Thunstone had trapped in his magic chalk-lines.

Thunstone, a pace ahead of me, snapped his fingers for attention, like a bush-guide in the Pacific islands. I followed his intent gaze. Something came toward us.

It seemed as large and strangely shaped as a camel, and it gleamed tall-pale as with its own inner radiance. After a moment I had the impression of a man on a horse, approaching at a shambling trot. But though the rider might once have been a man, he rode no horse thing.

They were bones, skeleton things, but not clear-cut to the bony anatomy we know in medical schools or museums. Everything was gross, strangely joined, lacking here and extra there. The beast had earlike juttings to either side of its skull, and below its eye-caverns sprouted a horn, set too far forward to make it a unicorn. It wore a bridle of sorts, but the rider seemed not to guide it. He sat upright in his saddle, as awkwardly arrogant as Don Quixote who had gone over to Satan. I thought he wore a blunt-peaked helmet, then judged that this was part of his bald, polished skull. From the chin-point below the lipless teeth hung a beard, long, lank and white as thistledown. Over his shoulders was draped a cloak of the moon's same bloody red, his left arm wore a shield with a squat, ugly figure for blazonry, and in his right hand he held aloft a spear. All this I saw as he came toward us, with an unhurried noiseless intensity of movement. At perhaps thirty yards he dropped the lance in rest. Its head, that seemed of some rough white stone like the point of a stalactite, aimed full at Thunstone.

If Thunstone had not stood so confidently immovable, I myself might have turned and run, and I cannot think where I could have run to safely.

As it was, I was able to draw from my companion some part of the mighty assurance that matched his mighty frame, and I, too, stood fast. The horrid rider on the horrid beast sped at him, upon him — and Thunstone had shot up his massive forearm, striking aside the lance, and was in close with both big hands clutching at the bridle.

He stopped the creature, forcing its bumpy, horned skullhead up and back until its fore hoofs rose and pawed. The two lipless rows of teeth on the rider's bearded face shot apart, and out came a reedy cry. I ran in on the left side, took a glancing blow from the shield that filled the upper space around the red moon with pale swimming stars; but then I got my arms around a bony leg in rattly chain mail, and with a heave in and up I tumbled him out of his saddle. As he fell, and I threw myself upon him, I saw that Thunstone had somehow twisted the steed's head and neck so that it fell uncouthly on its side, with a sickening clatter of bare bones.

Because I was beyond amazement, I had no sense of wonder at the burst of strength by which Thunstone achieved that overthrow.

My own capture had dropped his lance, but he flogged at me with the shield bound to his arm. I got my knee on his mailed chest and worked a hand through that white beard — it was coarse and dry as dried grass — to find his throat. There was no throat, only a struggling column of bones joined together, like a spinal column. My fingers recoiled of their own sickness, closed in the beard, and it twitched off of his skeleton jaw, like something gummed on. I would not allow fear, but disgust shook me and made me faint. Somehow I stayed on top, pinning the thrashing body until Thunstone sprang to my side and knelt.

"Thunstone!" wheezed the lipless, fleshless mouth. It needed no lips to articulate that name. "You —"

"You know me," said Thunstone, with a quiet triumph that somehow made everything all right. "I know you, then. Who are you — who *were* you?"

The misshapen skull shifted and turned its sockets up to me. Deep in their shadows was the hint of real, glaring eyes. The jaw stirred again. "Stonewall..."

"You know me, too!" I gasped.

"Call him by name," Thunstone bade me quickly.

Only one person beside Thunstone himself had ever called me Stonewall, and I spoke at once.

"Andy," I stammered. "Andrew Jackson Warren. What have they done to you?"

The form I held shuddered and went slack. I heard hoarse breathing, like a dying man struggling for a hold on life as it left him. A hand rose, not to strike or push, but to grope at me, appealing and pitiful. My eyes were sprung all full of tears, and I scrubbed them clear on my sleeve. Then I

could see.

It was Andy.

He was trying to sit up, and I crept clear of him. He stared blankly at me and at Thunstone, his wide mouth open in his pallid face. He dabbed at his disordered hair. The red cloak fell from his shoulders. He looked down at the shield he wore, and wriggled it off of his arm.

"Ghaa!" He cleared his throat, and spat on the ground, near some things like faintly phosphorescent toadstools. "What goes on here?"

Thunstone hooked a big fork of a hand under Andy's armpit and set him on his feet. "Of course they'd send him," he said to me. "Send him, changed like this, to blood himself into their horde by killing his rescuers. Try not to puzzle it out too much, Stonewall. This place where we've come isn't logical. It's proof of more dimensions than three, and of more senses than five."

I was thinking of what Thunstone had said about the *Svartaskoli*, and of the years spent there. They had had Andy brief hours, and had changed him to — Thunstone read my thoughts again.

"It wasn't real," he told me. "The old scholars called such think a glamor, and they didn't mean Hollywood glamor. Things can seem otherwise than they are, to sight and touch. You know about werewolves, and the 'appearances' in Salem long ago — disguise by sorcery, not by grease-paint or theatrical costume." He smiled down at Andy. "You don't know how much good this has done all hands. Their logic sent you against us, for they sensed our attack; and put you back into the right ranks."

I strolled over to where Thunstone had hurled that riding creature. It lay in a heap of mouldering bones, like some ancient fossils dug up by scientists. I stooped to touch them, and thought better of it.

"What else is standing in the way here?" Thunstone inquired gently of Andy.

Andy shook his head again, slowly, as if to get sense back into it. "Nothing that I know of. Everything's been blurred, like a dream. But they pointed me out here alone. Their orders were definite, anyway, and a moment ago I was set to carry them out."

"Remember Saemund, the Icelandic scholar?" Thunstone reminded me. "St. Jon called him his own name, and he was himself again. We've done just that. Now, Andy, tell us what you know, while it's still even faintly in your mind. Then I want you to go on and forget it."

Andy told, haltingly, as if it was a story out of his babyhood. The Spoor and one or two others had given him a book to read, in characters that were provocatively mysterious but which clarified as if his effort to decipher them made them more easy. And he grew foggier and dreamier, and gathered ideas that seemed at the time like brilliant truths, worth following to death and beyond. Finally they told him to come downstairs, and

he did so very willingly, into the country we now saw. A long trail led to a squat tower, blacker than soot, and inside was his school.

"I was to stay there and learn to be worthy of their fellowship," Andy told us. "Those were the Spoon's words. It was so black inside, charcoal would have made a white mark on the wall. But the books — they had letters of cold fire, like rotten wood —"

"Never mind telling us what they said," interrupted Thunstone. "How many were with you?"

"Two others, I think. We weren't to speak to each other. Only study. Once a hand came from somewhere, all shaggy with gray hair, and put down food. I didn't eat it."

"Probably a good thing," I ventured. "Three students — not much of a university, Mr. Thunstone."

"Harvard was no larger in the beginning," replied Thunstone sententiously. "One more question, Andy. Which way is this tower where you entered the primer class of the *Svartaskoli*?"

Andy pointed silently into the dark distance behind him.

"Come," said Thunstone, and stepped out lightly and swiftly as the biggest of all cats.

We followed side by side, Andy and I. It seemed a long, gloomy way, though there was a marked trail underfoot which our feet easily groped upon. Once or twice we passed through ugly thickets, which I fancied were alive and menacing, like ranks of tentacled animals. There was a way up a steep slope, and once we all three scrambled on all fours over a wall of close-set stone that was warm as if from recent fires upon it. I felt a damp wind, and had the sense of great space everywhere.

Thunstone stopped at last, under a mighty overhanging boulder tufted with lichenlike growths, and snapped his fingers as before. We saw what he saw.

The red moon had dropped toward a horizon, not far away. Against it was silhouetted a squat, square tower, black, to quote Andy, as soot. The damp wind blew from that direction.

VII

The purpose of all military training is success in battle, and there are a myriad sciences toward that success. If you have been an infantryman, you have learned how best to approach a hostile building.

Thunstone must have been an officer once, with plenty of experience in the front lines. He knew and did everything admirably.

He even knew the silent motions, nudges and signs by which to give us orders. We crept, belly to the gritty soil, on a long dim circle to the right that brought us around and in toward the tower. I wished for a weapon —

an M-1, a carbine or a BAR — on that approach crawl. Then I reflected that Thunstone had a master plan that involved no rifles.

He went ahead, leading us to the right, then in. We kept the tower between us and the red light of the sinking moon. It showed us two scrubby trees like gnarled talons spread upward, and then it showed us moving figures. These were human, or probably human. Two of them stood beside the tower, by the door, as if conversing. The other, a hunched thing with skinny long arms that hung almost to the ankle, stood to one side, as if guarding something that lay on the ground. At last one of the two moved to this hunchback, with a gesture and apparently a word. I guessed that this speaker was the Spoon, for he showed small and slim, with a suggestion of elegance in position and movement. The long arms of the hunchback scooped up something, a tray, and waddled toward the tower and in.

"The food," whispered Andy, faint as thought, in my ear.

I remembered what he said about the shaggy gray hair on the hands of the food-bringer, and hoped that if I came into close conflict with that thing I could make a quick job of it.

The two who had spoken had a final word together, and one of them started in our direction, along the trail we had followed.

Thunstone scrambled back to us, and in less than six words gave us our orders. I lay flat on the trail. Thunstone, a few feet ahead, made his big body small as possible behind one of those filthy-seeming bushes. Andy, on the opposite side of the trail, found a hummock behind which he took cover like the good soldier he had learned to be. The man came briskly along, whistling something minor. He was not the Spoon, too squat and ruggedly built.

He did not see me until he was almost upon me, and I sprang to my feet. Of course he stopped dead. I think he would have yelled, but Thunstone and Andy were upon him from both sides. I saw the darting chop of Thunstone's big hand, edge in, to the fellow's throat. That bruising wallop on the adam's apple quiets anybody. A moment later Andy had pinned the enemy's elbows from behind, and Thunstone hit him four or five times, to head and body. I could hear Thunstone grunt with the effort. When Andy let go, the man dropped as limply as an old rag.

We clustered around him. Thunstone's face was close enough to me to let me see his grin of savage relish.

"I know him," he whispered. "A fool, of course — nearly everyone in business like this is a fool or a tricked victim, as they planned to make Andy."

He gave the forward sign, and we headed towerward again.

The one remaining outside was the Spoon, all right. He was humming the same song that our late objective had whistled. Thunstone, still leading, gained cover within twenty yards of him. Then he stood up and walked

swiftly forward. Andy and I did likewise, but kept behind.

"Hello, Thunstone," said the Spoon, with an affectation of quiet cordiality. "We knew you'd be in this. You've come awfully close."

"I like to get close to my work," replied Thunstone.

"I see," and the Spoon's head-silhouette nodded. "You've come so far by brash, brainless audacity, and probably a few wallops with those big fists. You think you can crush me like a fly? But I'm no fly, Thunstone."

"A spider," amended Thunstone.

The Spoon nodded again. "I accept the compliment. A spider. A blood-drinking spider. I'll drink your blood, Thunstone — figuratively. And it'll be drunk literally, and your flesh eaten, by some of the native fauna of this little pleasure ground. All I have to do is whistle a note through my fingers and they'll be here."

"I'm safe for the moment, then," said Thunstone, and edged around the Spoon. "You won't dare whistle them up unless you can get inside to safety, or they'll eat you, too. As long as I stay between you and the door —"

"I've always admired your ability to find things out," said the Spoon. "You ought to be in with us. Really you ought. You'd have fun here."

"This place," said Thunstone, "is a dream. It's here because an attitude of mind creates it. I don't live in dreams, not this kind of dream, anyway. We're going to wake up the dreamer."

"Your friends are still shy," put in the Spoon, and laughed quietly. He had a master flair for restrained drama.

"If you insist on meeting them —" Thunstone beckoned us. "Come on, gentlemen."

We marched quickly in, shoulder to shoulder, and the Spoon turned to gaze at us. At the same moment Thunstone struck a march.

I saw the Spoon's mouth open, his eyes goggle. In the light of the match Thunstone held, his face turned whiter than wax. He tried to say something, and achieved only a bat-squeak. Then:

"Not two!" he wailed. "*Not two!*"

Maybe he fainted. Thunstone caught him and picked him up.

"Come on," he said, and rushed at the tower. It seemed made of earth, as if whittled out of a great natural mound of claylike consistency. Even the door was like that, perhaps its hinges. Thunstone threw the Spoon like a javelin, and the door broke all to pieces.

We were inside, lighting more matches. There was a little entry, and in one corner wriggled and cowered the hunchback, holding the tray in front of him. He wore no clothes that I could see, only a thick coat of grizzly hair.

"He's blind," said Thunstone. "Look, inside this place is wood — old wood, older than the first planks ever sawn in America."

He touched a match to the wall, and it kindled like candlegrease. Someone yelled farther inside — one of Andy's ex-school-fellows, I suppose. We backed out into the open, and it wasn't the open.

It was a cellar now, a cellar such as you find under many old houses in New York. The walls were of crumbly cement, there was a mass of trash everywhere. From the direction we had just quitted, and to which we now turned, beat a wall of flame, healthy red flame as in a monstrous fireplace.

"The stairs," said Andy, and pointed. "We can get out."

"Wait." I panted, and bent to look at something lying among the trash. "It's the Spoon. Here, too. Help me lift him."

Thunstone's hand closed on my shoulder and plucked me up and away.

"But he'll die in that fire!" I protested.

"Certainly he will!" Thunstone snapped. "Fire in this world, and fire in the next — that's the judgment on him!"

He rushed me up the stairs, and Andy followed. We were in the corridor we had once seen, and Thunstone poked me through the hole in the wall into the room behind the stationery stand.

VIII

On the floor of the room showed a rough figure in chalk, a star, some letters and a circle. There was nothing, not the slightest suggestion of anything, in its center. Thunstone scuffed the lines away with his heel.

"So much for the Spoon's magic," he said. "Do you understand what happened?"

"I do," I said. "A little. You said down there that the place was a dream place."

"Dreamed up — in the strictest sense of the word," nodded Thunstone. "Normally, we have a bookshop and a cellar beneath it. Some individuals with warped impulses and a decidedly unusual pattern of thought get together and read things and make complicated ceremony-gestures. The cellar becomes a subterranean country, full of abnormal conditions and objects. Frightening, unspeakable — but if it's that easy to create, it's that easy to destroy."

"The Spoon made it?" ventured Andy, and Thunstone nodded again.

"He considered himself master of all magic. What paralyzed his mind was the sudden sight of you two. Somewhere along the line you decided that your duplication wasn't coincidence, but a depart of a deliberate plan. You were right."

"Why couldn't he stand the two of us?" asked Andy.

"Because he knew he had lost power over the one by the freedom of the other. You were aware, too, of the belief that doubles are a curse. They were this time — a curse on the Spoon. He had not expected any such

opposition to him. He wanted all the supernatural on his side. When you popped in on him together — ”

“He folded up,” finished Andy. “Quit. Blacked out.”

“And everything he had charmed up for himself was ruined. We had a few seconds to set the fire, which always makes everything clean.”

Outside we heard voices, commotion and gongs. Thunstone led us out through the shop into the street.

“Fire engines?” he inquired mildly of an excited fat housewife.

“The bookshop around the corner,” she chattered. “It’s blazing like tinder. Firemen say they can save the shops around it, but that nice man that runs the place — Mr. Spoor — he and his friends are caught inside — they’ll never be got out — ”

“I see.” Thunstone strolled away, and we with him.

“It’s almost dinner time,” he told us, “and I’ve an invitation. Won’t you two come along? Several others will be there. A little Frenchman named de Grandin, who will want to hear all about this. And,” he smiled, “my host has daughters. Two strikingly beautiful girls. They’re identical twins — can’t be told apart.”

“Let’s go!” cried Andy.



Shonokin Town

THE FACE OF DR. Munford Smollett had once been round, but now it looked fallen in and haggard, like a badly baked pie, and one taut cheek was furrowed with scratches. His thick gray hair, probably never well groomed, hung in a tussock over his seamed forehead. When John Thunstone, at the door of his hotel suite, held out a great hand, Dr. Smollett seized and held it as though it were an anchorage in a reeling world.

"I came at once," he said hoarsely. "At once, as soon as I'd checked my bags at the station and crossed streets back and forth to make sure I wasn't followed. Sir, you won't believe what I am going to tell."

"I've believed many wonders in the past," Thunstone assured him, and drew him through the door to a comfortable chair. "Please sit down. I judge that you need a drink."

"Thanks," said the doctor, and when Thunstone mixed the highball he drank in just such a greedy fashion as he would deplore in a patient. The glass shook in his hand, but color came back into his drawn face, and he spoke more clearly. "It was at a town called Araby. Do you know of it?"

"Start somewhere near the beginning," Thunstone bade him. "So far I know only what you phoned — your name and that you're in trouble."

"Trouble — and not natural trouble, not trouble from normal nature —"

"You're safe here. Near the beginning, doctor."

Dr. Smollett drank again. Thunstone refilled his glass, and mixed a drink for himself.

"I was taking a special holiday," said Dr. Smollett slowly. "I'd been working hard and prescribed a complete change for myself. I'd heard there wasn't much of a tourist rush upstate. Somewhere or other I'd learned of nice remote hideaways in the neighborhood of Zoar Valley."

"Zoar, yes," nodded Thunstone, remembering the tale of how once children were born there under a curse, with two-toed hoofs for feet and two-fingered crab-claws for hands. "You went there?"

"By train, cross-country bus and again by a little spur of railroad." Dr. Smollett's throat twitched. "I was being completely careless. Wanted to drop casually into the quietest spot. The timetable said Araby, and a ticket-man in a little station said it was a flagstop only. So I asked to be let off, and dropped at a little stone shanty of a station, with a bag in each hand. And the impossible part began."

"There are no impossibilities," said Thunstone, speaking like an oracle to hearten his visitor. "What happened?"

Thunstone, immense and vital, knew how to study assurance into the great dark rectangle of his face. His eyes were steady, bright, interested, his mouth firm without tenseness below the trim black mustache. It was acting, but it served the purpose. Dr. Smollett borrowed some degree of composure from his host, and went on calmly.

"Maybe I've imagined things later, the way you imagine things to add into simple dreams. Now that I think, I guess the first men I saw in Araby — should I call them Arabians? — didn't frighten or even perplex me. One thin old fellow was lounging on the shady side of the shanty-station. His clothes were somehow peculiar; cut and worn right, even nattily — but their material was new to me. Not any fabric I knew, maybe not fabric at all. It was like skin, and not dressed skin, either, but suggested living integument, white and sheeny. Here, Thunstone, I may be piecing out with imagination."

"Perhaps," nodded Thunstone, who thought otherwise. "You spoke to the old man? How did he look?"

"A grand specimen. I'm a doctor, I appreciate good quality of body. He was old, but not decrepit. His hair was gray, not as gray as mine, and thick as a horse's mane. Worn mane-fashion, too, square-cut behind and a big sweeping lock over the brow. Dark face, wrinkled, but not loosely. The body was thin and wiry strong. I held out my hand to introduce myself, and he took it —"

"Stop right there," commanded Thunstone. "How did his handclasp affect you? Don't worry about imagination. Tell me."

"It was as strong as a closing trap," said Dr. Smollett. "Dry and cool for the warm morning, yet no impression of ill health. Fingers long, tapering, hard as hard rubber —"

"Was there anything unusual about the fingers?"

Smollett paused and his throat worked again. "Yes. I sensed it then, and made sure later. The third finger, the ring finger, was excessively long. I never saw its like before, longer than the middle finger. How do you know about it?"

"Go on," urged Thunstone, without making reply to the question.

"I said my name was Dr. Smollett, and the old fellow dropped my hand as if it had scorched him. I was looking past him at the scene. The town

was little and old and pretty — a well-mended place, if you know what I mean. The houses were mostly white, with low roofs like hats pulled well down, and they were grouped curiously, as if the streets weren't straight or crossed at right angles. The effect was like a modernistic stage set. Beyond rose the slope of a big hill, almost a mountain, and on it were trees, belt on belt of them, rich and green and with that upward-marching effect you get with a wooded incline. I said I liked the place. I asked where I might lodge for a few days.

"The old man shook his head. His gray mane stirred. He said, deeply and gently, that Araby had no accommodations for strangers."

Thunstone, watching the doctor closely, offered a cigar.

"Thanks." Smollett lighted a march. "Well, he was strange, but not unfriendly. I still wanted to stay. It struck me that the local medico might extend hospitality to a colleague, so I asked where a doctor lived. The old man jumped back from me, staring. I saw that his eyes — his eyes — "

"Had perpendicular pupils?" prompted Thunstone.

"How did you know? Thunstone, you have been in Araby!"

"Never. Go on."

"He stared. His lips twitched. He had pointed teeth. He said, 'No doctors here. We have no doctors in Araby.' "

"That intrigued me. 'Then,' I said, 'I might consider opening an office here. It looks like a pleasant little town.'

"He still glowered. 'Never have been doctors here,' he said. 'We heal things our own way. Don't want doctors.' And I thought he was going to spit at me, like an angry cat."

Smollett sighed and went on: "I figured him for a crank, and walked on past him with my luggage. I was looking for a place to pause, a store or tavern. Several men lounged together in front of a big square house. They all wore those white skin-stuff suits, they all seemed dark and spare and lithe, and they all were looking my way. I paused, gazing up and down, a little worried. Then the old man strode quickly past me. I wish I had energy like that — no, I don't. It wasn't human energy."

He was nervous again. Thunstone put a mighty hand on his shoulder. "I said you were safe here," he reminded. "I want the whole story."

"Things happened so fast they're hard to tell," said Dr. Smollett. "I may leave something out, or imagine something in. The old man spoke to the others — short words, in a language I don't know, and they jumped at me, fast and fierce as mad dogs.

"One hit me in the face, slapping and scratching." Dr. Smollett lifted his hand and touched the marks on his cheek. "He had long nails, and a long third finger. I felt disgusted and sick. I tried to back away, but they were all over me, grabbing at my arms and shoulders. They would have dragged me down, but I swung one of my heavy bags, with all my strength,

at the head of the biggest. You should have seen him fall. Like a wet coat with nothing inside it. He lay still. The others all screamed and yelled and shrank back. I got myself and my bags into the little station-shanty, and slammed the heavy door shut. There was a big latch, and I put it into place.

"I thought quietly. There wouldn't be a train for hours, perhaps not until next day. I knew I hadn't any friend, or anyone willing to be a friend, in the whole town of Araby. I wondered if I could stand siege against these men who for no reason seemed anxious to kill me. They were talking outside, in undertones. Then one scratched outside the door, like a dog wanting to come in. It was the old man. He said there had been a mistake, and they wanted to apologize."

"You believed that?" demanded Thunstone sharply.

"I was only too glad to. I opened the door, and they swarmed all around me again. They grabbed me, and held me. One of them pointed to where something lay. The man I had hit. He said I was a murderer.

"I got my nerve together, and argued that I had struck in self-defense. Then the old man reminded me that I had said I was a doctor. He told me that I must treat the fellow I'd hit, and make him well. I was glad to do that, and I took one of my bags, the one with my medicines and instrument. I went to the side of the fallen man. None of them followed me. They seemed to strain away, in absolute horror."

"Of course, of course," muttered Thunstone, more to himself than to Smollett. "The one thing that — but don't let me interrupt."

"I knelt by the man. His face was a sort of dusky, bloodless, buckskin color now. Blood showed at his ears and nostrils, and his eyes were open, and one of those slit-shaped pupils was wider than the other. Skull fracture, I knew, and even before I touched him I felt that he was dead. I made sure in a few seconds. The metal fittings on my bag must have struck his temple and smashed it in. I turned around and said to the others. 'He's dead. Help me carry him to the station.'

"They all shrank away from me. They looked even more bloodless than their dead friend. I said, 'He can't just lie here. Help me,' and I stooped and got him into my arms somehow. He wasn't small or light, but I managed alone. I carried him to the station, and inside, and laid him on a stone bench there. When I came back to the door, they had all retired to the houses, in a horrified knot. They stared at me, and whispered toward each other out of the sides of their mouths. When I came into the open, they scuttled clear away, and gazed at me from a distance, like frightened puppies.

"I'd had enough then. I took my cases and started to walk along the track. Two of them followed me far off, but once when I stopped and turned around, they stopped, too. They seemed set as if to fight or run, but they didn't move after me until I started along. We came through a narrow

pass in the hills, and the railroad paralleled a highway. A truck came along, and I hurried to the highway and thumbed a ride.

"I talked to the truck driver. Told him almost everything except about the man's death. He said, 'Araby? Oh, those ducks.' He seemed to know that they were queer, and he seemed not to want to know anything else. The way people are about convict labor camps or insane asylums near their homes. He took me to where I could catch my bus, and from the bus I caught a train to New York. On the train were two of those Araby men, in their strange suits, with their intent faces peering after me. They'd followed. I sat in a crowded smoking car all night. I got here, telephoned you, and I hope I shook them off my trail when I came here. Thunstone, people say you know more than almost anyone else about the strangest things of life. What is Araby, and what are its citizens?"

"Do you remember hearing anything about the Shonokins?" asked Thunstone in turn.

"Shonokins? Shonokins? Oh, the legend —"

"Don't you know now that they aren't a legend? That's a Shonokin community. I've barely heard of it, and you've done me a favor by telling me about it."

"But Shonokins are a nature myth, an Indian story like Hiawatha."

"Hiawatha was a real man, and the Shonokins are real — real almost-men. I've seen several. I've examined them. What you tell matches what I know about them. Those long third fingers, those strange clothes. Their peculiar knowledges and sciences, that make them distrust our medicine and other skills. And they fear only their own dead. Because, so far as I can learn, nobody ever saw a Shonokin die except accidentally or violently."

"How does science explain that?" demanded Dr. Smollett.

"Science doesn't recognize the existence of Shonokins, let alone try to explain them. Would science take seriously the report of a race that had no females as far as anyone knows?"

"I didn't see any women, at that," mused Smollett.

"Creatures with eyes and hands like that? Creatures that, for all they look like human beings, aren't human beings? Aren't descended from the same original beasts as ourselves, but were a different stock, branching off in ages we cannot define? Who say that they've lain in hiding enough centuries, and want to start quietly and deliberately to possess the world they insist was always theirs?"

"How do you know that's their way?" asked Smollett. "Or do you really know, are you doing more than guessing?"

"I know some things, and guess others. Dr. Smollett, I want your promise of silence for the time being. You need rest now, and pleasant companions, and safety. I want you to spend two or three days as the guest of some friends of mine."

They went in a taxi to the home of a man who came to the door in a robe like that of a priest, but dark green instead of black. He greeted Thunstone as one brother will greet another with whom he is on excellent terms. He was eager, but not surprised, when Thunstone introduced Dr. Smollett and asked if he might stay. The three had dinner, drinks and considerable pleasant talk. Thunstone went away, alone, to the office of a railroad executive. He introduced himself by mentioning the name of a man known and admired by both himself and the railroader.

"The favor I want," said Thunstone, "is to ride on a little spur line your railroad operates in the Zoar Valley region. I'm going up there tonight by airplane. I want to approach Araby, but not to stop there. Let your train slow down at a point I'll designate, so that I can drop off just outside the town."

They granted Thunstone's request of course. He never makes requests without reason, and without knowing those requests will be granted. He flew to the Zoar Valley country without hand luggage, though his pockets were stuffed with various things, and was in plenty of time for the train that left a small division point in the evening to travel the spur toward Araby.

It was a mixed train, with an ancient passenger coach, a milk car, two freight cars and a caboose. The wise-looking old conductor had on his sleeve four gold stripes for twenty years of service. He shook hands with Thunstone and sat beside him in the passenger coach, talking. Thunstone asked him no questions, but what the conductor told him might have been a series of helpful answers.

"Araby's an old town. I never get off there, never have. Somebody has a deal with the line to act as station master, though it's only a flagstop. Sometimes they take off freight, though they never put any on. Once in months, one or two of them will get on or off. Peculiar, yes, but the world's full of peculiar people. Never pass the time of day. Pay their passage in money, not tickets. Mostly in old coins, dollars and half dollars; once in a while in bills. The bills look new. I was worried a couple of times and had a bank check the bills for counterfeit. They were good, though."

"Naturally," said Thunstone.

"Unnaturally," rejoined the old conductor. "Araby's an unnatural place. Nobody goes there. Maybe the sheriff would, but there's never any trouble to call him. No telegraph, no phone, no newspaper I ever heard of. They have a deal with the government, too, like the deals Indian tribes have, to be let alone. Don't know how they worked it. They aren't Indians."

"No, they aren't," agreed Thunstone.

The conductor squinted through his spectacles at the scenery going past. It was after sundown, and to Thunstone the night looked black; but, like all railroaders on familiar routes, the conductor knew where he was.

"We'll be there in five minutes," he said. "Usually we highball through, but we'll take it at about thirty miles an hour. Two miles past, there's a little cut through, full of trees. We slow to about fifteen there, and out you can go. Goodbye, Mister. You know what you're doing."

"I know," Thunstone assured him.

The conductor got up. Thunstone followed him up the aisle and paused in the entry of the car. He watched as the train rolled to the edge of Araby and through. There were houses against a night-gloomy slope, as Dr. Smollett had described. They had lights, very few and dim and reddish, as if shining through colored glass. Thunstone walked down the steps of the car, his huge hand on the cleat at one side. The train cleared Araby and cut its speed. It came to a curve, plunged in between close heights. That would be the cut-through. Thunstone poised himself on the bottom step, waited for his instinct to speak, and sprang into the darkness.

For all his size and weight, he landed lightly on his feet, like a cat. Quickly he knelt on mossy ground among bushes, and waited for the train to gather speed and vanish with its lights that might disclose him. Then he flexed his muscles to rise, but at once he crouched lower. The ground under his knee gave a tiny vibration — something was coming, cautiously and slowly.

Thunstone waited motionlessly. A bush rustled. His eyes, growing accustomed to the darkness of the cut-through, made out a moving silhouette, upright and smaller than himself. It was pausing, then moving ahead, its head turning this way and that as if peering in the night. Not five yards from Thunstone the figure stopped. He heard it clear its throat, and then a match flared to light a cigarette.

He saw a hatless head of brown hair, an aggressive young face, an open-collared blue shirt with sleeves rolled almost to the shoulders over arms that were sinewy but not bulky. This was no Shonokin.

Thunstone crept forward at a crouch, then pounced with massive speed. His two mighty hands fell on the youngster's biceps and closed like manacles, holding his captive helpless.

Match and cigarette fell and went out. Towering above the young man, Thunstone spoke quickly.

"Don't move, or I'll pull your arms out at the shoulders. Where did you come from, and who are you?"

In the dark sounded a little chuckle, from nervousness or ordinary good humor. A gentle young voice made reply:

"I dropped off that train, just like you. And my name's Kent Collins. You can call me Crash, Mr. Thunstone."

"Crash?"

"A nickname I got when I played football. You'll find it tattooed on my left arm. I came because I wanted to help you."

The youth who called himself Kent Collins was well grown — perhaps

five feet ten inches tall, and all of a hundred and sixty-five pounds in weight — but plainly he realized that he would have no chance against the giant Thunstone. He did not move in Thunstone's grip, did not even tense his imprisoned biceps. "I was hoping," he said, "that you'd see my match light and come over. I don't blame you for not trusting me."

"Lighting a match hereabouts is foolish," Thunstone told him sententiously. "And why should I trust you?"

"You shouldn't until I prove myself. I'll try that. I know a little about you, and a little less about why you're here. But I do know something about both. I'm a friend of Dr. Smollett."

"So you say," said Thunstone.

"Several of his friends knew how tired he was, and were a little afraid he might collapse. When he went on that vacation, I agreed with some of the others to go along — not where he'd see, but in sight of him if he needed help."

"Didn't you think he needed help in Araby, Collins?"

"Call me Crash, Mr. Thunstone. I dozed through Araby, and when I woke up he was gone and the train pulling away. I jumped off at just about this point, and headed back toward town. I was in time to see him in trouble — out of it again — and running."

"What did you do?"

"Shivered." Crash Collins suited action to word. "So would you, Mr. Thunstone — no, they say you never shiver. They say you'd look the devil himself in the eye and call him a liar. But I shivered. I crouched down in some bushes by the track, until another train came along. I saw two of the Shonokins flag it down and get on. I made a run and caught the rear rail. They didn't pay attention to me, they were busy whispering together. I got off and followed them when they made a change to a New York train. Dr. Smollett was on that train, and they watched him so closely that they didn't notice me. He shook them off his trail and came to you, and I was right behind him. I heard everything the two of you said, at your hotel and later at —"

"You heard?" repeated Thunstone.

"There's a fire escape outside your window, Mr. Thunstone."

Thunstone relaxed his grip. "I heard a noise there, but I ignored it."

"Should you have ignored it?" inquired the gentle voice.

"I could afford to. The room where I live has — various devices." Thunstone decided not to enter into descriptions. "They would warn me of any danger or spying close at hand by supernatural enemies."

"Like the Shonokins," suggested Crash Collins.

"Exactly. What you tell me is enough to show that you're not in with them, at least. You may be honest about the rest of it, and you may not. But you're a normal human being, and no more than that."

"You make me sound run-of-the-mill," sighed Crash Collins. "I really want to help you. I haven't anything else to do in life. No family, no job of any importance —"

"My advice to you is to get out of here," Thunstone cut him off. "Head up the track and away from Araby. Now and then men find themselves idle and bored, and mix into adventures like this. They're a thousand times more in peril than the business man who fired ten shots at a mark and goes into the African wilds to hunt man-eating lions."

"Please," begged Crash Collins. "I'll do anything you say —"

"What I say is for you to get away from here," Thunstone interrupted again. "I need all my eyes and thoughts for the Shonokins, without protecting you. If you're honest in wanting to help, I'm honest in telling you that you may be more trouble than good. Sorry, I can't be more polite than that. Leave me alone."

Crash Collins shrugged and turned away. Thunstone moved in the direction of the Shonokin town.

There was noise from the town, not loud or definite. Perhaps he would not have heard it so far off if he had not expected to hear it.

It was not singing, though instruments of some sort played, and voices sounded in rhythm. They chanted and kept time, without musical tones. Thunstone had heard performances like that, once or twice, in concerts peculiarly planned and sponsored, that claimed to forecast the music of the future. His musical education was as good as the next layman's, but he had always felt baffled, repelled and in some sort dismayed. Now he wondered if the concerts were given by persons who knew something about Shonokin pseudo-music.

He thrust his hands into one pair of pockets, then another, to check the things he had brought along. Two talismans in particular he made sure of — a round gold case smaller than a coin, in which was sealed something said to be the eye of a bat, pierced and embalmed. The other was a dark leather thumb stall, which he now produced and slid upon his huge right thumb. It had been made, the giver had told him, from the ear of a black cat that had been boiled in the milk of a black cow and otherwise treated. Both talismans were credited with the power to make their bearer invisible. Thunstone did not wholly accept this claim, at least he did not think it could be done without the recital of words and the making of gestures he did not now care to try; but they could and would baffle counter-charms that might betray his whereabouts and motives to watchers in Araby.

The street he came to was as smooth and level as a dance floor, but not slippery. The Shonokins had strange materials and tools, for paving and other things. To one side grew a sort of hedge, of tall tufted reeds, and Thunstone hugged it, stealing quietly along. He came to a point opposite one of the houses with reddish lights inside, and paused, but could see

nothing through the clouded panes. He moved on toward another, then dropped to his knee. He parted his lips to relax pressure on his ear-drums, listening.

Movement. There was a rush of movement behind him. He swiveled around, still kneeling, and drove a hand under his coat for one of several weapons he had chosen as probably effective against such enemies. But they were not coming toward him. They swirled and struggled in a group yards away on his back track. He saw their pallid garments, their flourishing arms.

"Take that, you damned —"

There was a dull *chock* of a blow, and the voice stopped. But the four words were enough for Thunstone, and the voice. It was Crash Collins, who had brushed aside his warning and had followed. Knowing nothing of Shonokin methods, he had been detected and attacked.

Even now it was too late for Thunstone to charge to his rescue. Thunstone slipped silently through the hedge, and peered between stems. They came along the street, padding quietly like two-legged leopards, five or six of them. In their midst they hustled the staggering, half-stunned figure of Crash Collins. Moving past Thunstone, they walked toward the thicker jumble of houses just beyond. Voices called to them, in the language that Dr. Smollett had been unable to identify, and that Thunstone could identify but not understand.

They had captured the young man, kept him alive. Why?

He came from his hiding and moved quietly in the wake of the group, keeping their pale garments barely in sight. He himself was dressed in dark clothes, could hardly be seen, even by the feline eyes of the Shonokins. Up ahead he heard voices, questioning and answering, as though some sort of a guard challenged the group. Then more Shonokins were joining. They chattered together, all at once and briefly. Falling silent, they turned at a corner and he hurried after them in time to see them toiling up-hill.

He followed again, thankful that this path or trail led away from the houses. The Shonokins, up ahead, were marching their prisoner toward the top of the slope. The way was longish and more than a little steep, so that Thunstone found himself on all fours more than once. But the creatures he followed were sure and quick in the dark on the slope, and he had to exert himself to keep them in sight.

So hard did he work to climb that he did not watch well enough. A pale-clad figure appeared almost immediately above him, its foot within touch of his hand. It spoke to him, a question in the Shonokin language.

Thunstone, crouching to climb, shot out his hand and grasped an ankle that writhed as if boneless in his grip. The Shonokin might have opened its mouth to cry, but he was too quick and grim. A mighty heave upward, and its feet came out from under it and its head struck dully on the hard paving

of the trail. A moment later Thunstone's weight was upon it, and his hands were at its neck. He felt the cords of that neck crawl and writhe under his fingers, like a handful of captive snakes, and hands flashed upward to flesh sharp nails in his cheeks. He did not flinch nor move his head, except to writhe it clear of a groping of those ill-assorted fingers toward his eyes. Into his own hands and forearms he poured his muscular strength, deliberately and knowledgeably. He felt his thumbs sink into the relaxing flesh, as into putty, and the struggles beneath him weakened. The claws slipped down from his face and dabbled ineffectually at his wrists, scraping the skin but not fastening. The Shonokin went slack under him, but it might be a trick. Thunstone clung to his throttle-hold while he counted under his breath, very slowly, up to forty.

Then he let go and rose upward and backward, fumbling for a handkerchief to mop his bleeding face. He listened and peered. The Shonokin made no move and no sound, did not even breathe. He knelt again and fumbled for where its heart might be, then for its pulse. There was no hint of life.

John Thunstone, who had never rejoiced to kill or injure any of the men he had been forced to fight, smiled to himself in the dark. It was a hard smile, that would have frightened many excellent men and women who thought of John Thunstone as an oversized but gentle scholar. He dragged the body a little downhill and stretched it full across the trail. No Shonokin would follow him up past the dead carcass of one of its own race. And plainly this one had lingered as a sentry; he could advance without too great fear of rearward watchers above.

He continued his upward climb.

There was light above, pallid rather than the sort of strange red glow that had showed at the windows in the town. Thunstone left the trail to move cautiously in bush-clumps. He came close, as close as he dared, and pulled aside some leafy twigs for a look at what might be on the brow of the slope.

The glow showed him a building, at first glance like a castle, at second like those battlemented structures which set off the dam of a reservoir. It was square, with a tower at each corner, and each tower topped with a pointed roof like a nightcap. There were no windows, only a single arched doorway closed with a massive portal that seemed to have neither lock nor latch. From inside, as through an open space where the main roof should be, rose the pallid light, enough to show him everything. Over the building fluttered dark winged creatures — big bats, judged Thunstone.

Close to him, and all facing toward the door of the castle-like structure, were grouped the Shonokins. Among their pale-clad figures, lithe and triumphant, stood the darker, taller figure of Crash Collins. He was bound around the arms with something like a strip of pale, flexible metal.

One of the gathering, gray and consequential, spoke in a deep and authoritative voice.

One of the Shonokins near Collins addressed him:

"He asks your name."

"Kent Collins," was the steady reply. "This is war, I guess, and I'm your prisoner. Conventions of war allow you to ask my name, and say that I can answer."

"And what are you doing here?"

Collins laughed a single syllable. "Conventions of war don't oblige me to answer that. Keep it fair, Shonokin."

The interpreter spoke to his companions in their own language, and they chorused a soft, snarling noise that might have been laughter. The gray Shonokin spoke again, and the interpreter addressed Collins as before:

"He wonders if you are satisfied with what has happened to you."

"Nothing's happened to me yet that I can't stand," replied Collins. "I'm wondering at a lot of things, but I'm not hurt or scared yet."

The boy was a magnificent liar, Thunstone told himself. If Crash Collins was not frightened, then he was a bigger fool than Thunstone took him for. The interpreter translated into Shonokin, listened to yet another query from the gray chief, and turned back to Collins with a new question.

"He asks if you have any prayers to offer to the god you worship."

"Not here and now," replied Collins at once. "I've always thought I should pray more; but since I haven't, it's a poor time to begin when I'm in trouble. Nobody who listens to prayers is going to respect me if I do. And any help I deserve will come my way, pray or not."

"A sophistication," said the interpreter. "You may become less glib as time goes on, Collins. But if you decline to pray in your manner, you will let us pray in ours."

"If I don't have to enter into it."

"But you do have to enter into it, Collins. We'll show you how and when. But watch. It will be the last experience of your life."

Despite his own danger, and his apprehension for the youngster who had blundered into the hands of the creatures, Thunstone was fascinated. Worship — the Shonokin had said they would pray to their deity. Thunstone turned over in his mind the suggestion, made to him once by a professor of psychology, that religion was an instinct as deep as any, and not confined to humanity. The vanished race of the Stone Age, the Neanderthal folk that — like the Shonokins stood erect, used fire and tools and language, but were — like the Shonokins — another breed than man, had worshipped. Scholars knew that, for they found the ill-shapen bones of Neanderthals in graves, and beside them their weapons and possessions, laid there for use in an after-life. Someone not a psychologist had offered the fancy that the god of the Neanderthals was the being men knew as Satan... However

that might be, dogs worship their masters as gods, wild things fear men as devils. Did not the ancient writers about animals credit them with devotion — in the Arabian Nights the beasts swore by Allah, and there were the old stories from Africa about ape-peoples who served at abominable altars. Thunstone himself had visited the cave in Southern France that was maintained as a chapel, because inside it an ox had been found on his four knees before a natural marking in the shape of a cross.

The Shonokins, who are not human, were going to pray.

Collins, bound as he was, did not move or speak until two of his captors led him to a rock and shoved him down to sit upon it. Then he spoke, and in deadly insult. One of the group laughed back, unpleasantly and felinely. Around the gray chief several Shonokins were grouped, helping him into a costume. It included a scarf and what appeared to be an ancient, shabby opera hat. In his hand the chief took a staff, that was adorned at the end with a carven skull from the pate of which sprouted sparse hair, like faded grass. His costuming done, the creature looked like a coarse caricature drawn by a bitter radical artist of a penny-pinching man of wealth — Scrooge, or David Balfour's miserly uncle, or the rich squire who forecloses the mortgage in an old-fashioned melodrama.

Another Shonokin had pulled on a dark robe with a hood, like that of a monk. A third was strapping a belt with an old sword around his waist, and setting on his head a visored cap. And yet another put on something like a mortar-board.

The interpreter lounged by the rock where Collins sat. "Do you feel better?" he asked gently. "More at home, now that you see your friends, the powers that men best admire and trust?"

"I see no friends," replied Collins stoutly, "and none of you see a friend in me."

"Let me introduce you." The interpreter made a truly graceful gesture toward the chief in the top hat. "Here is the man of riches and position in your society, probably the most envied person of your race. Here," and he waved toward the one in the robe, "is your man of religion, your priest. In the swordbelt you see the soldier, your man of might, on whom you depend when force — the final argument — must settle differences. And in the flat hat comes the professor, your man of education."

"They look like a hard times party," sniffed Collins.

He was right. Thunstone knew it, and the interpreter knew it, too, for he emitted a Shonokin laugh.

"I say they are your friends, Collins. You are bound and helpless, and we, the Shonokins, will raise upon you those whom we worship. But these, your own people, the best of your own people, will stand by you to protect you. Can they avail you against our deities? Money, pride, religion, the soldier's sword, the professor's wisdom?"

"Just set my hands free — " began Collins.

"Oh, that stupidity!" cut in the interpreter. "You could not even win free from us, simple Shonokins. How can you oppose the deities? No human being can."

"I can think of one," Collins told him.

"And I can read your mind. Is his name — Thunstone?"

Collins was silent.

"I can read your mind," repeated the interpreter. "We know Thunstone. We have competed with him before this. I will say that you have something of a point — his part of the competition has not been wholly unsuccessful. But he is not here. Nobody is here. Your hopes are — what is your expression? — wishful thinking."

"Maybe," said Collins, and shut his mouth tight.

The interpreter was turning to speak to the other Shonokins. Their language was utterly incomprehensible, full of amazingly complex accountings, perhaps too much for a mouth shaped as a human being's mouth is shaped. Undoubtedly it had its complexity of syntax, too. But here and there was a syllable or an inflection that struck Thunstone as familiar. He wished that Lovecraft were alive to see and hear — Lovecraft knew so much about the legend of Other-People, from before human times, and how their behaviors and speech had trickled a little into the ken of the civilization known to the wakeaday world. De Grandin, too — a Frenchman, a scientist, and with the double practicality of his race and education. De Grandin would be interested to hear of all this later. Thunstone had no doubt that he would survive to tell de Grandin about it, over a bottle of wine at Huntington, New Jersey.

The Shonokins who were in costume moved away from the others, who squatted expectantly to watch. The priest-mocker lifted a hand and made a sign in the air, not the sign of the cross, but nearly. The other three, the travesties of soldier, scholar and squire dropped to their knees. The priest Shonokin said something that made the watchers snicker. Plainly a travesty of human religious rites...

Thunstone could have groaned in contempt. He kept silent. But he smiled and his lips made the motion of spitting.

As little of originality and wit as this! The Shonokins had taught it to ancient devil-worshippers, or the ancient devil-worshippers had taught it to the Shonokins. No way of telling, and no particular value in being able to tell. The important thing was that what they called worship was only a reversal, a burlesque, a stupid fatuous rebellion. He had known addled old women who recited the Lord's Prayer backward, a conceited and stuffy pseudo-poet who had hashed together garblings of many ceremonies and called them a new cult of wisdom. These Shonokins were doing the same thing, and not doing it very well. Thunstone debated for a moment the

policy of walking right in among them, knocking them down with his boulder-like fists, conquering them at the very door of their strange light-giving temple. Then he stayed right where he was.

While the mock-ceremony went on with the four costumed ones, another Shonokin walked slowly and stiffly toward the four-towered building. His arms were lifted, his fingers trembled and twitched. As he came close, he raised his voice, not in speech or in song, but in a cry. It was musical, prolonged and steady, like a blast from a bugle.

The bat-things in the upwash of light fluttered, swirled, and sailed away as if carried by a blast of wind. Something darker than the material of the walls rose into sight, midway between the towers.

It was a head, with horns upon it. A moment more, and it was joined by another horned head.

"You see?" the interpreter prompted Collins. "Other human beings have seen, too, but have not gone away to describe the sight. They come for you, that pair, but why should you be afraid? The greatest powers of the human race stand between you and them."

And indeed the five burlesque-makers had ceased their travesty on religious service, and were drifting toward Collins. They formed around him in a purposeful-seeming group, facing toward the building. Their bodies seemed tense and hostile inside their ridiculous costumes. They looked now like a bodyguard, hastily gathered but determined, for the prisoner.

Now Thunstone took a quarter of a second for self-congratulation. He had felt the impulse to show himself and give battle, and had he done so it would have been poorly timed. As things were turning out, he had three points, well separated, to watch — the group around Collins, the larger group of Shonokin spectators, and the building, from which the horned heads were emerging.

Each of the horned heads was set upon shoulders, bony and high, like the shoulders of an Egyptian statue. Bodies came into view, a long leg apiece came over the top of the wall, and the beings slithered and swung to the ground outside. They were tall and dusky, at the same time faintly glossy, like reptiles. They moved erect toward the two groups. It seemed to Thunstone that they were slightly transparent, like painted figures on glass.

The Shonokin whose bugle-like call had summoned the pair of things gave another cry, wilder and shriller, and threw himself on his face. So did the other Shonokins who watched. But those by Collins — the five in costume and the interpreter drew themselves more tense. One of them made a noise like a menacing growl.

"Don't you think they'll protect you, Collins?" murmured the interpreter. "No, don't get up from that rock. You'll only attract attention to yourself the more quickly."

"You ought at least to tell me what it's all about," came the voice of

Collins, and his teeth were set to keep the words steady. "You may not worry about rights and wrongs, but I do. I have all my rights and wrongs to mind. I've earned an explanation."

"You shall have it," the interpreter agreed smoothly. "Not that we recognize any claims of yours, Collins, but your knowing the truth is part of — of what happens here. In the simplest terms, let me say that we Shonokins and you men are enemies. You are usurpers, thieves, impostors on the throne of the world's rule. You've ruled badly, let it be said in passing. We are the rightful heirs, the true owners. We don't want you in our way. To be specific, we don't want you."

Thunstone listened, but his eyes were on the horned things that moved slowly out from the building. Their feet did not stir, they seemed to float... their feet? They had no feet. Thunstone remembered the tales of the Jumbee, of Sasabonsam and Tulia Viega and other devils of many lands. These beings stopped at the ankles. They floated nearer and nearer, just above the ground.

"Something — happened to one of us, down in the town," the interpreter was telling Collins. "One of your people struck one of ours. He fell. He did not move. We don't like that, Collins. We do things about it, or we aren't worthy in our lives. That is why we are exchanging you for our lost brother. Not a fair exchange, but it may satisfy Those."

Thunstone could sense the capital letter. As the interpreter said "Those," he gestured gracefully toward the approaching horned things.

It made sense to Thunstone. Shonokins feared their own dead, and for reasons he wished he understood fully. This ceremony was a sacrifice of some sort. But the interpreter had also said that the costumed Shonokins would protect Collins, in their roles of human leaders. Mockery was there, but mockery of what?

"Here Those come," said the interpreter.

The horned beings had floated as near as the main group of Shonokins, every one of which lay flat and limp, as though unconscious. They were close enough for Thunstone to see in detail. One wore a loose robe or gown, the other was naked and scaly. They had enormous ears, their eyes were deepset and glowing under heavy ridges, they seemed to have bestial teeth. Through them Thunstone could see the ground and the horizon beyond.

They skimmed, at ankle height, over the prone worshippers, just clearing them. There was a flash of light in the sky, as though a bolt of lightning had fallen, but no thunder.

"Now!" cried the interpreter, stooping almost to Collins' ear. "Trust in your friends to save you from Those!"

For the beings were swooping toward the group around the prisoner.

The four costumed Shonokins, who had poised themselves tensely

motionless for so long, now closed in around Collins. To the fore was the gray chief in his ridiculous top hat. He lifted the skull-knobbed staff. The others set themselves as for battle. Their hands lifted menacingly, crooked claw fashion. The interpreter walked swiftly backward, his eyes on the scene. He backed toward the spot where Thunstone hid. He made a chuckling sound in his throat, though it may not have been laughter.

"I wish you joy of what is going to happen to you," he called to Collins.

Thunstone moved quickly into the open and got his hands on the interpreter.

He acted more decisively and violently than in his struggle with the sentry on the slope trail. One hand closed on the slim neck, the other caught at a band that held the garment at the waist. With a quick and complete gathering of his strength, Thunstone swung the Shonokin from the ground, then muscled him at arm's length overhead, as an athlete at an exhibition lifts a bar bell. Up came one of Thunstone's knees, and down came the Shonokin, spine downward, upon and across it. The spine broke like a dry stick. Still clutching and carrying the limp body, Thunstone ran forward.

The four Shonokins had faced the horned ones as they approached, and at the last moment they, too, had fallen face downward, cowering and scrabbling. That was the crown of the ceremony, the finale of the mockery. A human prisoner, around whom representatives of human strength had gathered, and then a falling away to denote the powerlessness of man's devices — somebody could and should write a definitive essay on Shonokin humor as manifested in Shonokin malice.

But before the horned pair could move in over the prone figures, Thunstone had tramped to the rock and braced himself before it. He held out his victim, second of the night, at the full length of his strong arms. "I give you this," he said.

They screamed. Everything screamed the air full of noise. The shrill high chorused note drove into the ears like a needle, shook the flesh like a current of electricity. Any man but Thunstone, perhaps, would have dropped what he held. Undoubtedly that is what the scream was for. Since Thunstone did not drop the corpse of the Shonokin, he will never know exactly.

The noise died. The two horned ones were floating back, as curtains sag when the wind dies. Around Thunstone the Shonokins in their costumes were scrambling erect, and moving away. Their fear of a dead Shonokin was greater than their fear of Those they worshipped.

"You don't want it?" Thunstone inquired. "But you'll take it."

He raised the limp form shoulder high, and threw it sprawling through the air toward the horned ones. At the same time he ran toward them. One put out a talon-hand, and it touched Thunstone's sleeve. He felt his flesh burn as if from a blow with a red hot iron, and part of his coat blazed

up and fell away. But the thing was only trying to ward him off, not grasp him. The two retreated. And the Shonokin, forsaken and in terror, were running.

They yelled and jabbered as they ran, all in a scrambling turmoil for the trail and down the slope. Thunstone gazed after them, and tore away his burnt sleeve. The shirt beneath it bore a jagged black print, like a brand in the shape of a claw-fringed hand. He had time at last to speak to Collins.

"Are you all right?"

Collins did not answer. Thunstone took a step nearer, bent and tugged at the metal band. Its fastening gave way as he pulled, and Collins, free, stood up.

"Would you believe it, sir," he said, "I knew all the time you'd be here."

"You'll forgive me for finding that a little hard to believe," replied Thunstone, his eyes still fixed on the two horned shapes. They had drifted a little backward toward their castle-lair. Between them and himself lay the corpse of the Shonokin interpreter, its head lolling and its back interestingly broken. Apparently they were as furtive of it as were the Shonokins themselves.

"Without knowing you were there, and that you'd come at the right time," went on Collins, "how do you think I could stand to —"

"Thanks for trusting me," said Thunstone. He put away the thought that he himself had not known the right time to show himself, and that more through chance than otherwise he had seized upon the right time at last. "Stay close behind me when I — wait, listen!"

There were wails and jabberings down the trail. The fleeing Shonokins had come to the point where Thunstone had slain and left his first victim of the evening. The sight and sense of their dead companion drove the living Shonokins into an ecstasy of unreasoning terror. In terror, too, were the horned things they said their prayers to, in frank terror of a Shonokin corpse.

"I get the angle," said Crash Collins suddenly, as though he had been reading Thunstone's mind.

"Angle?" repeated Thunstone dully. Again he stooped, took hold of the dead interpreter, and lifted the limp body. Carrying it, he moved cautiously toward the horned pair, saw them retreat before him. They wanted none of that corpse's nearness.

"It's like this," went on Collins rapidly. "Simple when you realize it. The Shonokins hate their own dead — well, so do we, though maybe we don't go quite as crazy from fear and disgust. But their — their gods, if they are gods. Those." Collins faced toward the two figures that dangled clear of the ground. "They can't stand dead Shonokins, either. Don't you see why?"

"I see why," nodded Thunstone, and he did.

There must be only so many Shonokins alive. Men knew things about them — not many things, but some things. It was said that a Shonokin could die only by accident or violence. There were no females. No young. At least no human being had ever seen or heard of female Shonokins or young Shonokins. The Shonokins who wanted to possess the world again could not bring into that world any new Shonokins.

That must be why they dreaded death among them. When a Shonokin died, he was gone. Nothing was born to take his place. The cowering of Those made it possible, even plain. Because gods or devils or spirits can exist only if they are served and believed in. If Shonokins were to be killed, Those would be worshipped less. If all the Shonokins died, what would become of Those?

Thunstone approached again. The horned shapes were fleeing to their lair, climbing its wall like monkeys, dropping out of sight into its coldly flaming interior.

Thunstone walked almost up to the wall. There was silence beyond it. "Throw the body in after them," suggested Collins, at his elbow.

It was hard to do, but they managed it. Thunstone seized an arm and a leg. Collins took similar holds on the other side. They swung the sagging form backward and forward, backward and forward, while Thunstone counted to get them into rhythm. "Three," he said, and they heaved it with all the strength in both their bodies.

The dead thing soared upward, seemed to catch at the very top of the wall, then slid inside.

A howl went up and, it seemed to Thunstone, a paler, stronger blaze of light. A moment later the door swung outward, and Thunstone had just time and wit to catch Collins by the shoulder and hustle him bodily back and up, upon higher ground to one side.

Liquid gushed out of the door. It was gleaming liquid, with something of the deadish light that shines in and upon the sea, in certain tropical latitudes where myriads of tiny phosphorescent animals fill the waves with the seeming of cold fire. It made a torrent on the slope, and downward. Again Thunstone heard the Shonokins yell from below. They had something practical to fear now, for that flood was following the trail they had taken, like the bed of a stream. They yelled, and then their yells blurred and bubbled, as if overteemed with the flow.

"What kind of stuff is that?" demanded Collins. He sniffed in the night. "I don't exactly smell it, but my nose feels it, somehow."

"Let's get away from here."

The two of them retreated along the slope. They came to a high rock. Climbing to its top, they were able to see. A moon was coming up at last, and the valley where the Shonokin town had been built also sent up light, the light of the strange liquid, like a reflection of the moonglow.

"What's become of Those?" asked Collins.

"Perhaps nothing," replied Thunstone. "We won't know for a while. We won't ever know, unless we come back, very carefully and very intelligently, to find out. What I think is that they have been partially defeated and badly frightened. They wanted certain things tonight — yourself, for one. They didn't get you. Instead, they got the cold meat of one of their followers. It caused an explosion and overflowing of —"

"Probably," put in Collins, "they've had that stuff pent up here for a threat to the town below."

"Probably," agreed Thunstone. "It got out of hand, and it must have killed more Shonokins. Fewer worshippers by far than this time last night. It can't be pleasing to Those."

"Licked on their home grounds, huh?" said Collins, and his voice was savagely triumphant. "Let's strike out across the heights here. We don't know the country, but by morning we ought to reach some sort of a settlement —" He broke off and permitted himself a shudder, such a shudder as he had scorned to allow himself when Shonokins were all around him, exultant and sure of his doom. "A human settlement," he amplified.

"All right, let's start," Thunstone told him. "There's moon enough for us to see the country and remember it. For we'll want to know a way back, when we return to Araby."

They came back a week later, Thunstone and Crash Collins and three other men, carefully selected by Thunstone. The day they chose was a fortunate day, they had been assured. They came prepared in a variety of ways, for any sort of trouble they could imagine waiting.

There was no trouble. There was nothing. The town of Araby had been on that slope, and was there no more, nor even a trace to show where it had been. Not a house, nor a hole to show the basement-position of a house, nor one of the pavements that had been strange underfoot in the night, nor even the station house by the railroad track.

"Licked on their home grounds," Thunstone remembered that Collins had so described what had happened to the Shonokins.

Naturally the spot would be distasteful, unendurable. They were gone.

He tried to find the place where the castle had crowned the slope. He could not even be sure of where it had stood. Had he been sure he might have found there, at least, a trace of the Shonokins and of Those they prayed to.

"I know I wasn't dreaming," said Crash Collins at length. "But maybe these gentlemen think both of us were dreaming."

The three others shook their heads, and the oldest said courteously that he knew Thunstone would never have brought them so far just for the sake of an idle dream.



The Leonardo Rondache

BETWEEN PRENDIC NORBIER AND John Thunstone were not many physical differences. They were both inches over six feet, they were both broad even in proportion to such height, they were both dark-haired and strong-featured. Each had huge, long hands such as one associates with statues, each was perforce dressed in specially tailored clothing and specially cobbled shoes. And just now, in Norbier's little study-shack behind his country house, they sat on opposite sides of the table beneath the bright ceiling light in attitudes of eager interest almost exactly alike.

Differences were the great differences one sees at a second glance. That second glance, if a thoughtful one, would define John Thunstone's weight as hard, active weight and Norbier's as relaxed, good-humored weight. The tan on Thunstone's broad brow and lined jowl was somehow the tan of open-air activity, and that on Norbier's recognizable as fashionable tan, the product of lounging on beaches or dozing under sun lamps. And the expression in Thunstone's eyes was of intent, almost apprehensive study, while Norbier looked on in confident anticipation.

Dwarfed in Thunstone's great fingers was a magnifying glass. He narrowed his eye to peer through it at the photograph on the table. Finally he laid the glass down and looked at Norbier.

"It's a da Vinci signature," he announced gravely. "The reversed writing and the distinctive letter-forms — of course, those in themselves could be trickery, even clumsy trickery. But the glass shows that the lines are real writing, not a forger's painstakingly drawn replica. It's da Vinci, though with more of youth in it than any I remember seeing. Of course, there are other experts, better qualified than I — "

"You're one of several that says Leonardo da Vinci wrote the signature I photographed," said Norbier. "Thank you, Thunstone." He took the photographed writing back. "Now as to your pay — "

"For my pay," said Thunstone, "show me the original."

Norbier smiled. His smile was not like Thunstone's, it was a trifle crooked

and suspicious. "Well," he said, "I've thought and even worried about showing the original. But you, Thunstone, study other things than handwriting and Renaissance art. Your specific studies might make it all right for you to have a look. Those studies of yours — and the honest wish I feel to make a friend of you."

"My only other serious study," reminded Thunstone, "is black magic and how to nullify it."

"Exactly," nodded Norbier. "You'll see how it fits in. Step this way."

They rose and Norbier led the way across the floor to a wide narrow table that stood against a wall. Something stood there, like a big round mirror, covered with a white cloth. "Here it is," announced Norbier, and pulled the cloth away.

What Thunstone said would have been a curse, but for the tone that made it a prayer. He gazed at the round disk of wood, old and heavy and as big around as a tea tray. For a moment it was no disk, nor was it wood. In the brilliant light of the ceiling lamp he had a sense of attentive menace, glaring and scrambling. Then he made himself realize that he was looking at something painted, and painted long ago at that — the colors dimmed, the detail faded. Thunstone's mouth looked thin for a moment, but he kept himself steady.

"There's the signature I photographed, dashed in with black pigment just below the picture," Norbier was telling him. "And you probably realize just what one of Leonardo's lost masterpieces this is."

Thunstone gazed at Norbier. "I know what story of his life it immediately tells," he agreed. "A story some say is a legend, and others — Mrs. Rachel Annand Taylor for one — feel sure it is true. Leonardo was a boy in the home of his father, the notary Piero da Vinci. A peasant brought a round of wood — a *rondache*, such as foot-soldiers of that day used for shields — asking that a decoration be painted upon it —"

"Exactly, exactly," Norbier almost crowed. "And Leonardo was always interested in monsters. He shut himself away and studied all kinds of unpleasant little things — lizards, spiders, bats — and borrowed from all, blending and flavoring them with his own genius. What he managed," and Norbier seemed not too anxious to look at the picture, "was sufficient to startle his father; then the elder da Vinci's business sense asserted itself. He gave the peasant another *rondache*, nicely painted with an arrow-pierced heart. He sold the weird masterpiece of his son, at a thumping price; enough, perhaps, to pay Leonardo's first tuition fees in the studio of Verrochio in Florence."

"And this may be the *rondache* in question." Thunstone studied it again. "You understand Piero da Vinci's first reaction to it, don't you? May I ask where it came to modern attention, and how you got it?"

"In Germany," said Norbier. "I had a little hand, as no doubt you've

heard, in studying and identifying the hodge-podge of art treasures stolen by the Nazi bigwigs and stored away in vaults. This turned up in a neat little trove locked up in a cellar owned by one Herr Gaierstein. Know him?"

"Gaierstein," echoed Thunstone. "Not much publicized, but admired by his chiefs for certain ancient pagan knowledge. Quarreled with Himmler because he, Gaierstein, suggested that Himmler's elite henchmen needed special initiation before they assisted at the old rites with which Nazi chiefs wanted to replace German churches. Nobody knows how Gaierstein died, except that he did die, completely and messily. I know about him. That's where my black art studies come in."

"This *rondache* was in a vault within the vault," explained Norbier. "The other art objects fell into two classes — expensive popularized items, and pretty average obscenities. This was something special. There was no way to find where it came from. Finally I secured its release to me."

He turned back to the painted round and touched its edge with his finger. "I've been at pains to clean it without damaging. Only today there came to light this writing around the edge — a triple spiral of letters. What do you make of it, Thunstone?"

Thunstone bent, peered. His lips moved slowly, then seemed to freeze stiffly. He caught up the cloth and veiled the *rondache* once more.

"Norbier," he said, as earnestly as a judge on the bench, "if I've done you any service, do me one. Leave this thing alone for the time being. Don't uncover it or look at it until I return."

"Return?" repeated Norbier. "When?"

"Soon. Within an hour, perhaps. Agreed, Norbier?"

"Agreed," smiled Norbier, and Thunstone hurried out, with less courtesy than common with him.

Left alone in the study-shack, Norbier thought briefly that the silence was deeper and deader than it had been before Thunstone's call, and that the light on the ceiling was at once more lurid and less brilliant. He shook his big body, and smiled consciously to rid himself of such manifest illusions. He'd let himself become unsettled, ever so slightly, by Thunstone's strange manner in studying that triple-spiral of letters around the edge of the *rondache*. He told himself to leave creep-sensations to Thunstone. Who was Thunstone, anyway? A man of undenied gifts and scholarship, who nevertheless fiddled and fumbled with superstitions ordinarily taken seriously by nobody over the Hallowe'en age. There were those rumors about Thunstone's enmity with some self-styled wizard named Rowley Thorne, and Thorne's destruction, and those others, even less clear, about some people called Shonokins — was that the right word? — who weren't people, but something like people. Norbier could not even remember where he had heard the stories, or whether they had been told for the truth.

Anyway, he had better things to think about. This *rondache* was the work of Leonardo da Vinci, without whom the Renaissance would certainly not have been the Renaissance. More than that, it was perhaps the first artistic labor of Leonardo da Vinci ever to attract more than family notice, and it was the basis of a delightful story of a great man. Leonardo, blessed demigod of the Quattrocento — here was his first token of greatness. Even if Norbier had been aware that he had made a solemn promise to Thunstone, he now forgot it. One hand twitched the covering cloth from the *rondache*.

No getting away from it, even after so many glimpses he found the impact of that painting almost physically strong and daunting. But Norbier, for all his appearance of lazy softness, was neither naive nor cowardly. He sat down before the painted thing to study it.

If Leonardo da Vinci, a curly-blond boy in his teens, had studied lizards, bats and spiders for this, he had not hodge-podged his studies. Anyone else would have been content with a lizard's body, a spider's knuckly jointed legs, a bat's wings. Not so Leonardo, master of his eye and hand and brush even before his voice had changed and the first peachy fuzz had sprouted for the beginning of that apostolic beard he was to wear. What had Thunstone said? "...blending and flavoring them with his own genius." That was right. It sounded almost like a phrase from an art critic's description, what time Norbier would call in the art critics. But first he would enjoy the thing to the full, then decide which museum — civic or university — to offer it to as a loan. Not a gift, a loan. Then the critics would come and stare and wonder and worship.

Gazing and pondering thus, Norbier told himself that he was seeing the odious figure in the center of the round wood more clearly than ever before. It had clarity and life, that ancient color on that ancient wood. The thing was head on toward an observer, but you sensed the shape and extent of the fore-shortened body, at once lizard-lithe and spider-squat. The legs — there seemed to be a great many of them — were hairy and jointed, but those in front, at least, bore handlike extremities, reminiscent of the forefeet of lizards. Those wings were true da Vinci work; Norbier remembered the tales of how da Vinci, seeking to invent the airplane centuries before Langley or Wright, studied painstakingly every flying creature, bat, bird and insect. As for the thing's head, that was apparently meant to seem a squat, dark-furred blotch, with two glowing close-set eyes peering from the thick fur as from an ambush. A real face to it, flattened like a bat's, and a mouth with a jaw of ophidian shallowness, but a little open, to show... yes, fangs. No wonder that everyone who saw the thing, from Piero da Vinci to the present, squared his shoulders a trifle to dissemble a shiver.

The writing around the rim, now. Oddly enough, Thunstone had been more impressed with that than with the picture. Men had told Norbier that

Thunstone was never frightened, but Norbier thought different. What said the writing? It was a string of Roman capitals, that began at almost the exact top of the *rondache* and curved away to the left around the wooden rim, then came back and made a second circuit within the first, and a third within the second — a triple spiral. Aloud Norbier spelled out some letters:

“A-G-L-A-”

A cross-mark came there. “The end of the word,” he said, and enjoyed the comfort of his own voice’s sound. “If I read backward from left to right, there are words. What language? Let’s see.”

He took hold of the *rondache* and revolved it, reading more words aloud as they came to the top:

“Aglā... Barachiel... On... Astasieel... Alpahero... Raphael... Algar... Uriel... end of the first circle.”

Some of the names sounded familiar, names from old songs or prayers. He revolved the disk to read the second circle:

“Michael... Iova... Gabriel... Adonai... Haka... Ionna... Tetragramaton.”

That last name he had heard before, and neither in song or prayer. Some devil-story — wasn’t Tetragramaton a fiend or goblin? Once more he revolved the disk, reading the final circle of names:

“Vusio... Ualactra... Inifra... Mena... Iana... Ibam... Femifra.”

Norbier wished Thunstone had remained. But Thunstone said he would return. The names might mean something to Thunstone. Meanwhile, that monster-painting continued to impress. Any fool, even someone with no art appreciation, must admire the master touch of the boy who had been Leonardo, son of Piero da Vinci. The flat representation actually looked three-dimensional, as though it were a bas relief.

“Hmmm!” grunted Norbier aloud. For it was a bas relief. He hadn’t noticed that before.

The painted figure, too adroit to be grotesque, actually bulged from the flat surface of the wood. Norbier put out a hand to explore its contours — and snatched the hand back. Something had moved behind him, in the direction of the dying fire on the hearth, with a solid plunk.

He hopped out of his chair, as swiftly as John Thunstone might, and spun around to face whatever it was. For the instant he fully expected to see something, big and living, crawling out of the fireplace toward him; something that had come down the chimney, a sort of baleful antithesis of Santa Claus, with gifts of violence or ill fortune.

There was nothing there. No movement. Norbier became aware that he was fluttering and writhing the hand with which he had touched the *rondache*, and rubbing its fingertips together. Those fingertips still harbored a sensation of unpleasantness. For when he had touched the likeness of the monster, it had seemed to stir and yield, as painted wood could and

would never do. That was what had startled him, more than the noise from the direction of the fireplace. But what had made that noise?

He walked warily across the floor, and then he saw. A book had fallen from his shelf beside it, and lay open on the reading table below the shelf. He bent to see. The Bible, of all books — it had popped open to Isaiah, the eighth chapter. His eyes caught the verse at the top of the inner column, the nineteenth verse:

And when they say unto you, Seek them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep and mutter...

It was coincidence, of course, this passage, but Norbier cursed his imagination that made him think he heard actual muttering behind him. His eye skipped to the last verse of the chapter:

And they shall look unto the earth; and behold trouble and darkness, dimness of anguish; and they shall be driven to darkness.

"Dimness of anguish," repeated Norbier aloud, for he relished the neat turn of a phrase. "Driven to darkness. Sounds as if it should fit in somewhere with what's going on —"

"What IS going on?"

Again he whirled around, facing toward where the *rondache* was propped up on the table opposite.

Something huge, heavy, many-legged, was lowering itself with ponderous stealth from the tabletop to the floor.

Norbier stood dead still, his brain desperately seeking to explain what he saw. Explanation came.

Hypnotism. That was it. Self-hypnotism. He had gazed too intently at the painted nightmare. Or, more likely, it was that triple spiral of letters. He'd read, a year ago, something in a national magazine about hypnotism and how it was induced. You can hypnotize yourself by gazing raptly at a helix — a spiral line, curving in and in and in within its own whorls to a central point. You look at it, and it eventually seems to begin turning like a pinwheel, and you go to sleep. You may have dreams in that sleep. That was what he, Norbier was doing now sleeping, dreaming.

The entity had completed its slow, ponderous journey from table to floor. It seemed to crouch there, then to hoist itself erect on the tips of its multiple claws. Among the curved, jointed brackets of its legs hung a puffy body, like a great crammed satchel. The integument had pattern, like scales, and from the spaces between the scales sprouted tufts and fringes of dark fur, like plush grown wild. And it had wings, also scaly and tufted, ribbed like a bat's, that winnowed and stirred above its bulk. The head, a shaggy ball, craned in his direction. Deep within the thicket of fur upon the face clung two wise, close-set eyes, that glowed greenly, then redly, at him. Between and above them the fur seemed to part in two directions, as if the undeveloped forehead frowned. A mouth opened, the light caught a stock-

ade of white, irregular, pointed fangs. A great gout of foam came out, and fell splashing on the floor.

The talons scraped on the floorboards, like the tines of a dragged pitchfork. The creature moved toward Norbier. The two foremost limbs rose, and at the ends Norbier saw hand-like claws, like the front feet of a big, big lizard.

He shook his head, like a mauled boxer trying to clear his wits. He kept remembering that article about hypnotism. It was never of long duration. Even if someone hypnotizes you, and falls dead next minute, you have a short nap and waken again, as well and serene as ever. But while you napped, what dreams may beset you. Norbier tried to retreat before the advance of the creature, and his back came up against the bricks at the side of the fireplace. He reached down and caught hold of a pair of fire tongs.

"Get back from me!" he bawled shakily, and lifted the tongs as if to strike.

The wings flapped and stirred the air. The big body — it looked as big as a bear rose slowly from the floor. Another flap of the wings, and it sailed at him. He swung the tongs, missed. A wing brushed him with its furry tip, the shape circled round in the glaring light, and dropped down facing him near the opposite wall. Norbier felt sick. The touch of the furry wing had seemed to nauseate him, to weaken his joints.

The creature was lifting itself on its wings again. This time —

"Stay against the wall, Norbier!" came the stern, quiet voice of John Thunstone.

Norbier could not have moved from his position against the wall had he tried. He sagged there, grateful for the solid brickwork, and his eyes seemed to cloud over so that only as a huge, vague shadow did Thunstone move forward and in front of him. Toward Thunstone came another shadow, also big and vague, but seeming to flap wings and flutter many legs.

"Would you, though?" Norbier heard Thunstone say, and there was a quick move as one shape moved to meet the other. Norbier's inner ears were wrung and jangled by a cry, so high as almost to top the audible range for human hearing and go among the soundless vibrations — a cry sharpened by pain and rage and terror, such a cry as might be uttered by a bat larger and more evil than all bats ever seen or imagined.

Norbier dashed at his eyes with the back of his hand, and he saw the struggle. Thunstone was poking or thrusting with something — with Thunstone's back toward Norbier, the weapon could not be seen. The creature retreated before him, trying to strike or grapple with some of its limbs.

"Get back," Thunstone was saying. "Back where you started. There!"

The thing had scrambled up on the table. It was shrinking unbelievably

— no longer bear-size, more the size of a cat. It retreated toward the standing *rondache*. It was gone. The *rondache* showed the picture Norbier knew. Thunstone quickly laid down something slim and shining, and seized the *rondache* with both hands. He spun it around and around, from left to right. He faced toward Norbier.

"All safe now," he said, quite cheerfully.

Norbier gazed at a splattery blackness on the floor — an uneven wet blot, another and another beyond, clear back to the table. It would look like the trail of blood from a wound, but it was so black. His nostrils caught, or he thought they caught, a sickening odor. He swayed, pawing at the wall for support.

"Sit in that chair next to you," said Thunstone, and Norbier managed to reach it. Thunstone laid the *rondache* down and made a long stride, swift as a tiger, to a cupboard. The door was locked, but Thunstone plucked it open with a rending rasp of broken metal. He exclaimed in satisfaction, drew out a bottle and poured from it into a glass. "Drink," he said, steadying the glass in Norbier's hands.

It was good brandy. Norbier reflected that he always bought the best brandy. He looked up, revived. His eyes sought the shining, slender object on the table beside the *rondache*.

"That?" said Thunstone, following the direction of the glance. "It's a stabbing blade, made of silver — black magic never faces silver, you know. Silver bullets kill witches and werewolves, silver charms keep away devils. Someone has claimed that Saint Dunstan himself forged that blade. It isn't the first time I've used it successfully, nor the second or the third."

"I'm — sorry, Thunstone," Norbier managed. "I got looking at that spiral of writing —"

"Of course. And you turned it around three times from right to left — widdershins, contrary to the clock and to the sun. That let the demon come out to you. And any one of fifty legends will convince you that no demon wants to be called up by someone who is at a loss for ways to treat it. I put it back where it came from, by turning the *rondache* the opposite way."

"But that isn't a work of Leonardo!" Norbier protested, feeling like a child whose dearest illusion has been shattered. "Not Leonardo! He might have to do with gods, but not with devils."

"Think of the story of the *rondache*," reminded Thunstone gently. "Leonardo's father was frightened by the picture, but he was money-conscious enough to offer it for sale. Who would buy such a thing from him, and for what purpose?"

Norbier made no answer, and Thunstone went on. "A sorcerer, naturally. Italy was full of them then, and they are not gone from the world. The addition of the spiral writing, and the method of turning it, was a spell

to invoke the monster."

"Destroy it," begged Norbier. "Whatever I spent for it will be money well spent if the thing is put out of existence."

Thunstone smiled. He had picked up his silver blade and was wiping it.

"I rather hoped you would say something like that, Norbier." He bent and caught up a rod that lay on the floor. Norbier saw that it was a walking stick, but hollow. Thunstone fitted the silver blade into it, and so out of sight. Leaning it in a corner, he went back and took up the *rondache*. This he carried to the fireplace, stirred the last coals with a careful toe, and put the round wooden disk upon them.

There was a leap of flame, pale and hot as the center of a blast furnace. Around that leaped up a circle of glowing redness, and sparks rose as from a fireworks display. They died down again, fat, black clouds of vapor billowed and vanished in their turn. When Norbier looked closely, the wood was burned to ashes. Norbier rose and walked to where the open Bible lay.

"It was as if some power tried to warn me," he said. "Look at what this page says — no, the pages have turned."

"There was considerable stirring of air in here," observed Thunstone. He came to Norbier's side. "Now the book is open to the beginning of the Gospel of Saint John. If your other reference warned you — this should comfort you."

He put his finger on the page. "'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God,'" he read. "'The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.'"

Thunstone smiled at Norbier. "That's enough, eh?"

"No, it's not all," demurred Norbier, studying the page. "Look below, where the sixth verse begins. 'There was a man sent from God, whose name was John...'"

John Thunstone put out his hand and closed the book. "All my life I've tried to deserve my name," he said softly. "Some day, perhaps, I shall deserve it a little."



The Last Grave of Lill Warran

THE SIDE ROAD BECAME a rutted track through the pines, and the track became a trail. John Thunstone reflected that he might have known his car would not be able to travel the full distance, and in any case a car seemed out of place in these ancient and uncombed woods. A lumber wagon would be more in keeping; or a riding mule, if John Thunstone were smaller and lighter, a fair load for a mule. He got out of the car, rolled up the windows, and locked the door. Ahead of him a path snaked through the thickets, narrow but well marked by the feet of nobody knew how many years of tramping.

He set his own big feet upon it. His giant body moved with silent grace. John Thunstone was at home in woods, or in wilder places.

He had dressed roughly for this expedition. He had no intention of appearing before the Sandhill woods people as a tailored and foreign invader. So he wore corduroys, a leather jacket that had been cut for him from deer hides of his own shooting, and a shabby felt hat. His strong-boned, trim-mustached face was sober and watchful. It did not betray excitement, or any advance on the wonder he expected to feel when he finished his quest. In his big right hand he carried a walking stick of old dark wood.

"Yep, yep," the courthouse loafers at the town back on the paved road had answered his questions. "Lill Warran — that's her name, Lill, not Lily. Not much lily about her, nothin' so sweet and pure. She was a witch, all right, mister. Sure she was dug out of her grave. Nope, we wasn't there, we just heard about the thing. She was buried, appears like, in Beaver Dam churchyard. And somebody or several somebodies, done dug her up outa there and flung her body clear of the place. Old-time folks believe it's poison bad luck to bury a witch in church ground. You do that and leave her, you might's well forget the church 'cause it won't be blessed no more. Ain't saying we believe that personal; it's country belief."

But the courthouse loafers had not denied the belief in the necessity of

digging up a witch. One or two of them contributed tales of Lill Warran. How she was no dry, stooped, gnarled old crone, but a "well-grown" woman, tall and fully and finely made, with a heavy massive wealth of black hair. She wore it knotted into a great loaf at her nape, they said, and that hair shone like fresh-melted tar. Her eyes, they said, were green as green glass, in a brown face, and her mouth —

"Huh!" they'd agreed to Thunstone. "You've come a far piece, and it's like you seen a many fine-looking women. But, mister, ain't no possible argument, you seen Lill Warran and that red mouth she had on her, you'd slap a mortgage on your immortal soul to get a kiss of it."

And the inference was, more than one man had mortgaged his immortal soul for a kiss of Lill Warran's mouth. She was dead now. How? Bullet, some said. Accident, said others. But she was dead, and she'd been buried twice over, and dug up the both times.

Gathering this and other information, John Thunstone was on the trail of the end of the story. For it has been John Thunstone's study and career to follow such stories to their end. His story-searches have brought him into adventures of which only the tenth part has been told, and that tenth part the simplest and most believable. His experiences in most cases he has kept to himself. Those experiences have helped, perhaps, to sprinkle gray in his smooth black hair, to make somber his calm, strong face.

The trail wound, and climbed. Here the wooded land sloped upward. And brush of a spiny species grew under the pines, encroaching so that John Thunstone had to force his way through, like a bull in a swamp. The spines plucked at his leather-clad arms and flanks, like little detaining fingers.

At the top of the slope was the clearing he sought.

It was a clearing in the strictest sense of the word. The tall pines had been axed away, undoubtedly their strong, straight trunks had gone to the building of the log house at the center. And cypress, from some swamp near by, had been split for the heavy shingles on the roof. All around the house was bare sand. Not a spear of grass, not a tuft of weed, grew there. It was as naked as a beach by the sea. Nobody moved in that naked yard, but from behind the house came a noise. *Plink, plink*, rhythmically. *Plink, plink*. Blows of metal on something solid, like stone or masonry.

Moving silently as an Indian, John Thunstone rounded the corner of the log house, paused to make sure of what was beyond, then moved toward it.

A man knelt there, of a height to match John Thunstone's own, but lean and spare, after the fashion of Sandhills brush dwellers. He wore a shabby checked shirt and blue dungaree pants, worn and frayed and washed out to the blue of a robin's egg. His sleeves were rolled to the biceps, showing gaunt, pallid arms with sharp elbows and knotty hands. His back

was toward Thunstone. The crown of his tow head was beginning to be bald. Before him on the ground lay a flat rectangle of liver-colored stone. He held a short-handled, heavy-headed hammer in his right hand, and in his left a narrow-pointed wedge, such as is used to split sections of log into fire wood. The point of the wedge he held set against the face of the stone, and with the hammer he tapped the wedge butt. *Plink, plink.* He moved the point. *Plink.*

Still silent as a drifting cloud, Thunstone edged up behind him. He could see what the gaunt man was chiseling upon the stone. The last letter of a series of words, the letters irregular but deep and square:

HERE LIES
LILL WARRAN
TWICE BURIED AND TWICE DUG UP
BY FOOLS AND COWARDS
NOW SHE MAY
REST IN PEACE
SHE WAS A ROSE OF SHARON
A LILY OF THE VALLEY

John Thunstone bent to read the final word, and the bright afternoon sun threw his shadow upon the stone. Immediately the lean man was up and his whole body whipped erect and away on the other side of his work, swift and furtive as a weasel. He stood and stared at John Thunstone, the hammer lowered, the lean-pointed wedge lifted a trifle.

"Who you?" the gaunt man wheezed breathily. He had a sharp face, a nose that projected like a pointed beak, with forehead and chin sloping back from it above and below. His eyes were dark, beady, and close-set. His face was yellow and leathery, and even the whites of the eyes looked clouded, as with biliousness.

"My name is John Thunstone," Thunstone made reply, as casually as possible. "I'm looking for Mr. Parrell."

"That's me. Pos Parrell."

Pos... It was plain to see where the name suited the man. That lean, pointed snout, the meager chin and brow, the sharp eyes, looked like those of an opossum. A suspicious, angry, dangerous opossum.

"What can I do for you?" demanded Pos Parrell. He sounded as if he would like to do something violent.

"I want to ask about Miss Lill Warran," said Thunstone, still quietly, soothingly, as he might speak to a restive dog or horse. "I see you're making a gravestone for her." He pointed with his stick.

"And why not?" snapped Pos Parrell. His thin lips drew back from lean, strong teeth, like stained fangs. "Ain't she to be allowed to rest peace-

fully in her grave some time?"

"I hope she will," said Thunstone. "I heard at the county seat about how she'd been dragged out of her grave at the churchyard."

Pos Parrell snorted. His hands tightened on hammer and wedge. "Now, mister, what almighty pick is it of yours? Listen, are you the law? If you are, you just trot your law back to the county seat. I'm not studying to hear any law. They won't let her stay buried at Beaver Dam, I've buried her here, and here she'll stay."

"No," Thunstone assured him. "I'm not the law."

"Then what are you? One of them reporters from the newspapers? Whatever you are, get off my place."

"Not until we've talked a bit, Mr. Parrell."

"I'll put you off. I got a right to put you off my place."

Thunstone smiled his most charming. "You do have the right. But could you put me off?"

Pos Parrell raked him with the beady eyes. "You about twice as big as me, but —"

He dropped the hammer. It struck the sand with a grim thud. He whipped the lean wedge over to his right hand, holding it daggerwise.

"Don't try that," warned Thunstone, and his walking stick lifted in his own hand.

Pos Parrell took a stamping stride forward. His left hand clutched at the tip of Thunstone's stick, the wedge lifted in his right.

But Thunstone drew back on the stick's handle. There was a metallic whisper. The lower part of the stick, clamped in Parrell's grasp, stripped away like the sheath of a sword, revealing a long, straight skewer of gleaming blade that set in the handle as in a heft. As Parrell drove forward with his wedge, Thunstone delicately flicked the point of his sword cane across the back of Parrell's fist. Parrell squeaked with pain, and the wedge fell beside the hammer. Next instant Parrell was backing away hurriedly. Thunstone moved lightly, calmly after him, the sword point quivering inches from Parrell's throat.

"Hey!" protested Parrell. "Hey!"

"I'm sorry, but you'll have to listen to me."

"Put that thing down. I quit!"

Thunstone lowered the point, and smiled.

"Let's both quit. Let's talk."

Parrell subsided. He still held the hollow lower length of the stick. Thunstone took it from him and sheathed his blade.

"You know what?" said Parrell, rather wearily. "That's about the curiousest place I ever seen a man carry a stab weapon."

"It's a sword cane," explained Thunstone, friendly again. "It was made hundreds of years ago. The man who gave it to me said it was made by

Saint Dunstan."

"Who was that?"

"He was an Englishman."

"Foreigner, huh?"

"Saint Dunstan was a silversmith," Thunstone told Parrell. "This blade in my stick is made out of silver. Among other things, Saint Dunstan is said to have twisted the devil's nose."

"Lemme see that thing again," Parrell said, and again Thunstone cleared the blade. "Huh!" grunted Parrell. "It got words on it. I can't make 'em out."

Thunstone's big finger tapped the engraved lettering. "*Sic pereant omnes inimici tui, Domine,*" he read aloud. "That means, 'So perish all thine enemies, O God.'"

"Bible words or charm words?"

"Perhaps both," said Thunstone. "Now, Parrell, I want to be your friend. The people in town are pretty rough in their talk about you."

"And about Lill," said Parrell, so faintly that Thunstone could hardly hear. "But I loved her. Lots of men had loved her, but I reckon I was the only one loving her when she died."

"Tell me," urged Thunstone.

Parrell tramped back toward the Cabin, and Thunstone followed. Parrell sat on the door sill and scuffed the dirt with his coarse shoes. He studied the back of his right hand, where Thunstone's skillful flick of the silver blade had raised a thin wale and shed a drop of blood.

"You know, you could have hurt me worse if you'd had a mind," he said.

"I didn't have a mind," Thunstone told him.

Again the shoes scuffed the sand. "I prized up my door stoop stone to make that marker for Lill's grave."

"It's a good one."

Parrell gestured to the edge of the clearing. There, in the shade of the pines, showed a mound of sand, dark with fresh digging, the size and shape of a body.

"I buried her there," he said, "and there she'll stay. At the last end, I reckon, she knowed I loved her and nothing could change it."

A rose of Sharon, a lily of the valley. Lill Warren had been no sweet lily, the court house loafers had insisted. Thunstone squatted on his heels.

"You know," he said, "you'll feel better if you talk about it to somebody who will listen."

"Reckon I will."

And Pos Parrell talked.

Later Thunstone wrote down Parrell's story from memory, as a most interesting record of belief in the supernatural, and also belief in a most

beautiful and wilful woman.

Lill Warran was called a witch because her mother had been one, and her grandmother had been one. Folks said she could curse pigs thin, and curse hens out of laying, and make trees fall on men cutting them. They wouldn't hear of things like that happening by chance. The preacher at Beaver Dam had sworn she said the Lord's Prayer wrong — "Our Father, who *wert* in heaven." Which meant Satan, who'd fallen from the Pearly Gates, the way it says in the book of Isaiah. No, the preacher hadn't read Lill Warran out of church, but she stopped coming, and laughed at the people who mumbled. The old folks hated her, the children were afraid, and the women suspicious. But the men!

"She could get any man," said Parrell. "She got practically all of them. A hunter would leave his gun, a drinker would leave his bottle of stump-hole whiskey, a farmer would leave his plough standing in the field. There was a many wives crying tears because their husbands were out at night, following after Lill Warran. And Nobe Filder hanged himself, everybody knows, because he was to meet Lill and she didn't come, but went that night to a square dance with Newton Henley. And Newton grew to hate her, but he took sick and when he was dying he called on her name."

Pos Parrell had just loved her. She never promised to meet him, she tossed him smiles and chance words, like so many table scraps to a dog. Maybe it was as well. Those who were lovers of Lill Warran worshipped her, then feared and hated her.

That, at least, was witch history as Thunstone had read it and researched it. The old books of the old scholars were full of evidence about such seductive enchantresses, all the way back to the goddesses of dark love — Ishtar, Ashtoreth, Astarte, various names for the same force, terrible in love as the God of War is terrible in battle. To Thunstone's mind came a fragment of the Epic of Gilgamesh, lettered on a Chaldean tablet of clay five millennia ago. Gilgamesh had taunted Ishtar's overtures:

*Thou fellest in love with the herdsman
Who ever scattered grain for thee,
And daily slaughtered a kid for thee;
Thou smotest him,
Turned him into a wolf...*

"It didn't prove nothing," Parrell was protesting. "Only that she was easy to fall in love with and hard to keep."

"What did she live on?" asked Thunstone. "Did her family have anything?"

"Shucks, no. She was orphaned. She lived by herself — they've burned

the cabin now. People said she knew spells, so she could witch meat out of smokehouse into her pot, witch meal out of pantries onto her table."

"I've heard of people suspecting that of witches," nodded Thunstone, careful to keep his manner sympathetic. "It's an easy story to make yourself believe."

"I never believed it, not even when —"

Parrell told the climax of the sorry, eerie tale. It had happened a week ago. It had to do with a silver bullet.

For silver bullets are sure death to demons, and this was known to a young man by the name of Taylor Howatt, the latest to flutter around the fascinating flame that was Lill Warran. His friends warned him about her, and he wouldn't listen. Not Taylor! Not until there was prowling around his cabin by something that whined and yelped like a beast — varmint — a wolf, the old folks would say, except that wolves hadn't been seen in those parts since the old frontier days. And Taylor Howatt had glimpsed the thing once or twice by moonlight. It was shaggy, it had pointy ears and a pointy muzzle, but it stood up on its two legs, part of the time at least.

"The werewolf story," commented Thunstone, but Parrell continued.

Taylor Howatt knew what to do. He had an old, old deer rifle, the kind made by country gunsmiths as long back as the War with the North. He had the bullet mould, too, and he'd melted down half a silver dollar and cast him a bullet. He'd loaded the deer rifle ready, and listened for several nights to the howls. When the thing came peeking close to an open window, he caught its shape square against the rising moon and fired.

Next day, Lill Warran was found dead on the foot path leading to her own home, and her heart was shot through.

Of course, there'd been a sheriff deputy down. Taylor Howatt was able to claim it was accidental. The people had gathered at Lill's cabin, and there they'd found stuff, they said. One claimed a side of bacon he said had hung in his smokehouse. And another found a book.

"Book?" said John Thunstone quickly. For books are generally interesting properties in stories like the story of Lill Warran.

"I've been told about it by three folks who swore they seen it," replied Parrell. "Me myself, I didn't see it so I hold I ain't called on to judge of it."

"What did those three people tell you about it?"

"Well — it was hairy like. The cover all hairy and dark, like the skin of a black bear. And inside it had three parts."

"The first part," said Thunstone, "was written with red ink on white paper. The second part, with black ink on red paper. And the third, black paper, written on with —"

"You been talking to them other folks!" accused Parrell, half starting up.

"No. Though I heard the book mentioned at the court house. It's just

that I've heard of such books before. The third part of the book, black paper, is written on with white ink that will shine in the dark, so that it can be read without light."

"Then them folks mocking me heard what you heard about the like of the book. They made it up to vex my soul."

"Maybe," agreed Thunstone, though he doubted that the people of the Sandhills brush would have so much knowledge of classical and rare grimoires. "Go on."

The way Parrell had heard the book explained, the first part — red ink on white paper — was made up of rather simple charms, to cure rheumatism or sore eyes, with one or two more interesting spells that concerned the winning of love or the causing of a wearisome lover to depart. The second, the black ink on red, had the charm to bring food from the stores of neighbors, as well as something that purported to make the practitioner invisible, and something else that aided in the construction of a mirror in which one could see far away scenes and actions.

"And the black part of the book?" asked Thunstone, more calmly than he felt.

"Nobody got that far."

"Good," said Thunstone thankfully. He himself would have thought twice, and more than twice, before reading the shiny letters in the black third section of such a book.

"The preacher took it. Said he locked it in his desk. Next day it was gone. Folks think it went back to Satan himself."

Folks might not be far wrong, thought Thunstone, but did not say as much aloud.

Parrell's voice was wretched as he finished his narrative. Lill Warran had had no kinsmen, none who would claim her body at least. So he, Parrell, had claimed it — bought a coffin and paid for a plot in Beaver Dam churchyard. He and an undertaker's helper had been alone at the burying of Lill Warran.

"Since nobody wanted to be Christian, nothing was said from the Bible at the burying," Parrell told Thunstone. "I did say a little verse of a song I remembered, I always remembered, when I thought of her. This is what it was."

He half-crooned the rhyme:

*"The raven crow is a coal, coal black,
The jay is a purple blue,
If ever I forget my own fair love,
Let my heart melt away like dew."*

Thunstone wondered how old the song was. "Then?" he prompted.

"You know the rest. The morning after, they tore her up out of the grave and flung her in my yard. I found her lying near to my doorstep, the one I just now cut for her gravestone." Parrell nodded toward where it lay. "I took her and buried her again. And this morning it was the same. There she lay. So let them all go curse. I buried her yonder, and yonder she'll stay, or if anybody says different I'll argue with something more than a law book. Did I do wrong, mister?"

"Not you," said Thunstone. "You did what your heart told you."

"Thanks. Thank you kindly. Like you said, I do feel better for talking it over." Parrell rose. "I'm going to set up that stone."

Thunstone helped him. The weight of the slab taxed their strength. Parrell drove it into the sand at the head of the grave. Then he looked to where the sun was sinking behind the pines.

"You won't be getting back away from here before it's dark and hard to pick the way. I'll be honored if you stopped here tonight. Not much of a bed or supper doings, but if you'll so be kind —"

"Thank you," said Thunstone, who had been wondering how to manage an overnight stay.

They entered the front room of the little cabin. Inside it was finished in boards, rough sawn but evenly fitted into place. There was an old table, old chairs, a very old cook stove, pans hanging to nails on the walls. Parrell beckoned Thunstone to where a picture was tacked to a wall.

"It's her," he said.

The photograph was cheap, and some slipshod studio artist had touched it up with color. But Thunstone could see what sort of woman Lill Warran had been. The picture was half length, and she wore a snug dress with large flower figuring. She smiled into the camera, with the wide full mouth of which he had heard. Her eyes were slanting, mocking, and lustrous. Her head was proud on fine shoulders. Round and deep was the bosom into which a silver bullet had been sent by the old deer rifle of Taylor Howatt.

"You see why I loved her," said Parrell.

"I see," Thunstone assured him.

Parrell cooked for them. There was corn bread and syrup, and a plate of rib meat, hearty fare. Despite his sorrow, Parrell ate well of his own cooking. When the meal was finished, Parrell bowed and mumbled an old country blessing. They went out into the yard. Parrell walked slowly to the grave of Lill Warran and gazed down at it. Thunstone moved in among the trees, saw something that grew, and stooped to gouge it out.

"What you gathering?" called Parrell.

"Just an odd little growth," Thunstone called back, and pulled another. They were the roots called throughout the South by the name of John the

Conqueror, great specifics against enchantment. Thunstone filled his pockets with them, and walked back to join Parrell.

"I'm glad you came along, Mr. Thunstone," said Parrell. His opossum face was touched with a shy smile. "I've lived alone for years, but never so lonely as the last week."

Together they entered the house. Parrell found and lighted an oil lamp, and immediately Thunstone felt the impact of eyes from across the room. Swiftly facing that way, he gazed into the face of the portrait of Lill Warran. The pictured smile seemed to taunt and defy him, and to invite him as well. What had the man leered at the court house? *You'd slap a mortgage on your immortal soul to get a kiss.* That picture was enough to convince Thunstone that better men than pitiful, spindling Pos Parrell could find Lill Warran herself irresistible.

"I'll make you up a pallet bed here," offered Parrell.

"You needn't bother for me," Thunstone said, but Parrell opened a battered old wooden chest and brought out a quilt, another. As he spread them out, Thunstone recognized the ancient and famous patterns of the quilt work. Kentucky Blazing Star, that was one of them. Another was True Love Fancy.

"My old mamma made them," Parrell informed him.

Parrell folded the quilts into a pallet along the wall. "Sure you'll be all right? You won't prefer to take my bed."

"I've slept a lot harder than what you're fixing for me," Thunstone quickly assured him.

They sat at a table and talked. Parrell's thoughts were still for his lost love. He spoke of her, earnestly, revealingly. Once or twice Thunstone suspected him of trying for poetic speech.

"I would look at her," said Parrell, "and it was like hearing, not seeing."

"Hearing what?"

"Hearing — well, more than anything else it was like the sound of a fiddle, played prettier than you ever heard. Prettier than I can ever play."

Thunstone had seen the battered fiddle-case on a hand-hewn shelf beside the door of the rear room which was apparently Parrell's sleeping quarters, but he had not mentioned it. "Suppose you play us something now," he suggested.

Parrell swallowed. "Play music? With her lying out there in her grave?"

"She wouldn't object, if she knew. Playing the fiddle gives you pleasure, doesn't it?"

Parrell seemed to need no more bidding. He rose, opened the case, and brought out the fiddle. It was old and dark, and he tuned it with fingers diffidently skilful. Thunstone looked at him. "Where did you get it? The fiddle, I mean."

"Oh, my granddaddy inherited it to me. I was the onliest grandboy he

had cared to learn."

"Where did he get it?"

"I don't rightly know how to tell you that. I always heard a foreigner fellow — I mean a sure-enough foreigner from Europe or some place, not just somebody from some other part of the country — gave it to my granddaddy, or either traded it to him."

Thunstone knew something about violins, and judged that this one was worth a sum that would surprise Parrell, if no more than mentioned. Thunstone did not mention any sum. He only said, "Play something, why not?"

Parrell grinned, showing his lean teeth. He tucked the instrument against his jowl and played. He was erratic but vigorous; with training, he might have been brilliant. The music soared, wailed, thundered, and died down. "That was interesting," said Thunstone. "What was it?"

"Just something I sort of figured out for myself," said Parrell apologetically. "I do that once in a while, but not lots. Folk would rather hear the old songs — things they know, like Arkansaw Traveller and Fire In the Mountains. I generally play my own stuff to myself, alone here in the evenings." Parrell laid down the instrument. "My fiddle's kept me company, sometimes at night when I wished Lill was with me."

"Did you ever know," said Thunstone, "why we have so many fiddles in the American country localities?"

"Never heard that I recollect."

"In the beginnings of America," Thunstone told him, "frontier homes were lonely and there were wild beasts around. Wolves, mostly."

"Not now," put in Parrell. "Remember that crazy yarn Taylor Howatt told about shooting at a wolf, and there hasn't been a wolf around here since I don't know when."

"Maybe not now, but there were wolves in the old days. And the strains of fiddle music hurt the ears of the wolves and kept them away."

"There may be a lot in what you say," nodded Parrell, and put his instrument back into its box. "Listen, I'm tired. I've not slept fit for a dog these past six nights. But now, with you here, talking sense like you have —" Parrell paused, stretched and yawned. "If it's all right with you, I'll go sleep a while."

"Good night, Parrell," said Thunstone, and watched his host go into the rear room and close the door.

Then Thunstone went outside. It was quiet and starry, and the moon rose, half of its disk gleaming pale. He took from his pockets the roots of John the Conqueror, placing one on the sill above the door, another above the front window, and so on around the shanty. Returning, he entered the front room again, turned up the lamp a trifle, and spread out a piece of paper. He produced a pen and began to write:

My Dear de Grandin:

I know your own investigations kept you from coming here with me, but I wonder if this thing isn't more interesting, if not more important, than what you chose to stay and do in New Jersey.

The rumors about Lill Warran, as outlined to you in the letter I wrote this morning, are mostly confirmed. Here, however are the new items I've uncovered:

Strong evidence of the worst type of grimoire. I refer to one with white, red and black sections. Since it's mentioned in this case, I incline to believe there was one — those country folk could hardly make up such a grimoire out of their heads. Lill Warran, it seems, had a copy, which later vanished from a locked drawer. Naturally! Or, super-naturally!

Presence of a werewolf. One Taylor Howatt was sure enough to make himself a silver bullet, and to use it effectively. He fired at a hairy, point-eared monster, and it was Lill Warran they picked up dead. This item naturally suggests the next.

Nobody knows the person or persons who turned Lill Warran twice out of her grave. Most people of the region are rather smugly pleased at the report that Lill Warran wasn't allowed rest in consecrated churchyard soil, and Pos Parrell, grief-stricken, has buried her in his yard, where he intends that she will have peace. But, de Grandin, you will already have guessed the truth they have failed even to imagine: if Lill Warran was indeed a werewolf — and the black section of the grimoire undoubtedly told her how to be one at will — if, I say, Lill Warran was a werewolf...

Thunstone sat up in the chair, the pen in his fingers. Somebody, or something moved stealthily in the darkness outside.

There was a tapping whisper at the screen Pos Parrell had nailed over the window. Thunstone grimly forbore to glance. He made himself yawn, a broad hand covering his mouth — the reflex gesture, he meditated as he yawned, born of generations past who feared lest the soul might be snatched through the open mouth by a demon. Slowly he capped his pen, and laid it upon the unfinished letter to de Grandin. He rose, stretched, and tossed aside his leather jacket. He stopped and pretended to untie his shoes, but did not take them off. Finally, cupping his palm around the top of the lamp chimney, he blew out the light. He moved to where Parrell had spread the pallet of quilts and lay down upon them. He began to breathe deeply and regularly. One hand, relaxed in its seeming, rested within an inch of the sword cane.

The climax of the adventure was upon him, he knew very well; but in

the moments to follow he must possess himself with calm, must appear to be asleep in a manner to deceive the most skeptical observer.

Thus determined, he resolutely relaxed, from the toe-joints up. He let his big jaw go slack, his big hands curl open. He continued to breathe deeply and regularly, like a sleeper. Hardest of all was the task of conquering the swift race of heart and pulse, but John Thunstone had learned how to do that, too, because of necessity many times before. So completely did he contrive to pretend slumber that his mind went dreamy and vague around the edges. He seemed to float a little free of the pallet, to feel awareness at not too great a distance of the gates of dreamland.

But his ears were tuned to search out sounds. And outside in the dark the unknown creature continued its stealthy round.

It paused — just in front of the door, as John Thunstone judged. It knew that the root of John the Conqueror lay there, an obstacle; but not an obstacle that completely baffled. Such an herb, to turn back what Thunstone felt sure was besieging the dark cabin, would need to be wolfbane or garlic: or, for what grew naturally in these parts of the world, French lilac. John the Conqueror — Big John or Little John, as woodland gatherers defined the two varieties — was only “used to win,” and might not assure victory. All it could do, certainly, was slow up the advance of the besieger.

Under his breath, very soft and very low, John Thunstone began to mutter a saying taught him by a white magician in a far-away city, half a prayer and half a spell against evil enemies:

“Two wicked eyes have overshadowed us, but two holy eyes are fixed upon us; the eyes of Saint Dunstan, who smote and shamed the devil. Beware, wicked one; beware twice, wicked one; beware thrice...”

In the next room, Thunstone could hear sounds. They were sounds as of dull, careful pecking. They came from the direction in which, as he had seen, was set the closed casement window of Pos Parrell's sleeping chamber.

With the utter silence he knew how to keep, Thunstone rolled from his pallet, lying for a moment face down on the floor. He drew up one knee and both hands, and rose to his full height. In one hand he brought along the sword cane.

The pecking sound persisted as he slid one foot along the rough planks of the floor, praying that no creak would sound. He managed a step, another, a third. He was at the door leading to the next room.

His free hand groped for a knob. There was none, only a latch string. Thunstone pulled, and the door sagged silently open.

He looked into a room, the dimness of which was washed by light from the moon outside. In the window, silhouetted against the four panes, showed the outline of head and shoulders. A tinkling whisper, and one of the panes fell inward, to shatter musically on the boards below. Something

had picked away the putty. A dark arm crept in, weaving like a snake, to fumble at the catch. A moment later the window was open, and something thrust itself in, made the passage and landed on the floor.

The moonlight gave him a better look at the shape as it rose from all fours and faced toward the cot where Pos Parrell lay, silent and slack as though he were drugged.

John Thunstone knew that face from the picture in the room where he had slept. It had the slanted, lustrous eyes, the cloud of hair — not clubbed, but hanging in a great thunder cloud on either side of the face. And the wide, full mouth did not smile, but quivered as by some overwhelming pulse.

"Pos," whispered the mouth of Lill Warran.

She wore a white robelike garment, such as is put on dead women in that country. Its wide, winglike sleeves swaddled her arms, but it fell free of the smooth, pale shoulders, the fine upper slope of the bosom. Now as in life, Lill Warran was a forbiddingly beautiful creature. She seemed to sway, to float toward Parrell.

"You love me," she breathed at him.

The sleeper stirred for the first time. He turned toward her, a hand moved sleepily, almost as though it beckoned her. Lill Warran winnowed to the very bedside.

"Stop where you are!" called John Thunstone, and strode into the room, and toward the bed.

She paused, a hand on the blanket that covered Parrell. Her face turned toward Thunstone, the moonlight playing upon it. Her mocking smile possessed her lips.

"You were wise enough to guess most of me," she said. "Are you going to be fool enough to try to stop what is bound to happen?"

"You won't touch him," said Thunstone.

She chuckled. "Don't be afraid to shout. You cannot waken Pos Parrell tonight — not while I stand here. He loves me. He always loved me. The others loved and then hated. But he loves — though he thinks I am dead —"

She sounded archaic, she sounded measured and stilted, as though she quoted ill-rehearsed lines from some old play. That was in order, Thunstone knew.

"He loves you, that's certain," agreed Thunstone. "That means you recognize his helplessness. You think that his love makes him your easy prey. You didn't reckon with me."

"Who are you?"

"My name is John Thunstone."

Lill Warran glared, her lips writhed back. She seemed as though she would spit.

"I've heard that name. John Thunstone! Shall I not dispose of you, right now and at once, you fool?"

She took a step away from the bed. Her hands lifted, the winglike sleeves dipped back from them. She crooked her fingers, talon fashion, and Thunstone saw the length and sharpness of her nails.

Lill Warran laughed.

"Fools have their own reward. Destruction!"

Thunstone stood with feet apart. The cane lay across his body, its handle in his right fist, the fingers of his left hand clasping around the lower shank that made a sheath.

"You have a stick," said Lill Warran. "Do you think you can beat me away, like a dog?"

"I do."

"You cannot even move, John Thunstone!" Her hands weaved in the air, like the hands of a hypnotist. "You're a toy for me! I remember hearing a poem once: 'A fool there was — ' " She paused, laughing.

"Remember the title of that poem?" he said, almost sweetly, and she screamed, like the largest and loudest of bats, and leaped.

In that instant, Thunstone cleared the long silver rapier from its hiding, and, as swiftly as she, extended his arm like a fencer in riposte.

Upon the needle-pointed blade, Lill Warran skewered herself. He felt the point slip easily, smoothly, into the flesh of her bosom. It grated on a bone somewhere, then slid past and through. Lill Warran's body slammed to the very hilt, and for a moment she was no more than arm's length from him. Her eyes grew round, her mouth opened wide, but only a whisper of breath came from it.

Then she fell backward, slack as an empty garment, and as Thunstone cleared his blade she thudded on the floor and lay with her arms flung out to right and left, as though crucified.

From his hip pocket Thunstone fished a handkerchief and wiped away the blood that ran from point to base of the silver weapon forged centuries before by Saint Dunstan, patron of those who face and fight creatures of evil.

To his lips came the prayer engraved upon the blade, and he repeated it aloud: "*Sic pereant omnes inimici tui, Domine...* So perish all thine enemies, O God."

"Huh?" sleepily said Pos Parrell, and sat up on his cot. He strained his eyes in the dimness. "What you say, mister? What's happened?"

Thunstone moved toward the bureau, sheathing his silver blade. He struck a match, lifted the chimney from the lamp on the bureau, and lighted it. The room filled with the warm glow from the wick.

Parrell sprang out of bed. "Hey, look. The window's open — it's broke in one pane. Who done that?"

"Somebody from outside," said Thunstone, standing still to watch.

Parrell turned and stared at what was on the floor. "It's Lill!" he bawled in a quivering voice. "Sink their rotten souls to hell, they come dug her up again and throwed her in here!"

"I don't think so," said Thunstone, and lifted the lamp. "Take a good look."

Moving, he shed light down upon the quiet form of Lill Warran. Parrell knelt beside her, his trembling hands touching the dark stain on her bosom.

"Blood!" he gulped. "That's fresh blood. Her wound was bleeding, right now. She wasn't dead down there in the grave!"

"No," agreed Thunstone quietly. "She wasn't dead down there in the grave. But she's dead now."

Parrell examined her carefully, miserably. "Yes, sir. She's dead now. She won't rise up no more."

"No more," agreed Thunstone again. "And she got out of her grave by her own strength. Nobody dug her up, dead or alive."

Parrell stared from where he knelt. Wonder and puzzlement touched his grief-lined, sharp-snouted face.

"Come out and see," invited Thunstone, and lifted the lamp from where it stood on the bureau. He walked through the front room and out of the door. Parrell tramped at his heels.

The night was quiet, with so little breeze that the flame of the lamp barely flickered. Straight to the graveside Thunstone led Parrell, stopped there and held the lamp high over the freshly opened hole.

"Look, Parrell," Thunstone bade him. "That grave was opened from inside, not outside."

Parrell stooped and stared. One hand crept up and wiped the low, slanting brow.

"You're right, I guess," said Parrell slowly. "It looks like what a fox does when he breaks through at the end of his digging — the dirt's flung outward from below, only bigger'n a fox's hole." Parrell straightened up. His face was like sick tallow in the light of the lamp. "Then it's true, though it looks right pure down impossible. She was in there, alive, and she got out tonight."

"She got out the other two nights," said Thunstone. "I don't think I can explain to you exactly why, but night time was the time of her strength. And each time she came here to you — walked or crept all the way. Each time, again, she could move no more when it was dawn."

"Lill came to me!"

"You loved her, didn't you? That's why she came to you."

Parrell turned toward the house. "And she must have loved me," he whispered, "to come to me out of the grave. Tonight, she didn't have so far to go. If she'd stayed alive —"

Thunstone started back to the house. "Don't think about that, Parrell. She's certainly dead now, and what she would have done if she'd stayed alive isn't for us to think about."

Parrell made no reply until they had once more entered the front door and walked through to where Lill Warran lay as they had left her. In the light of the lamp Thunstone carried her face was clearly defined.

It was a calm face, a face at peace and a little sorrowful. Yes, a sweet face. Lill Warran may not have looked like that in life, or in life-in-death, but now she was completely dead, she was of a gentle, sleeping beauty. Thunstone could see how Parrell, or any other man, might love a face like that.

"And she came to me, she loved me," breathed Parrell again.

"Yes, she loved you," nodded Thunstone. "In her own way she did love you. Let's take her back to her grave."

Between them they carried her out and to the hole. At its bottom was the simple coffin of pine planks, its lid thrown outward and upward from its burst fastenings. Thunstone and Parrell put the body into the coffin, straightened its slack limbs, and lowered the lid. Parrell brought a spade and a shovel, and they filled and smoothed the grave.

"I'm going to say my little verse again," said Parrell. Standing with head bowed, he mumbled the lines:

*"The raven crow is a coal, coal black,
The jay is a purple blue,
If ever I forget my own fair love,
Let my heart melt away like dew."*

He looked up at Thunstone, tears streaming down his face. "Now she'll rest in peace."

"That's right. She'll rest in peace. She won't rise again."

"Listen, you mind going back to the house? I'll just watch here till morning. You don't think that'll hurt, do you?"

Thunstone smiled.

"No, it won't hurt. It will be perfectly all right. Because nothing whatever will disturb you."

"Or her," added Parrell.

"Or her," nodded Thunstone. "She won't be disturbed. Just keep remembering her as somebody who loved you, and whose rest will never be interrupted again."

Back in the house, Thunstone brought the lamp to the table where he had interrupted his letter to de Grandin. He took his pen and began writing again:

I was interrupted by events that brought this adventure to a good end. And maybe I'll wait until I see you before I tell you that part of it.

But, to finish my earlier remarks:

If Lill Warran was a werewolf and killed in her werewolf shape, it follows as a commonplace that she became a vampire after death. You can read as much in Montague Summers, as well as the work of your countryman, Cyprien Robert.

And as a vampire, she would and did return, in a vampire's travesty of affection, to the one living person whose heart still turned to her.

Because I half suspected all this from the moment I got wind of the story of Lill Warran, I brought with me the silver blade forged for just such battles by Saint Dunstan, and it was my weapon of victory.

He finished and folded the letter. Outside, the moon brightened the quiet night, in which it seemed no evil thing could possibly stir.



Rouse Him Not

THE SIDE ROAD IN from the paved highway was heavily graveled but not tightly packed except for two ruts. John Thunstone's black sedan crept between trees that wove their branches together overhead. Gloom lay in the woods to right and left. Once or twice he thought he heard a rustle of movement there. Maybe half a mile on, he came to the house.

It was narrow and two-storied, of vertical planks stained a soft brown. A tan pickup truck was parked at a front corner. Thunstone got out of the sedan. He was big and powerfully built, with gray streaks in his well-combed dark hair and trim mustache. He wore a blue summer suit. In one broad hand he carried a stick of spotted wood with a bent handle and a silver band, but he did not lean on it. Walking the flagged path to the front steps, he studied the house. Two rooms and a kitchen below, he guessed, another room and probably a bath above.

A slender girl in green slacks and a paint-daubed white blouse came to the open door. "Yes, sir?" she half-challenged.

He lifted a hand as though to tip the hat he did not wear. "Good afternoon. My name is John Thunstone. A researcher into old folk beliefs. I came because, yonder at the county seat, they told me an interesting story about this place."

"Interesting story?" She came out on the stoop. Thunstone thought she was eighteen or nineteen, small but healthy, with a cascade of chestnut hair. Her long face was pretty. In one hand she held a kitchen knife, in the other a half-peeled potato. "Interesting story?" she said again.

"About a circle in your yard," said Thunstone. "With no grass on its circumference. It's mentioned briefly in an old folklore treatise, and I heard about it at your courthouse today."

"Oh, that," she said. "Here comes Bill — my husband. Maybe he can tell you."

A young man carrying a big pair of iron pincers came around the cor-

ner of the house. He was middle-sized and sinewy, in dungarees and checked shirt, with a denim apron. He had heavy hair and close-clipped beard and a blotch of soot on his nose. No older than, say, twenty-two. This couple, reflected Thunstone, had married early "Yes, sir?" said the young man.

"This is Mr. Thunstone, Bill," said the girl. "Oh, I didn't say who we were. This is my husband Bill Bracy, and my name's Prue."

"How do you do?" said Thunstone, but Bill Bracy was staring.

"I've seen your picture in the papers," he said. "Read about your researches into the supernatural."

"I do such things," nodded Thunstone. "At your county seat, I looked up the old Colonial records of the trial of Crett Marrowby, for sorcery."

"Yes, sir," said Bill Bracy "We've heard of that, too."

"Mr. Packer, the clerk of the court, mentioned this house of yours," went on Thunstone. "He called it the Trumbull house. And said that there's a circular patch in the yard, and some old people connect it with the Marrowby case."

He looked around him, as though in quest of the circular patch.

"That's around in the backyard," said Prue Bracy. "We've only lived here a few months. When we bought from the Trumbulls, they said we'd do well to leave the thing alone."

"Might I see it?" asked Thunstone.

"I'll show it to you," said Bill Bracy. "Prue, could you maybe fix us some drinks? Come this way, sir."

He and Thunstone rounded the corner of the house and went into the backyard. That was an open stretch of coarse grass, with woods beyond.

"There it is," and Bracy pointed with his tongs.

Almost at the center of the grassy stretch lay a moist roundness, greener than the grass. Thunstone walked toward it. The circle seemed nine or ten feet across. It was bordered with a hard, base ring of pale brown earth. Thunstone paced all around, moving lightly for so large a man. The inner expanse looked somewhat like a great pot of wet spinach. It seemed to stir slightly as he studied it. It seethed. He reached out with the tip of his spotted stick.

"Don't," warned Bracy, but Thunstone had driven the stick into the mass.

For a moment, something seemed to fasten upon the stick, to drag powerfully upon it. Thunstone strongly dragged it clear and lifted it. Where it had touched the dampness showed a momentary churning whirl. He heard, or imagined, a droning hum.

"I did that when we first came here," Bill Bracy said, a tremble in his voice. "I put a hoe in there, and the hoe popped out of my hand and was swallowed up before I looked."

"It didn't get my cane." He looked at Bracy. "Why did it take your

hoe?"

"I've wondered myself. I haven't fooled with it again." Bracy's bearded face was grave. "I should explain, Prue and I came here from New York because the house was so cheap. She paints — she's going to do a mural at the new post office in town — and I make metal things, copper and pewter, and sell them here and there. Mr. and Mrs. Trumbull wanted to get rid of the house, so we got it for almost nothing. They told us what I told you, leave that sinkhole thing alone. 'Do that,' Mr. Trumbull said, 'and it will leave you alone.'"

"But you lost a hoe in it," Thunstone reminded.

"Yes, sir," Bracy nodded heavily. "And when it came to evening that day, we heard noises. Sort of a growling noise, over and over. I wanted to go out and check, but Prue wouldn't let me. She was frightened, she prayed. And that's the last time we've meddled in it, and how about a drink now?"

"In a moment."

Thunstone studied the outer ring intently. It was of bald, hard earth, like baked pottery. Again he measured the distance across with his eye. Rings of that dimension had been common in old witchcraft cases, he reflected; they were about the size to hold a coven of thirteen sorcerers standing together, perhaps dancing together. Circles were always mysterious things, whether they were old or new. He turned back to Bracy.

"I'll be glad for that drink you mentioned," he said.

They returned to the house and entered a small, pleasant front room. There were chairs and a table and a sofa draped in a handsome Indian blanket. A small fireplace was set in a corner. Prue Bracy was making highballs at the table. They sat down and drank.

"I explained to Mr. Thunstone how we were advised to leave that thing alone," said Bracy.

"I'm not sure it should be left alone," said Thunstone, sipping. "Let me tell you some things I found out earlier today, when I was at the courthouse."

He referred to a sheaf of notes to read some of his conversation with the clerk Packer. He quoted what brief record the ancient county ledgers had of the execution, long ago, of Crett Marrowby. At that time in Colonial history, George II's act of 1735 obtained to repeal the death penalty for witchcraft; but for a mass of odd charges Marrowby had been put in jail for a year, with a public appearance in the pillory every three months. His execution had been simply for the murder of a minister of the local church, the Reverend Mr. Herbert Walford.

"And it was ordered that he be buried outside the churchyard," Thunstone finished.

"Confession or not, they thought he was evil," suggested Bill Bracy. "Is that all you have on the case?"

"So far, it is," replied Thunstone. "Yet I hope for more. Mr. Packer spoke of an old resident named Ritson —"

"That one!" broke in Bill Bracy, not very politely. "He's one of those crusty old characters that got weaned on a pickle. We met him when we first came here, tried to make friends, and he just turned the acid on us."

"I'll try to neutralize his acid," said Thunstone, and rose. "I'll go now, but I have a cheeky favor to ask. I want to come back here tonight and stay."

Prue blinked at him, very prettily. "Why," she said, "we don't have a spare room, but there's this sofa if you don't have a place to stay."

"I'm checked into the Sullivan Motel in town, but right here is where I want to be tonight," said Thunstone. "The sofa will do splendidly for me." He went to the door. "Thank you both. Will you let me fetch us something for supper? I'll shop around in town."

He went to the soft-lighted grillroom of the Sullivan Motel, for there, Packer had told him, old Mr. Ritson habitually sat and scowled into a drink. Sure enough, there at the bar sat a gray man, old and hunched, harshly gaunt where Thunstone was blocky. It must be Ritson. He was dressed in shabby black, like an undertaker's assistant. His lead-pale hair bushed around his ears. His nose and chin were as sharp as daggers. Thunstone sat down on the stool next to him. From the bartender he ordered a double bourbon and water. Then he turned to the old man.

"I think you're Mr. Ritson," he said.

The other turned bitter, beady eyes upon him, clamped the thin mouth between sharp nose and sharp chin. "So you know who I am," came the grumpiest of voices. "I know who you are, too — this Thurston fellow who's come to poke into what ain't none of his business, huh? And you want to ask me something."

"Yes," said Thunstone evenly. "I thought I'd ask you what you'd like to drink."

"Eh?" The beady eyes quartered him, then gazed into an empty glass. "I'll have what you're having."

The bartender brought the drinks. Ritson gulped at his. Thunstone lifted his own glass but did not sip.

"I've been told that you know past history here, Mr. Ritson," he tried again. "About the case of a man named Marrowby, long ago hanged for murder and buried here."

Skimpy gray brows drew down above the unfriendly eyes. "Why in hell should I tell you a word of what I know?"

"If you don't," said Thunstone, "I'll have to go to Mr. Packer, the clerk."

"Packer?" Ritson squealed. "What does he know. Hell, mister, he wasn't even born here. He doesn't know old-time town history, he just sort of

mumbles about it.”

“But if you won’t talk to me, I must look for information wherever I can get it.”

“What information could Packer give you? Look here, my folks was here ever since the town was built, away back before the Revolution. Sure I know about the Marrowby thing. When I was a boy, my great-grandmother told me what she’d heard from her grandfather, who was young here at the time — better than two hundred and forty years back, I calculate.” Ritson swigged down the rest of his drink.

“Bring this gentleman another,” Thunstone told the bartender, putting down some money. “Now, Mr. Ritson, what did you hear from your great grandmother?”

“It happened long lifetimes ago. They’d had Marrowby up for his magic doings — he could witch people’s dinners off their tables to his house, he’d made a girl leave her true love to come to him. All the law gave him for that was just a year in the jailhouse.”

“But he was hanged at last,” said Thunstone.

“That he was, higher than Haman,” nodded Ritson above his second drink. “The way it was told to me, he killed a preacher — can’t recollect the preacher’s name — who’d read him out of the church.”

“The preacher’s name was Walford,” supplied Thunstone.

“Whatever the name was, he died of a stab in the heart. And at Marrowby’s house, they found a wax dummy of the preacher, with a needle stuck in it.”

“Where was Marrowby’s house?” asked Thunstone.

“Why, out yonder where the Trumbull house is, where them young folks took over. Maybe the charge wouldn’t have stood, but Marrowby pleaded guilty in court. And they built a scaffold in the courthouse yard and strung him up.” Ritson drank. “I heard the whole tale. He stood up there and confessed to black magic, confessed to murder. He said he had to repent, or else he’d go to hell. He warned the folks who watched.”

“What was his confession?” Thunstone asked.

“Seemed like he warned all who were there not to follow black magic. Said he must confess and repent. And he said a thing I don’t know the meaning of.”

“Here,” said Thunstone, “I haven’t touched this drink.” He shoved the glass to Ritson’s hand. “What did he say?”

“It didn’t make sense. He warned them not to be familiar.”

“Familiar?” echoed Thunstone, interested.

“Said, ‘Let familiar alone.’ The like of that — strange words. Said, ‘Rouse him not.’ And swung off.”

“And that’s all?”

“Yes. They buried him outside the churchyard, and drove an ash stake

into his heart to make sure he wouldn't rise up. That's the whole tale. But don't you go writing it."

"I won't write it," Thunstone promised him.

"Mind that you don't. Now, I've told you what I heard, and I hope it's enough."

"I hope the same," said Thunstone "Will you excuse me? Good afternoon."

"What's good about it?" snorted Ritson, halfway through his third drink.

Thunstone went to his motel and changed into rougher clothes, chino slacks and a tan shirt and a light brown jacket. He thrust a flashlight into the jacket pocket. Around his neck hung a tarnished copper crucifix. He found a lunch stand and bought a plastic bucket of barbecued ribs, a container of slaw, and bottles of beer. Then he drove to the Bracy house.

The Bracys welcomed him in and enthused hungrily over the barbecue. "It just so happens that I'm baking cornbread," said Prue. "That will go well with it."

As the sun sank toward the trees, they ate with good appetite. Prue asked about Thunstone's crucifix, and he told her he had inherited it from his mother. When they had finished eating, Prue carried the dishes to the kitchen and came back with blankets over her arm.

"Will these be all right for tonight?" she asked.

"They'll be splendid, many a night I've lain on harder beds than your sofa. But before I do that, there's business to be done outside, as soon as it gets dark."

"I'll come along," volunteered Bill, but Thunstone shook his massive head.

"No, two of us out there will be a complication," he said quietly "This business will require careful handling, and some luck and playing by ear."

"Whatever you say," granted Bill, and Prue looked relieved.

"I won't promise to win ahead of things," went on Thunstone, "but I'll be specially equipped. Look here."

He grasped the shank of his cane in his left hand and turned the crook with his right. The cane parted at the silver ring, and he drew out a lean, pale-shining blade.

"That's a beautiful thing," breathed Prue. "It must be old."

"As I understand, it was forged by St. Dunstan, something like a thousand years ago. See what these words say at the edge?"

Both Bracys leaned to study. Bill moved his bearded lips soundlessly.

"It looks like Latin," he said. "I can't make it out."

"*Sic pereant inimici tui, Domine,*" Thunstone read out the inscription. "So perish all thine enemies, O Lord," he translated. "It's a silver blade, and St. Dunstan was a silversmith, and faced and defeated Satan himself."

Bill was impressed. "That must be the only thing of its kind in the world," he ventured.

"No, there's another," Thunstone smiled under his mustache. "It belongs to a friend of mine, Judge Keith Hilary Pursuivant. Once I defeated a vampire with this blade, and twice I've faced werewolves with it. As well as other things."

"I don't feel right, letting you go out while I stay here," said Bill, almost pleadingly.

"Do me a favor and stay here with Prue," Thunstone bade him. "Stay inside, even if you hear trouble out there."

He got to his feet, the bared blade in his hand.

"It's dark now," he said. "Time for strange things to stir."

"Stir?" Bill echoed him, his hand to his bearded chin "Will that old sorcerer stir, the one they called Marrowby?"

"Not as I see it," said Thunstone. "Not if they drove an ashen stake through him to keep him quiet in his grave. No, something else I judge. I expect to see you later, when things are quieter."

He went to the front door and through it, and closed it behind him.

Night had crawled swiftly down around the house. Thunstone's left hand rummaged out his flashlight and turned it on, while his right hand carried the silver blade low at his side. The light showed him the grass of the yard, the corner of the house. He went around to the open space at the back. He heard something, a noise like a half-strangled growl. It led him toward the circle, while the bright beam of the flash quested before him. He came to where the ring of hard brownness bordered the soft, damp greenness. Again the noise stole, upward, the strangled snarl of it. Thunstone stooped and directed the beam of the light, then thrust the mess with the keen point of his blade. Powerfully he stirred it around.

"All right," he said, hoping his words would be understood. "All right. Come out and let's settle things."

The snarl rose to a reedy shrillness, and he felt a clutch on his silver weapon. He drew it out, and thought the edge sliced something. Louder rose the voice, a true scream now, and something showed itself there in the swampiness.

A lump like a head rose into view, with two larger lumps like shoulders just below it. Thunstone made a long, smooth stride backward, keeping his light trained on what was there. Two slablike paws caught the bald rim of the circle, and a great, shaggy shape humped itself up and out and stood erect before him.

It was taller even than Thunstone, broader even than he was. And it looked nothing natural. In the dancing light of the torch, it seemed to be thatched over with dark, wet fronds and tussocks. Its head was draped with

such stuff, through which gleamed two closely set eyes, pale as white-hot iron.

A mouth opened in the tangle and out came a rumbling shout, like the roar of a great beast.

It slouched heavily toward him, on two feet like shovels.

Thunstone slid warily to one side, keeping the beam of the light upon the creature, at the same time poising his blade.

"So here you've stayed," he said to it. "Marrowby repented, forswore you. He's dead, but you're alive. You're evil."

It roared again. Its great, long forelimbs rose like derricks. Thunstone saw talons, pale and deadly.

"Well, come on," said Thunstone, his voice quiet and steady. "Come on and see what you can do, and what I can do."

It approached in a squattering charge. Thunstone sidestepped at the last instant and sped a slashing cut at the bulk as it floundered past. This time it screamed, so shrilly that his ears rang. It swung around toward him, and he turned the ray of his flash back upon it.

"Hurt you, did I?" said Thunstone. "That's the beginning. Come again. Maybe I won't dodge this time."

It rushed at him with ungainly speed. He stood his ground. As it hurtled almost upon him, he lunged, a smooth fencer's lunge.

His point went home where its chest should be. The blade went smoothly, sleekly in, with a whisper of sound. It penetrated to the very hilt, and liquid gushed upon Thunstone's hand. He smelled an odor as of ancient decay.

A louder, more piercing scream than before. The weedy bulk almost forced him back. Then, abruptly, it fell away and down, and as it went he cleared his point with a strong, dragging pull. He stood over his adversary, shining his light to see it thrash and flounder on the ground.

"Did that do your business?" he asked it. "Perhaps not quite. Here, I'll do this."

He probed with the point where the neck would be, and lifted the blade and drove it down with all his strength, as he would swing an axe.

The head-lump went bounding away on the coarse grass, a full dozen feet. The body slumped flaccidly and lay still.

"*Sic pereant inimici tui, Domine,*" intoned Thunstone, like a priest saying a prayer for the dead. He stood tense and watched. No motion. He walked to where the head lay. It, too, was as silent as a weed-tufted rock.

A moment, and then he turned back and went to the house, finding his way with the flash beam. His feet felt tired and heavy as he mounted the steps. Pocketing his flashlight again, he opened the door.

Bill and Prue Bracy stood inside, arms around each other, eyes strained wide in terror.

"It's all over," Thunstone comforted them, and went to the sofa and sat down heavily. He fished out a handkerchief and wiped his silver blade. The liquid on it was thick and slimy, like blood, but it was green and not red.

"When old Mr. Ritson said that Marrowby had warned about something familiar, I felt pretty sure," he said.

"F-familiar?" stammered Prue.

"A sorcerer makes his pact with the powers of evil," said Thunstone, "and from the powers of evil he receives a familiar. Marrowby repented and died repenting, but his familiar stayed here, stayed hidden, without guidance, but wishing to do evil. I've put an end to that."

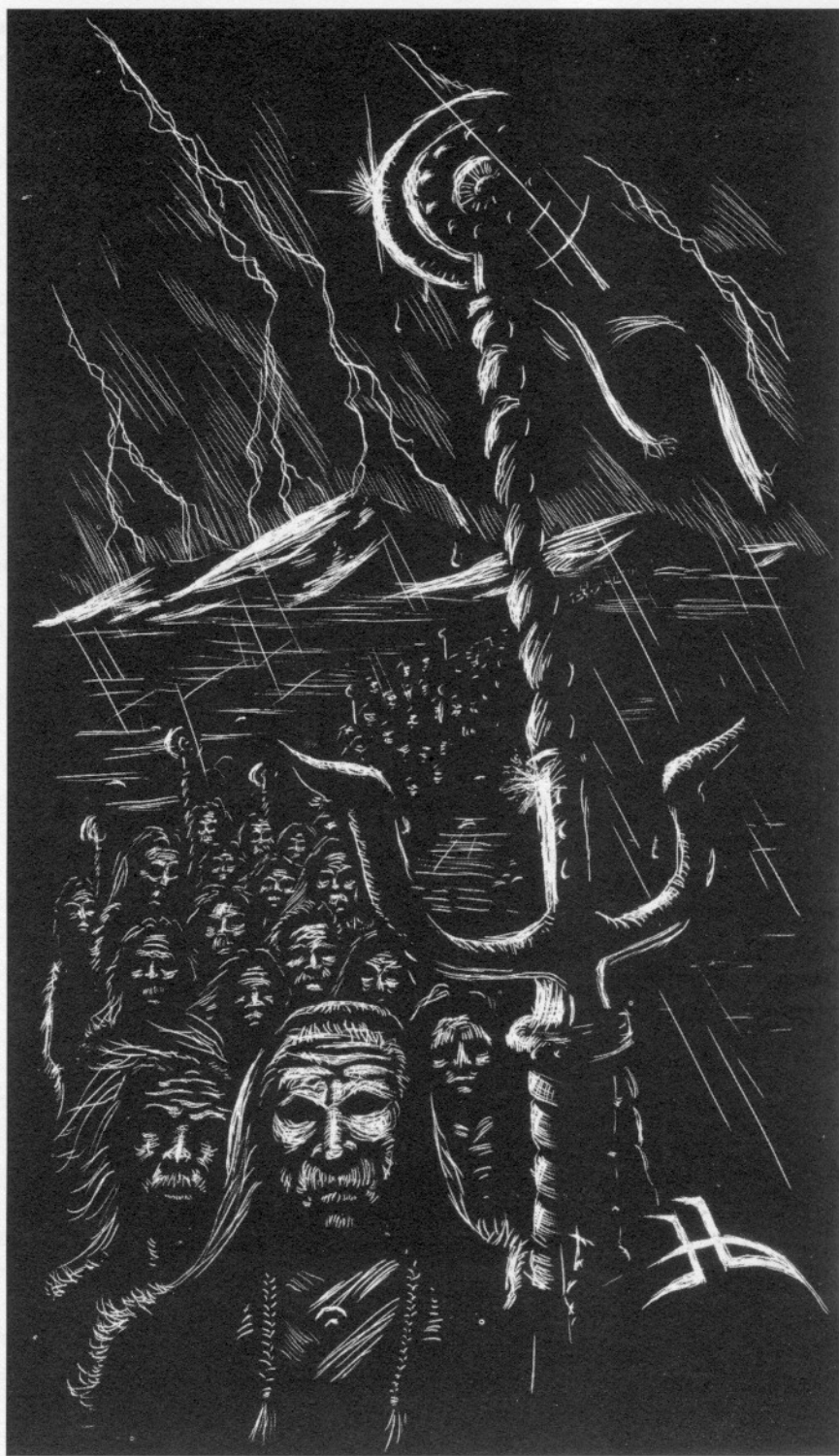
"What was it?" wondered Bill Bracy.

"It's hard to describe. When it's light tomorrow morning, maybe you and I will take spades and bury it. It's not pretty, I promise you that. But its evil is finished. I know words to say over its grave to ensure that."

He smiled up at the blank-faced Prue.

"My dear, could we have a fire there on the hearth? I want to burn this filthy handkerchief."

Still smiling, he slid the cleaned blade into the cane again.



The Dakwa

NIGHT HAD FALLEN TWO hours ago in these mountains, but Lee Cobbett remembered the trail up from Markum's Fork over Dogged Mountain and beyond. Too, he had the full moon and a blazing skyful of stars to help him. Finally he reached the place where Long Soak Hollow had been, where now lay a broad stretch of water among the heights, water struck to quivering radiance by the moonlight.

Shaggy trees made the last of the trail dark and uneasy under boot soles. He half groped his way to the grassy brink and looked across to something he recognized. On an island that once had been the top of a broad rise in the hollow stood a square cabin in a tuft of trees. Light from the open door beat upon a raftlike dock and a boat tied up there.

Dropping his pack and bedroll, Cobbett cupped his big hands into a trumpet at his mouth.

"Hello!" he shouted. "Hello, the house, hello, Mr. Luns Lamar, I'm here! Come over and get me!"

The shadow slid into the doorway. A man tramped down to where that dock was visible. He held a lantern high.

"Who's that a-bellowing?" came back a call across the water.

"Lee Cobbett — come get me!"

"No, sir," echoed to his ears. "Can't do it tonight."

"But — "

"Not tonight!" The words were sharp, they meant that thing. "No way. You wait there for me till sunup."

The figure plodded back to the doorway and sat down on the threshold with the lantern beside it.

Cobbett cursed to himself, there on the night shore. He was a blocky man in denim jacket and slacks, with a square, seamed face and a mane of dark hair. Scowling, he estimated the distance across. Fifty yards? Not much more than that. If Luns Lamar wouldn't come, Lee Cobbett would

go.

He put the pack and roll together next to a laurel bush and sat on them to drag off his boots and socks. He stripped away slacks, jacket, blue shirt, underwear, and stood up naked. Walking to the edge of the lake, he tested it with his toe. Chill, like most mountain water. He set his whole foot in, found bottom, and waded forward to his knees. Two more steps, and he was waist deep. He shivered as he moved out along the clay bottom until he could wade no longer. He struck out for the light of the cabin door.

The coldness of the water bit him, and he swam more strongly to fight against it. Music seemed to be playing somewhere, a song he had never heard, like a muted woodwind. A hum in his head — no, it came from somewhere away from the cabin and the island, somewhere on the moonbright water. It grew stronger, more audible.

On he swam with powerful strokes. His body glided swiftly, but a current sprang up around him, more of a current than he had thought possible. And the melody heightened in his ears, still nothing he could remember, but tuneful, haunting.

Then a sudden shuddering impact, a blow like a club against his side and shoulder.

He almost whirled under. He kicked at whatever it was, shouting aloud as he did so. Next moment he was at the poles that supported the dock, grabbing at them with both hands. Luns Lamar stooped above him and caught his thick wrists.

"You damned fool," grumbled Lamar, heaving away.

Cobbett scrambled up on the split slabs, kneeling. "Whatever in hell made you swim over here?" Lamar scolded him.

"What else was there for me to do?" Cobbett found breath to say. "You said you wouldn't come and fetch me, even when you'd written that letter wanting me to bring you those books. I don't know why I should have moped over there until tomorrow, not when I can swim."

"I wouldn't go out on this lake tonight, even in the boat." Lamar helped Cobbett to his feet. "Hey, you're scraped. Bleeding." It was true. Cobbett's sinewy shoulder looked red and raw.

"There's a log or snag right out from the dock," he said, heading for the cabin's open door.

"No," said Lamar. "That wasn't any log or snag."

They went inside together. The front half of the cabin was a single room, raftered overhead. Cobbett knew its rawhide-seated chairs, the plank table, the oil stove, tall shelves of books, a fireplace with a strew of winking coals and a glowing kerosene lamp on the mantel board. Against the wall, an ancient army cot with brown blankets. In a rear corner, a tool chest, and upon that a scuffed banjo case. Lamar brought him a big, frayed towel. Cobbett winced as he rubbed himself down. "That's a real rough raking

you got," said Lamar peering.

He, too, was known to Cobbett, old and small but sure of movement, with spectacles closely set on his shrewd face. He wore a dark blue pull-over, khaki pants, and scuffed house slippers.

"We'd better do something about that," he said and went to a shelf by the stove. He took down a big, square bottle and worried out the cork, then came back. "Just hold still."

He filled his palm with dark, oily liquid from the bottle and spread it over the torn skin of Cobbett's ribs and shoulder.

"What's in that stuff?" Cobbett asked.

"There's some sap of three different trees in it," replied Lamar. "And boiled tea of three different flowers, and some crushed seeds, and the juice of what some folks call a weed, but the Indians used to prize it." He brought an old blue bathrobe with GOLDEN GLOVES in faded yellow letters across the back. "Put this on till we can go over tomorrow and get your clothes," he said.

"Thanks." Cobbett drew the robe around him, and sat down in a chair. "Now," he said, "if that wasn't a log or snag, what was it?"

Lamar wiped his spectacles. "You won't believe it."

"Not without hearing it," said Lamar.

"I asked you to fetch me some books," Lamar reminded.

"Mooney's study for the Bureau of Anthology, *Myths of the Cherokee*," said Cobbett. "And Skinner's *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*. And *The Kingdom of Madison*. All right, they're over yonder in my pack. If you hadn't flooded Long Soak Hollow, I could have brought them right into this cabin without even wetting my feet. If you'd come with the boat, they'd be here now. Why don't you get to telling me what this is all about?"

Lamar studied him. "Lee, did you ever hear about the Dakwa?"

"Dakwa," Cobbett said after him. "Sounds like Dracula."

"It's not Dracula, but it happens to be terrible in its own way. It's what rubbed up against you while you were out there swimming," Lamar scowled. "Look here, let's have a drink. I reckon maybe we both need one."

He sought the shelf again and opened a fruit jar of clear, white liquid and poured generous portion into two glasses. "This is good blockade whiskey," he said, handing a glass to Cobbett. The liquid tingled sharply on Cobbett's tongue and warmed him all the way down.

Lamar sipped in turn. "It's hard to explain, even though we've known each other nearly all our lives."

"You've known me nearly all my life," said Cobbett, "but I haven't known you nearly all yours. I've heard that you studied law, then you taught in a country school, then you edited a little weekly paper. After that, I don't know why, you quit everything and built this cabin. You don't ever come out of it except to listen to mountain songs and mountain tales, and some-

times you write about them for folklore journals." Cobbett studied his friend. "Why not start by telling me what you've done, drowning Long Soak Hollow like this?"

"It wasn't my doing," growled Lamar. "Some resort company did it, to make a lake amongst the summer cottages they're building for visitors. You remember how this place of mine was set — high above the little creek down in the hollow, safe from any flood. I wouldn't sell out, but that company bought up all the land round about and put in a dam, and here it is, filled in. I'm like Robinson Crusoe on my island, but I'm not studying to go ashore till tomorrow."

Cobbett drank again. "Because of what?"

"Because of one of those same old tales that makes a noise like the truth." Lamar showed his gold-wired teeth. "The Dakwa," he said again. "It's in those books I asked you to fetch along with you."

"And I said they're across that water that scares you," said Cobbett. "What," he asked patiently, "is the Dakwa?"

"It's what tried to grab you just now," Lamar flung out. "It used to be penned up in the little creek they called Long Soak, penned up there for centuries. And now by God, it's out again in this lake they've dammed up, a-looking for what it may devour." His face clamped desperately. "Devour it whole," he said.

"You say it's out again," said Cobbett. "What do you mean by again? How long has this been going on?"

"Centuries, I told you," said Lamar. "The tale was here with the Cherokee Indians when the first settlers came, before the Revolutionary War. And the Dakwa's hungry. Two men and a boy — Del Hungant and Steve Biggins and a teenager from somewhere in the lowlands named McIlhenny — they just sort of went out of sight along this new lake. Folks came up from town and dragged for them, and nothing whatever dragged up."

"Not even the Dakwa," suggested Cobbett.

"Especially not the Dakwa. It's too smart to be hooked."

"And you believe in it," said Cobbett.

"Sure enough I believe in it. I've seen it again and again, just an ugly hunch of it in the water out there. I've heard it humming."

"So that's what I heard," said Cobbett.

"Yes, that's what. And once, the last time I've ever been out in the boat at night, it shoved against the boat and damn near turned it over with me. You'd better believe in it yourself, the way it rasped your skin like that."

Cobbett went over to the bookshelf and studied the titles. He took down Thompson's *Mysteries and Secrets of Magic* and leafed through the index pages.

"You won't read about it in there," Lamar told him sourly. "That's only about old-world witches and devils, with amulets and charms against them,

and all the names of God to defeat them. The Dakwa doesn't believe in God. It's an Indian thing — Cherokee. Something else has to go to work against it. That's why I wanted those books, hoping to find something in them. They're the only published notices of Dakwa."

Cobbett slid Thompson's volume back into place and went to the door and opened it.

"You fixing to do something foolish?" grumbled Lamar.

"No, nothing foolish if I can help it," Cobbett assured him. "I thought I'd go and look at the stars before bedtime."

He stepped across the threshold log into grass. Dew splashed his bare feet. He paced to the dock and gazed up at the moon, a great pallid blotch of radiance. Gazing, he heard something again.

Music, that was all it could be. Perhaps it had words, but words so soft that they were like a faint memory.

Out upon the dock he stepped. Ripples broke against its supporting poles. Something made a dark rush in the water, close up almost to the boat. Whatever it was glinted shinily beneath the surface. Cobbett stared down at it, trying to make out its shape. It vanished. He turned and paced back to the cabin door, that faint sense of the music still around him.

"All right, what did you find out there?" Lamar demanded.

"Nothing to speak of," said Cobbett. "Now then, I had a long uphill trudge getting here. How about showing me where I'll sleep?"

"Over yonder, as usual." Lamar nodded toward the cot.

"And we'll get up early tomorrow morning and go get my gear and those books of yours."

"Not until the sun's up," insisted Lamar.

"Okay," grinned Cobbett. "Not until the sun's up."

When Cobbett woke, Lamar was at the oil stove, cooking breakfast. Cobbett got into the robe, washed his face and hands and teeth and unclasped the banjo case. He took out Lamar's old banjo, tuned it briefly and softly began to pick a tune, the tune he had heard the night before.

"You cut that right out!" Lamar yelled at him. "You want to call that thing out of the water, right up to the door?"

Cobbett put the banjo away and came to the table. Breakfast was hearty and good — flapjacks drenched in molasses, eggs and home-cured bacon, and black coffee so strong you'd expect a hatchet to float in it. Cobbett had two helpings of everything. Afterward, he washed the dishes while Lamar wiped.

"And now the sun's up," Cobbett said, peering at it through the window. "It's above those trees on the mountain. What do you say we get me back into my clothes?"

Wearing the GOLDEN GLOVES bathrobe, he walked out to the dock

with Lamar. He had his first good look at the boat. It was well made of calked planks, canoe style, pointed fore and aft, with two seats and two paddles. It was painted a deep brown.

"I built that thing," said Lamar. "Built it when they started in to fill up the hollow. Can you paddle? Bow or stern?"

"Let me take stern."

Getting in, they pushed off. Lamar, dipping his paddle, gazed at something far out toward the middle of the lake. Cobbett gazed too. Whatever it was hung there on the water, something dark and domed. It might have been a sort of head. As Cobbett looked, the thing slipped under water. The light of the rising sun twinkled on a bit of foam.

Lamar's mouth opened as if to speak, but closed again on silence. A score of determined strokes took them across to a shallow place. Cobbett hopped ashore, picked up his clothes and pack and blanket roll, and came back to stow everything in the waist of the boat. Around they swung and headed back toward the island. Out there across the gentle stir of the water's surface, the dark domed object was visible again.

"Whatever it is, it's watching us," ventured Cobbett. "It doesn't seem to want to come close."

"That's because there's a couple of us," grunted Lamar, paddling. "I don't expect it would tackle two people at a time, by daylight."

That seemed to put a stop to the conversation. They nosed in against the dock. Tying up, Lamar helped Cobbett carry his things into the cabin. Cobbett rummaged in the pack.

"All right, here are those books of yours," he said. "Now, I'll get dressed."

While he did so, Lamar leafed through Mooney's book about Cherokee myths.

"Sure enough, here we are," he said. "Dakwa — it's a water spirit and it used to drag Cherokee hunters down and eat them. It's said have been in several streams."

"Including Long Soak," supplied Cobbett.

"Mooney doesn't mention Long Soak but, yes, here too." Lamar turned pages. "It's still here, and well you know that's a fact." He took up two smaller volumes. "Now, look in this number two book of Skinner's *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*. Hmmm," he crooned.

"More Dakwa?" asked Cobbett, picking up the other book he had brought.

"Skinner titles it, 'The Siren of the French Broad.' This time it's as grotesque as in Mooney. It's supposed to be a beautiful naked woman rising up to sing to you. So, if you're a red-blooded American, you stoop close to see and hear better and it quits being beautiful, it suddenly has a skull and two bony arms to drag you down." He snapped the book shut. "I judge the white settlers prettied the tale up to sound like the Lorelei. But

not much in any of these books to tell how to fight it. What are you reading there in *The Kingdom of Madison*?"

"I'm looking at page thirteen, which I hope isn't unlucky," replied Cobbett. "Here's what it says about a deep place on the French Broad River: 'There, the Cherokees said, lurked the *dakwa*, the gigantic fishmonster that caught men at the riverside and dragged them down, swallowed them whole.' And it has that other account, too: 'The story would seem to inspire another fable, this time of a lovely water-nymph, who smiled to lure the unwary wanderer, reached up her arms to him, and dragged him down to be seen no more.'"

"Not much help, either. That's about what Mooney and Skinner say and it's no fable, no legend." Lamar studied his guest. "How do you feel today, after that gouging it gave you in the water last night?"

"I feel fine." Cobbett buttoned up his shirt. "Completely healed. It didn't hurt me too much for you to cure me."

"Maybe if it had been able to get you into its mouth, swallow you up —"

"Didn't you say that was an old Indian preparation you sloshed on me?"

"It's something I got from a Cherokee medicine man," said Lamar. "A valued old friend of mine. He has a degree in philosophy from the University of North Carolina, but he worships his people's old gods, is afraid of their evil spirits, carries out their old formulas and rituals, and I admire him for it."

"So do I," said Cobbett. "But you mentioned certain plants in that mixture."

"Well, for the most part there were smashed up seeds of viper's bugloss and some juice of campion, what the country folks call rattlesnake plant."

"Both of those growths had snake names to them," reflected Cobbett. "I think you might have mentioned to me why you wanted these books," he said.

"Why mention it?" groaned Lamar, adjusting his spectacles. "You wouldn't have believed me then. Anyway, I don't see how this extra information will help. It doesn't do more than prove things, more or less. Well, I've got errands to do." He walked out to the dock. Cobbett followed him.

"I'm paddling across and going down the trail to meet old Snavel Dalbom," Lamar announced. "This is his day to drive down to the county seat to wag back a week's supplies. He lets me go with him to do my shopping."

He got into the boat and began to cast off.

"Let me paddle you over," offered Cobbett, but Lamar shook his head violently.

"I'll paddle myself over and tie up the boat yonder," he declared. "I'm not a-going to have you out on this lake, maybe getting yourself yanked

overboard and down there where they can't drag for you, like those three others who never came up."

"How do you know I won't go swimming?" Cobbett teased him.

"Because I don't reckon your mother raised any such fool. Listen, just sit around here and take it easy. Snavé and I will probably get a bite in town, so fix your own noon dinner and look for me back sometime before sundown. There's some pretty good canned stuff in the house — help yourself. And maybe you call read the whole tariff on the Dakwa, figure out something to help us. But I'm leaving you here so you'll stay here." He shoved out from the dock and paddled for the shore opposite.

Cobbett strolled back to the cabin, and around it. Clumps of cedar brush stood at the corner, and locusts hung above the old tin roof. The island itself was perhaps an acre in extent, with cleared ground behind the cabin. A well had been dug there. Lamar's well-kept garden showed two rows of bright green cornstalks, the tops of potatoes and tomatoes and onions. Cobbett inspected the corn. At noon he might pick a couple of ears and boil them to eat with butter and salt and pepper. On the far side of the garden was the shore of the island, dropping abruptly to the water. Kneeling, Cobbett peered. He could see that the bottom was far down there, a depth of many feet. Below the clear surface he saw a shadowy patch, a drowned tree that once had grown there, that had been overwhelmed by the lake.

That crooning music, or the sense of it, seemed to hang over the gentle ripples.

He returned to the cabin and sat down with Mooney's book. The index gave him several page references to the Dakwa and he looked them up, one by one. The Dakwa had been reported where the creek called Toco, and before that called the Dakwai, flowed into the Little Tennessee River. Again, it was supposed to lurk in a low-churned stretch of the French Broad River, six miles upstream from Hot Springs. There were legends. A hunter, said one, had been swallowed whole by a Dakwa and had fought his way out to safety, but his hair had been scalded from his head. Mooney's notes referred to Jonah in the Bible, to the swallowing of an Ojibwa hero named Mawabosho. That reminded Cobbett of Longfellow's poem, where the King of Fishes had swallowed Hiawatha.

But Hiawatha had escaped, and Jonah and Mawabosho had escaped. The devouring monster of the deep, whatever it might be, was not inescapable.

Again he studied the index. He could not find any references to the plants Lamar had mentioned, but there was a section called "Plant Lore." He read it carefully:

...the cedar is held sacred above all other trees... the small green twigs

are thrown upon the Fire in certain ceremonies... as it is believed that the anisgina?? or malevolent ghosts cannot endure the smell...

Below that, a printed name jumped to his eye:

...the white seeds of the viper's bugloss (Echium vulgare) were formerly used in many important ceremonies...

And, a paragraph or so beyond:

The campion (silene stellata)... the juice is held to be a sovereign remedy for snake bites...

He shut up the book with a snap and began to take off his clothes.

He searched a pair of bathing trunks out of his pack and put them on. Next, he explored Lamar's tool chest. Among the things at the bottom he found a great cross-hilted hunting knife and drew it from its riveted sheath. The blade was fully a foot long, whetted sharp on both edges. Then he went out to the woodpile and chose a stafflike length of hickory, about five feet in length. There was plenty of fishing line in the cabin, and he lashed the knife to the end of the pole like a spearhead. From the shelf he took the bottle of ointment that had healed him so well and rubbed palmsful on himself from head to foot. Remembering the Indian warrior who had been swallowed and came out bald, he lathered the mixture into his dark, shaggy hair. He smeared more on the blade and the pole. When he was done, the bottle was two-thirds empty.

Finally he walked out with his makeshift spear. He paused at the corner of the cabin, gazing at what grew there.

Those cedar bushes. *The anisgina or malevolent ghosts cannot endure the smell*, Mooney had written, and Mooney, the scholarly friend of the Cherokees, must have known. Cobbett found a match and gathered a sheaf of dry twigs to make a fire. Then he plucked branches of the dark green cedar leaves and heaped them on top of the blaze. Up rose a dull, vapory smoke. He stood in it, eyes and nose tingling from the fumes, until the fire burned down and the smoke thinned away. Spear in hand, he paced around the cabin and past the garden and to the place where the margin shelved steeply down into the lake.

He gazed at the sunken tree, then across the lake. No motion there. He looked again at the tree. He could see enough of it to remember if from times before Long Soak was dammed up. It was a squat oak, thick-stemmed with sprawling roots driven in among rocks, twenty feet below him.

Yet again he looked out over the water. Still no sign upon it. He began

to hum the tune he had heard before, the tune Lamar had forbidden him to pick on the banjo.

Humming, he heard the song outside himself, faint as a song in a dream. It made his skin creep. Something came floating upward from the deep shadowy bottom straight toward where he knelt. A woman, thought Cobbett at once, certainly a woman, certainly what the myth in Skinner's book said, not terrible at all. He saw her streaming banner of dark hair, saw her round, lithe arms, her oval, wide-eyed face, and her plump breasts, her skin as smooth and as richly brown as some tropical fruit. Her eyes sought him, her red lips moved as though they sang. Closer she came. Her head with its soaking hair broke clear of the water. Her hand reached to him, both her hands. Those beautiful arms spread wide for him.

He felt light-headed. He almost leaned within the reach of the arms when she drew back and away, still on the surface. His homemade spear had drooped between them. Her short, straight nose twitched as though she would sneeze.

A moment, and then back she came, to the very brink. And changed suddenly. Her eyes spread into shadowed caverns, her mouth opened to show stockades of long, stale teeth. Her arms, round and lithe no longer, drove a taloned clutch at him.

He thrust with the spear, and again she slid swiftly back and away. Off balance, Cobbett fell floundering into the water.

He plunged deep with the force of his fall. In the shimmering above him he saw a vast, winnowing shape, far larger than the woman had seemed. It was dark and somehow ribbed, something like a chute fluttering in a gale. He rose under it, trying to stab and failing again. He could not dart a thrust under that impeding water. He clamped the hickory shaft so that it lay tight along his forearm and made a pushing prod with it. The point struck something, seemed to pierce. The broad shape slid away with a flutter that churned the lake all around. Cobbett rose to the surface, gratefully gulping a mighty lungful of breath.

The Dakwa, whatever it was, whatever it truly looked like, had dived out of sight as he came up. Cobbett swam for the shore, one-handed, as another surging wave struck him. He dived deeply, as deeply as he could swim without letting go of his spear.

There it was, stretched overhead again. The dimness of the water, the hampering slowness put upon his movements, seemed like a struggling nightmare. He turned over as he swam. The dark blotch extended itself and came settling down upon him, like a seine dropped to secure a prey. Clamping his spear to his right arm from elbow to wrist he stabbed, not swiftly but powerfully. Again he felt something at the point. He slid clear and swam upward until his head broke the surface and he could breathe.

He thought no longer of winning to shore. He was here in the lake, he

had to fight the Dakwa, do something to it somehow. Underwater was best, where he could see his adversary beneath the surface. Huckleberry Finn had counted on a whole minute to swim without breath under a steamboat. He, Lee Cobbett, ought to do better than that.

But before he went under, ripples and waves. His charging enemy broke into sight, making a veering turn. He saw the slanting spread of it, suddenly rising high, like the murky sail of a scudding catboat. At waterline skimmed the jut of a woman's semblance, a sort of grotesque figurehead, hair in a whirl, teeth bare and big.

Cobbett dived, as straight down as he could manage. The cavernous head was almost at him as he dipped under. Groping talons touched his leg and he felt the stab of them, but he twitched clear. As he swam strivingly down, headfirst, he saw the shape of the water-whelmed oak there, standing where the lake had swallowed it. Its trunk looked bigger than arms could clasp, its roots clutched crookedly at rocks. He slid toward it and went behind as that sprawling shape descended toward him. It did not want him there below, poking and stabbing. Cobbett's left hand found and seized a stubby branch of the oak. He rose a trifle. As the Dakwa came gliding toward him and just beneath him, he drove down hard with the spear.

The force of the blow would have pushed him upward if he had not held the branch. That solid anchor helped him bring weight and power into his stab as it went home.

All around him the water suddenly rippled and pulsed, as though with an explosion. Darkness flooded out around him, like sepia expelled by a great cuttlefish, but he clung to the branch and forced the spear grindingly into what it had found, and through and beyond into some thing as hard and tough as wood. As oak wood. He had spiked the Dakwa to the root of the tree.

The spear lodged there as though clamped in a vise. He let go of it and swam upward. It seemed miles to the surface, to air. He knew he was very tired. He came up at the grassy shag that fringed the island's shore.

With both hands he caught the edge. It began to crumble, but he heaved himself out with almost the last of his strength. Sprawling on the grass, he squirmed dully around and looked down to see what he had done.

No seeing it. Just bubbles and ripples, in water gone poisonously dark, as with some dull infusion. Cobbett panted and moaned for air. At last he got to his hands and knees, and finally stood shakily upright.

His thigh was gashed and the skin on his arm and chest looked rasped, although he could not remember how that last contact had come. He almost fell in as he stooped and tried to see into the lake. If he could not see, he could sense. The Dakwa was down there and it was not coming up. Strength began to return to his muscles. He scowled to himself as he

summoned his nerve. Drawing a deep breath into himself, he dived in again. Down he swam, determinedly down.

There it was, writhed around the roots of the oak like a blown tarpaulin. It stirred and trembled. He could make out that forward part, the part shaped with head and arms and breasts to lure its prey. There was where his spear had struck. The knife that had been lashed on for a point was driven in, clear to the cross hilt, at the very region of the spine, if the Dakwa had a spine. It was solidly nailed down there, the Dakwa, like some gigantic, loathsome specimen on a collector's pin. It could not get away and come after him. He hoped not.

Slowly, laboriously, he swam up again, and dragged himself out as before. Getting to his feet, he half-staggered to the cabin and inside. Blood from his wounded leg dripped to the floor. He found the fruit jar full of blockade whiskey, screwed off the lid, put it to his mouth and drank and drank. After that, he took the bottle of ointment and spread it on the places where the Dakwa had gashed and scraped him.

He felt better by the moment. Picking up the robe Lamar had lent him, he put it on. More strongly he walked out and to the place where he had gone in to fight the Dakwa.

The water was calm now, and clearer. He could even make out what was prisoned down there at the root of the oak; you could see it if you knew what you were looking for. It was still there. It would stay there.

Midway through the afternoon, Lamar tied up at the dock again. He came with heavy steps to the cabin door, loaded down with a huge can of kerosene and a gunnysack crammed with provisions. Cobbett was inside, wearing the GOLDEN GLOVES robe, busy at the stove.

"Welcome back," he greeted Lamar over his shoulder. "I've been fixing a pot of beans for supper. I've put in a few smoked spare ribs you had, and some ketchup and sliced onions, and a sprinkle of garlic salt I happened to bring with me."

Lamar dropped his burden and stared. "What are you doing in my bathrobe again? Did you manage to get chopped up the way you did last night, you damned fool?"

"A little, but not as badly chopped up as something else."

"What are you blathering about? Listen, though. In town, I found out that these resort folks can be made to drain out their lake. If I bring the proper kind of lawsuit in court —"

"Don't do it," said Cobbett emphatically. "Without the water in there, something ugly will come in sight. Right at the foot of the steep drop behind the garden."

"The Dakwa?" quavered Lamar. "You trying to say you killed it?"

"Not exactly. I have a theory it can't be killed. But I went in all doped

over with your sacred Cherokee ointment and smoked up with cedar, and I was able to stand it off. Finally, I spiked it to the roots of the tree down there."

Lamar crinkled his face. He was beginning to believe, to be aware of implications.

"What about when it comes up again?" he asked.

I doubt if it can come up until the oak rots away," said Cobbett. "That will take years. Meanwhile, we can study the matter of how to cope with it. I'd like to talk to your friend, that Cherokee medicine man. He might figure out how to build on the Indian knowledge we already have."

"We might do something with dynamite," Lamar began to suggest. "The way some people blow fish up."

Cobbett shook his head. "The Dakwa might not be affected. And a charge let off would break up that tree, tear down some of the bank, even wreck your cabin."

"We can get scientists," said Lamar, gesturing eagerly. "I know some marine scientists, a couple of fellows who could go down there with diving gear."

"No," said Cobbett, turning from the stove. "You don't want them to have bad dreams all their lives, do you?"



The Beasts That Perish

A SCRAP OF MOON hung in the late haze of night as he stopped his shabby sedan in front of the crossroads store, got out and entered.

It looked old inside, with cans and cartons stacked on shelves and bunches of work clothes on hooks. Half a dozen overalled men sat on boxes, their ruinous hats pulled low, drinking from beer cans. A slender young woman with cinnamon hair stood at the counter. Nobody more than glanced at him, tall and blocky and seam-faced in his tan jacket and dark slacks.

"Good evening," he said. "I'm looking for the Domfrey place."

Then their eyes leveled like guns. "Did ye say the Domfrey place?" asked a scrawny old man.

"My name's Lee Cobbett. I've come a long way to find it."

"What for?" asked another, heavy-bellied and heavy-jowled.

"I own it," said Lee Cobbett.

"If Parcher Domfrey sold it to ye, he ain't no choice friend of yours," said the old man.

"He gave it to me," said Lee Cobbett.

"What for?" asked the heavy man again.

"He hopes I can fix some sort of trouble there."

"Mr. Cobbett," said the old man, "ain't no good goin' there of a night-time."

"Nor either daytime," added someone else. "None of us do."

"How do I get there?" asked Cobbett.

Nobody spoke. Nobody was going to speak. Cobbett grinned his face-lines deeper, nodded, and went back out to his car.

"Mr. Cobbett." The softest voice he could imagine. The young woman had followed him.

"Is that true?" she asked. "Cousin Parcher gave you the place?"

"He heard me lecture in Atlanta, and looked me up afterward. I study supernatural phenomena."

"Supernormal — " she tried to say after him.

"Strange happenings, strange beliefs. He thought I might do something about an old house he inherited. He won't go there himself."

She pointed to where a rutted road angled from the highway.

"About three miles along," she said. "But it's dark, grown up. And the woods are thick. I doubt if a car could make it, even by day."

"Could I leave my car here and walk, Miss — " he began.

"Miss Laurel Parcher. Leave it, but you'd better lock it. And here, wait."

Her hands were at her neck. She put something on a chain into his palm.

"That might help," she said, and went back into the store.

He dropped the chain into his side pocket. From the back of the car he lifted a musette bag, checked its contents and slung it onto his shoulder. He belted on an old army canteen. Then he locked the doors and walked through the dimness to the road Laurel Parcher had shown him.

It was a rough way, grown with rank grass and scrub. Almost at once it crept between ranks of trees that laced their thick branches overhead like twined fingers. He took a flashlight from his musette to light the steps. His long strides covered the rough ground. His wristwatch said eleven o'clock. He began to sing an old song he liked:

"In the pines, in the pines, where the sun never shines,
I shiver when the wind blows cold..."

Then he shivered, though no wind blew, and he stopped singing.

Something fluttered across the beam of his light, but he could not recognize it as bat or bird. He fancied he could hear heavy feet keeping pace with him, among the trees to the left. He began to recite a verse from Lord Byron:

"We'll go no more a-roving
So late into the night..."

It was so manifestly inappropriate that he laughed aloud. The foot-steps scuttled away.

At last he came to his destination. Here shone that fragment of moon. The trees crowded back on all sides, as though daunted by the house in the center of the clearing. It was a tall, lean house, with broad-eaved roof like the hats of the men in Laurel Parcher's store. Its front was of board planks, weathered as pale as bone in the dim light. A porch had been there, but it had fallen down in flinders. Oblong windows peered bleakly at left and right of the door. As Cobbett studied them, a glow as of rotten green

winked on and off inside.

He walked toward the house, close to a window. Its glass had been smashed. From inside drifted a faint, dull odor, like that of a cave where wild beasts denned. The door had no knob, only a dangling chain that must control a latch inside. He did not touch it. Turning on his heel, he walked back to the trees.

One was gigantic, gnarled. Its writhing roots clutched a boulder, on which he set his musette. Then he searched for wood and brought back a huge armful. He broke some dry pine twigs together, and struck a match. When the twigs caught fire, he fed on more wood to make a dancing blaze.

From the musette he rummaged a mess kit, unclasped the cover and snapped out a handle. He found a package of bacon and spread several slices into the mess kit. Then he propped it on rocks close to his fire. He produced a small bag of cornmeal and a shaker of salt and made a mixture on the lid, trickling water from the canteen to make into a stiff batter.

The bacon crackled as it fried, and he poured off some of the fat to let the slices get crisp. With a fork he broke them into fragments. He poured in his batter, stirred the bacon scraps through it, and tilted the mess kit to let the fire brown his dodger. More water went into the canteen cup, and he set that on the rocks to heat. He leaned his back to the boulder and gazed at the house.

Again the green light winked stealthily inside the broken window. Whatever it might be, it was not the reflection of the fire's healthy red. From his pocket he drew the chain Laurel Parcher had given him and held it to the light. The chain bore a cross, once gold-plated but now worn dim and dull. It occurred to him that Jonathan Harker had been given such a present when on his way to Castle Dracula. Creasing his grin, he hung the cross around his neck outside his shirt.

The water bubbled. He spooned in soluble coffee, stirred it up and drank. He broke off a piece of the corn dodger and munched. The fire burned lower, and he leaned forward to put on more wood. Up shot a bright flame, and Lee Cobbett sprang swiftly to his feet, to face whatever came walking toward him in the firelight.

"Mr. Cobbett," said Laurel Parcher's soft voice, and he had his first good look at her.

She was small and gracefully made, in her snug brown sweater and slacks and half-boots. Her cheekbones were high, her chin firm, and her eyes slanted and her mouth was full but not loose. She looked to be in her late twenties.

"You said you'd try to fix things here," she said, coming to the fire. "I closed up the store and came to help if I could."

She looked at the house, and flinched. "I've not been here at night," she said. "Just once or twice by day."

With a swift, sure movement she sat down by the fire and gathered her feet under her. "Do I smell coffee?"

Kneeling, he handed her the cup. "You know this place?" he said.

"I lived here until I was about six. My parents died. My mother was Mrs. Domfrey's cousin, so they took me in. Mrs. Domfrey was gone then, I never heard where. There was her husband, Race Domfrey, and a woman living with them they called Nolly, and Race Domfrey's son Ban and his daughter Sula. There'd been another adopted cousin, Parcher Domfrey, but he'd left them when he was about sixteen. I think you've met him."

"Here's a letter from him." Cobbett took it from an inside pocket and brightened the fire with pine chunks. She read, and he looked over her shoulder.

"...Frankly, I'm afraid to go there. Those people were some sort of devil-worshippers. They died a horrible death, and did horrible things before they died, and their evil hangs on there, like a fog. If you can dispel it, you will have served the decent world. Good luck..."

"He's right," said Laurel Parcher, giving back the letter. "They had songs and spells. At night, the chairs and tables danced. The windows rattled. Race Domfrey would thrust a knife out at the door and bring it back with hot blood on it. And their sacrifices."

She shuddered. The green light blinked at the broken window.

"They'd catch birds and frogs, trap rabbits, squirrels, sometimes a 'possum. Once a fox. And torture them till they cried, and cut them to pieces and drink the blood. Outside, something would laugh." The green light danced at the window. "Something was happy at what they did."

"You got away," said Cobbett. "How?"

"I'd found a baby turtle." Her thumb and middle finger circled to show the size. "He had yellow marks on his shell, and I thought his eyes were like jewels. They took him away from me and cut him up for a sacrifice." She closed her eyes. "I ran off at sunrise next day. I came to the store — Mr. Joe Todd ran it then. When Race Domfrey came looking for me, Mr. Joe said that if Race wanted to take it to court, the court would be interested in my story. But if Race wanted to start something right then, go ahead. And Mr. Joe took a shotgun and ran him right back into the woods."

"Did that settle it?" Cobbett asked.

"Not that, but it was settled. About a week later, some hunters knocked at the door, and it came open. All of them — Race Domfrey, his woman Nolly, and Ban and Sula — were jammed into a corner. All dead. All with their faces twisted up as if they'd been frightened to death."

"Your cousin mentions that in his letter."

"The coroner's jury called it death from causes unknown," she went

on. "Some curious people poked around here, and ran away again, half scared to death themselves. The place was left alone. Mr. and Mrs. Joe Todd took care of me. I grew up, went off to college a couple of years, and came back when Mr. Joe was too old and sick to look after the store."

"And here you are, back where you were a child," Cobbett said.

"You and I are the first people to come here in years."

"I was going to wait until morning," he said, rising to his feet. "But wouldn't that have been cowardly?"

Slowly, carefully, he walked toward the house, moving on the balls of his feet like a boxer.

"Lee!" she cried his name as he crossed the open space in the dim wash of moonlight. He did not look back. One hand stole to his chest and closed upon the cross she had given him. The green glow flicked inside the window. He moved among the fallen ruins of the porch.

He heard a dull, breathy stir. Out stole the rank den-odor. He took a long step to the door. Still gripping the cross in one hand, he took the latch chain in the other and pulled. Metal creaked and the door sagged inward, with blackness beyond.

Not empty blackness. Something loomed there, he knew, he could sense without really seeing. He was close enough to touch it. Now was the time to say the words, powerful and protecting. Of the three forms of exorcism he knew, none seemed right just then. But the cross in his tense fingers made him remember an ancient prayer for safety, out of an old book of white magic. He whispered it into the house:

"The cross in my right hand.
That I may travel open land,
That I be charmed and blessed,
Safe kept from any man or beast..."

A heavier stir within, as whatever blocked the door drifted back from it. Cobbett lifted a foot high to the threshold and hoisted himself into the darkness. He could hear nothing, see nothing. But the rank stench was so powerful that his eyes watered.

"Who's in here?" he demanded of the room, and his voice bounced back from unseen walls. He took another step and another, on boards that creaked protestingly. His outstretched hand touched something, the back of a chair. He closed his finger upon it. If he had to, he could use that chair to fight with.

Darkness hung thick upon him, like many layers of half-felt webs. A touch on his face, another on his hand, a creeping quest around his calves and knees. He could not lift the chair; it was strangely weighted down. His feet stirred as though in thick mud. Touches again, many touches, furtive

and exploring. Pressure grew and greatened around his arms and body, swaddling coils of pressure.

He knew he must not cry out. He struggled against the folds of a heavy carpet, almost falling as he managed several steps. Now he was moving away from the door, though he could not see the door, something gigantic and midnight black spread itself between. Desperately he thrust out a hand, found the jamb of another door, an inner one. He was being drawn toward that door, to the inside of the house.

Fear did not grip him, only a sort of dreamy desperation. He clung to the door jamb, letting go of the cross to grab with both hands. The blackness that had taken substance and power closed over and around him, choked him, tried to carry him through.

"Lee!" came Laurel Parcher's voice, faint and muffled as though from far away.

"Get out of here," he managed to wheeze out, hoping she could hear him.

But in the instant he spoke, the smothering pressure slacked. With a bounding struggle, he won free from it. He could see the dim rectangle of the open front door, far across the room. In it stooped the small outline of Laurel Parcher, busy at something.

"Don't come in!" he shouted, loudly this time. He stumbled across the floor. Something stirred up around his feet, perhaps trying to catch at them, but he got to a window, the one with the glass broken out, and dived headlong as into a pond. He landed with a great sprawling shock and lay for a moment in the yard, under the soft light of the sky. He gulped air, and scrambled up again.

Laurel Parcher leaned in at the open front door, doing whatever she was doing. He ran to her, gasping for breath.

"Come out," he besought her.

"No," she said. "No, it's all right."

He leaned to look in, too. He heard a faint noise. This time it was a noise like eating, like fowls in a pen, like small creatures in a cage finding things to nibble. He stepped back away, drew himself up quiveringly, and felt calm again.

"You saved me," he said. "How did you do it?"

Laurel Parcher straightened to face him, there by the blackness of the door. "I'd picked up your corn cake to bite into," she said, "and when you went in through the door, I came after you with the cake in my hand. I couldn't see you in there. Something covered you — blotted you out."

"Yes," he nodded, remembering. "But then it let me go, it went away."

"It went all to pieces," she told him, "as if it melted down. And I felt the corn cake being tugged at, so I broke it up into pieces for — " She paused. "For whatever wanted it."

"You fed it."

"And you got away and jumped out the window."

Cobbett looked up at the moon that hung over them like a glowing shred, then looked at her face, the dark pools of her eyes and mouth.

"Those cousins of yours aren't here," he said, so emphatically that his voice went harsh.

"Their ghosts —"

"No, they were never here," he said. "Never since they died."

"But this place is haunted," she half-wailed, as if she must believe it to be sane.

"Not by them," insisted Cobbett. "Not by any human spirit."

He spun away from the house and strode quickly back across the clearing to where his fire burned. She ran to follow him.

"Tell me, Laurel," he said. "Those animals they tortured to death for their ceremonies — how many did they kill?"

She shook her head and her cinnamon hair stirred. "I don't know. Lots of them. Perhaps too many to count."

"And all of them little things," he said.

"Yes, squirrels, frogs, rabbits. My baby turtle. But what was in there was big, horrible." She shuddered.

"It broke up into little things," Cobbett said. "Maybe the spirits of those poor little animals they tortured, maybe they haunt here. They died in pain and terror, and their ghosts stayed, and finally they found out how to join and take vengeance. Don't you see?"

She was silent, pondering. He picked up his musette and again started toward the house.

"What are you going to do?" she cried after him. "Wait, Lee, I want to come with you."

Together they walked to the door. Cobbett took out the sack of cornmeal. Leaning into the darkness, he scattered meal by handfuls over the floor. Handful after handful he threw into the room until it was all gone. A mutter of sound rose and shifted here and there. Cobbett opened the package of bacon, tore the slices into shreds and threw them in. Close at his side, Laurel Parcher peered and listened.

The movement inside was brisk and eager. Cobbett put his hands on the doorsill and leaned in.

"They're eating," he said. "That stuff seems to be disappearing, at any rate."

"And they know we gave it to them," said Laurel Parcher.

"Yes. And they know we're not enemies. That began when you broke up the corn dodger for them. Do you understand that? They had died miserably, their spirits lived for revenge, and they got it. But they don't want revenge on us."

Laurel Parcher tried to peer through the darkness. "I don't see anything in there."

"They aren't clotted together now, gathering themselves to be big and strong and terrible. They're eating. They don't want to attack. We aren't enemies."

He took his flashlight from the musette and climbed into the house.

"I'm coming in, too," said Laurel Parcher.

"All right."

He reached a hand to help her. They stood together inside the door while he turned the beam here and there. Furniture stood in the room, a table, old chairs, a sofa with broken, moldy cushions of leather.

And no movement, no murky fog of pseudo-substance. The scatterings of meal, the morsels of bacon, all had vanished. Cobbett probed corners with his light, turned it upward to the ceiling of mildewed planks. No stir anywhere.

After a few moments, Cobbett walked to the inner door. Laurel Parcher kept close at his side. He entered a square hallway, with more doors opening into it. Opening one, he found a kitchen with a massive iron stove, a counter, shelves of dusty dishes, rows of tarnished copper pots hung on nails. Another door led into a bedroom. A broad bed stood there, with rumpled, dust-clotted blankets. Its massive posts of dark wood were curiously carved. Against the wall towered a chest of drawers. Cobbett went to it and pulled out a drawer.

"Black walnut, I judge," he reported. "Old, but in perfect shape. Antique dealers would bid high on it."

They explored a second and third bedroom. Finally Cobbett turned his light up a steep flight of stairs.

"That's the way to the attic," Laurel Parcher said.

Up he went swiftly, opened a door at the top and walked in under naked rafters, brown in his light. There were old trunks, old chairs, old boxes. Laurel Parcher came in and bent above a stack of books. Cobbett took one with a cover made of hairy skin. He grimaced as he glanced into it, then took another for a brief study.

"Usually I'm against book burning, but these had better go into the fire out yonder," he said. "Will you help me carry them down?"

They bore big armfuls of books to the lower floor and out to the fire. Cobbett threw in a book. It almost exploded into pale, furious flame. He and Laurel Parcher added the others, one by one. They made a towering incandescence, with dancing tongues of pink, dull green, soft blue. Cobbett drew Laurel Parcher back from the blistering heat. Together they watched until the fire dwindled to a natural blaze again. Then Cobbett kicked dirt upon it until it died.

"It must be morning now," he said. "Let's go."

The way back did not seem really long. They walked close together, arms twined, hands holding, saying nothing. At last they came out of the woods to the crossroads, and to the yard of the store where his old car waited.

"Come in," she said in her soft voice. "I'll make coffee, and fry some eggs."

"I wish I could," he said very gently. "But I'm overdue on another job that's waiting, something on the order of the one you and I did tonight. I must hurry. I want to stop at the county seat and be at the courthouse when it opens. That deed your cousin made over to me, I'm going to transfer to you."

"Won't you come back?" she asked. "I don't know about that house, Lee. I don't know if it's good to be there."

"It's yours, more than anyone's. And it will be safe for you. You can make it cheerful. The little ghosts won't bother you. Your cousins never came back to haunt it, after all. It was the beasts. They needn't lurk there anymore. They can go away, too."

"The beasts that perish," she quoted. "Maybe they'll be at rest. If they do come back, they'll be friendly."

"And the furniture and utensils are worth thousands of dollars. Call in experts to bid on them."

"Won't you come back?" she asked again.

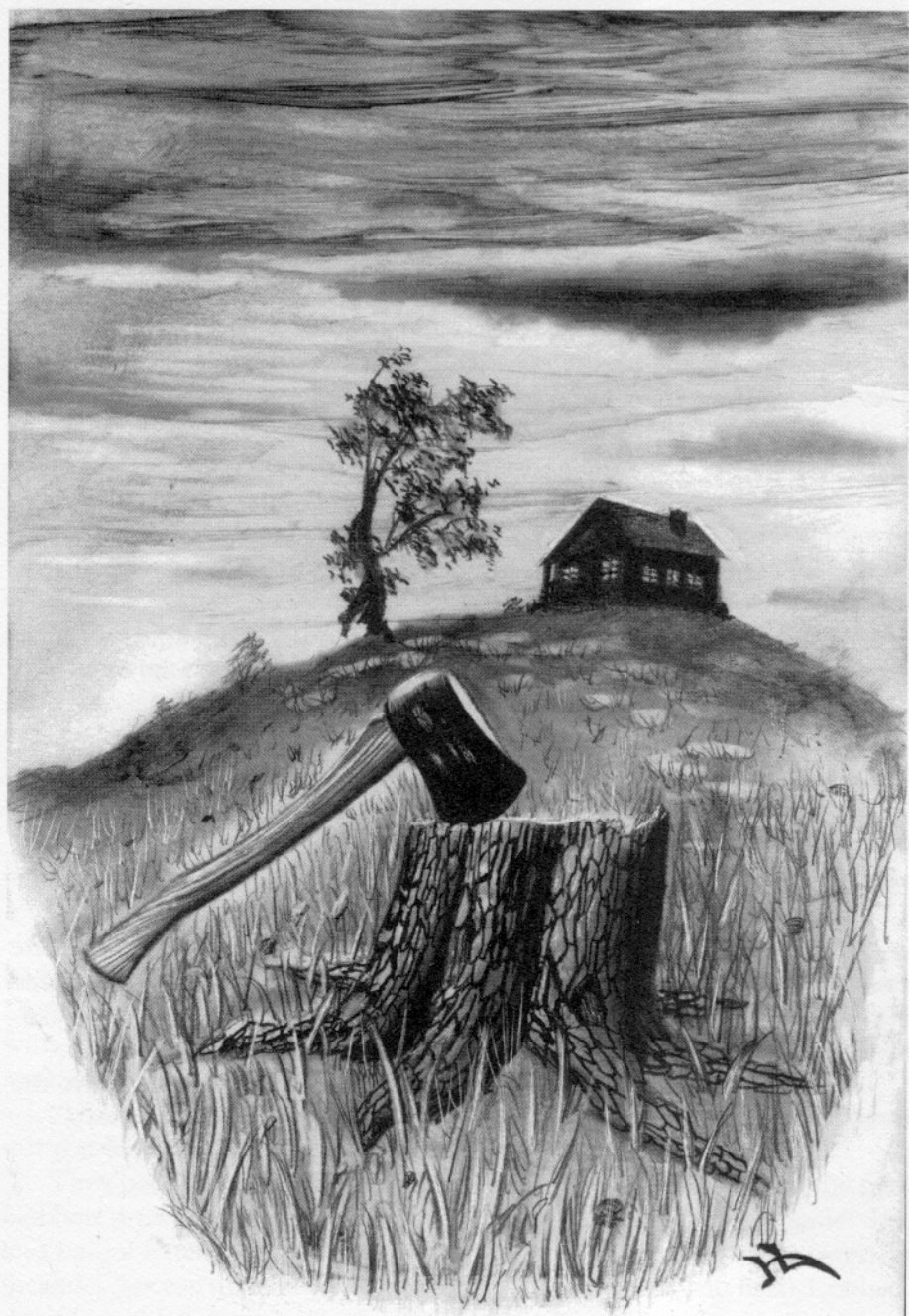
He looked into her eyes and his smile seamed his face. "Yes," he said, "I'll come back, Laurel."

He bent down to kiss her. Her graceful, gracious body came close to the broadness of his. Her arms rose to clasp his neck. Their mouths swam upon each other as though they had known and relished each other always.

"I'll wait," she promised him.

He let her go and unlocked the door of his car, tossed in his musette and canteen. Getting in himself, he started the motor. Carefully he backed out and around. She stood and lifted her hand as though in blessing. Certainly not to say good-bye.

Rolling into the highway, he saw dawn's first dove-gray tint above the trees.



Willow He Walk

AS LEE COBBETT DROVE along the country road, he kept peering among dense trees until he saw a board nailed to a trunk with BINNS in big black letters. He stopped on the road's shoulder, got out and walked along a path between two leafy oaks. He was square-jawed, square-shouldered, wearing denim slacks and jacket, in his middle thirties. Beyond the oaks he saw a green yard and a squat house faced with yellow brick.

A lean man in chino slacks and tan shirt plied a hoe to clear frondy scrub from before the stoop. He turned his curly-bearded face to stare at Cobbett.

"Yes?" he said. "What is it?"

"Good afternoon," said Cobbett, smiling. "My name's Cobbett. I'm looking for Roy Binns."

"Yes, sir, that's me." Eyes blinked above the beard. "Lee Cobbett? Yes, sir, I wrote to you. Come on inside."

He put down the hoe and opened the door. Cobbett walked into a front room cluttered with bookshelves, plaid-cushioned furniture, a sideboard, a desk and a typewriter. On the walls hung two ancient-looking maps and a landscape with a mill. Binns went to the sideboard. His hands trembled as he poured whiskey into two glasses.

"You're a famous expert on the supernatural," he said. "I wrote you when I couldn't find Judge Pursuivant. Didn't tell much in my letter, so you'd better have a drink to hear it all. Wait, I'll get some ice."

He hustled away to fetch back a bowlful, put cubes in the glasses and poured water from a pitcher. "Sit down," he bade, and gave Cobbett one of the glasses.

They both sat. "It's hard to start," he said unhappily.

"In your letter," said Cobbett, "you hinted that a tree was doing strange things."

Binns drank deeply. "A willow. What do you know about willows?"

"Well, willow twigs make baskets and lobster pots, and the English use

the wood for cricket bats. The Indians shredded willow bark into their tobacco to burn to cure sickness. Willows are supposed to keep snakes away. In the Bible — Leviticus, I think — there's something about willow branches in ceremonies. And some Germans think you can kill an enemy by tying knots in willow sprouts. That last is as close to malevolence as I've heard about willows."

Binns cramped his whiskered face. "The one I cut down out there is as malevolent as hell."

"Yes?"

"I said I'd tell the whole thing. This place belonged to my father, and before that to my grandfather, who built it. Twenty acres, all in trees. My father and grandfather wouldn't cut a tree." A shuddery hike of shoulders. "My grandfather would walk his woods with a shotgun, ready to blast anybody who brought in an axe."

"I see," said Cobbett, silently admiring Binn's grandfather.

"They're both dead, and I inherited here. Then I got myself a sweetheart, a wonderful girl named Trix." He half-sang the name. "She left her husband for me, they're getting divorced, and she came here to live with me where we'd be left alone."

"Recluses?" suggested Cobbett.

"Call us that if you like. We were writing a play together. But Trix objected to the willow tree."

"What willow tree?"

Binns gestured shakily. "In the front yard. Trix said it gave her the creeps. Said willow meant black bad luck — friends had told her that. As a matter of fact, my grandfather was killed in an auto accident, and two big alimony suits didn't prolong my father's life — his heart stopped on him, one day at the office. So," and Binn's fist clenched, "I got an axe and chopped the willow down, and all hell broke loose."

"Tell me how hell broke loose."

Binns gulped. "That night there was a sort of storm. Tree branches drove against the window, broke a pane." He nodded to where a sheet of cardboard had been set to hide the breakage. The house stood — it's solid brick and stone — but some shingles cracked on the roof. We were upset."

"Of course," said Cobbett. "Naturally."

"But it was unnatural," Binns squealed. "Next morning we went out to see the damage to the trees and — well, there wasn't any. No sign of a windstorm. Only the yard was grown all full of little willow scrub, overnight."

Cobbett frowned and set down his glass.

"Unnatural," said Binns again. "I'd heard of Judge Pursuivant, how he can put a stop to unnatural things. I phoned, and he was away from his hometown, Bucklin. But whoever answered gave me your address and said

you'd helped Judge Pursuivant in the past, so I wrote to you."

"I got your letter yesterday, and here I am."

"But meanwhile!" Binns burst out. "Night after night of howlings outside, shovings at the house. And day before yesterday, after another night of it —"

He broke off. "Yes?" Cobbett nudged him.

"Lord God, it was unbearable. A siege, you can't imagine. But I slept somehow, and next morning —" His beard trembled. "Trix was gone. Drove off in her little car, I hadn't heard her. And not a word, not a note, not anything!"

Cobbett could think of nothing to say, and said nothing.

"She left me, and she was the loveliest, sweetest —"

Binns wept. His shoulders shook and heaved.

"Will you be leaving, too?" Cobbett inquired at last.

Binn's eyes stared. "I can't. What if she came back?"

"Do you think she'll come back?"

"I don't know, don't know." The frantic head shook. "But if she does, I've got to be here for her, got to be here!"

Cobbett rose. "I'd better park my car somewhere else than in the road."

"Of course," said Binns. "Bring it around back. My pickup's there, and the place where Trix had her car —"

He began to shake again. Cobbett went out the door, feeling that it was wise to leave Binns alone for a moment.

He studied the yard for the first time. No grass there, but a growth of slender-leaved sprouts. He stepped into it. The stuff stirred as in a breeze, though there was no breeze. In the center of the space jutted a stump, dark-rinded, eight or ten inches across. Its upper end was white and raw-looking. He went to start his car and drove into a branch-bowered driveway. Behind the house stood a neatly kept blue pickup truck and, beside it, ruts where another car had been. Cobbett parked there, walked back into the yard and stood for a moment.

The green tendrils cloaked the open space. Cobbett looked for other willows. There were none. He saw a drooping elm, a rather gloomy oak, at the edge of things. He murmured aloud an ancient folk jingle from Somerset in England.

"Elm he grieve, oak he hate,
Willow he walk if you stay out late..."

Something nudged his foot. He looked down. He saw the raw stump of the willow; saw, too, that a leafy stem coiled there, looped around his ankle like a snake. Startled, he kicked free. He hurried, almost ran, to the door, glanced over his shoulder at the sky. The sun drooped low. Not truly

late, but it was almost evening. And willow walked.

He was glad to get into the house and shut the door behind him.

"I see something of what you mean," he said to Binns.

"What willow means?" Binns asked dully.

"I told you I didn't think of willow as actively evil," said Cobbett. "It's more a symbol of sadness. Shakespeare puts willow into sad songs, in *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice*. W. S. Gilbert joked about that in *Patience* and *The Mikado*, and somewhere in *The Bob Ballads*. But what you have out there creeps and threatens."

Binns blinked at him. "Do you want to leave? I'll stay here alone."

Cobbett managed a smile. "No, I'll stay with you. I came to help if I could."

"Let's have some supper," said Binns, more brightly. "I have some tins of things. How about corned beef hash with a fried egg on it?"

"That sounds fine."

Binns shuffled away to the back of the house. Cobbett looked out of the broken window, past the cardboard. The sun set in a gray sky. In the yard, the willow scrub stirred and rippled like water. *Willow be walk if you stay out late*, he said to himself, and went to the kitchen.

"It'll be ready soon," said Binns above his cooking. "Get us some butter from the refrigerator, and there's beer there."

They ate in the kitchen. Cobbett was hungry. Binns seemed to pick at his food. When they had done, Binns opened two more cans of beer. They went to the front room and Binns turned on a light.

"I've been thinking," said Cobbett. "Maybe there was a spirit in that willow you cut down?"

"You believe such a thing?" demanded Binns.

"Maybe," Cobbett continued. "People believe in tree-spirits everywhere. The Indians respected them. And they were called dangerous in Europe, Asia, Africa. Everywhere," Cobbett repeated.

"That's called animus," said Binns. "A savage belief."

"But sophisticates like Pythagoras and Plato considered it. The notion that nature itself is a soul for everything. That notion includes trees and plants, gives them not only souls but minds and behaviors."

Binns scowled over the thought.

"That's not just primitive fancy," Cobbett elaborated. "A tree truly lives. It's born, it grows up, it reproduces. It can be successful in life, unless it's killed."

"And I killed this one, and I'm being punished," said Binns, and glanced toward the patched window. "The sun's gone down," he said miserably. "Hell will break loose again."

Cobbett sought the window. It was dusk, stars peeped. The trees beyond the yard seemed tense in the watch they kept. The scrub of willow in

the yard looked longer, denser. It heaved strongly. Strands of it lay on the concrete stoop. Cobbett frowned, trying to remember something. He fished a ballpoint pen from his shirt pocket. Carefully he made letters on the cardboard:

I
NIR
I
SANCTUS SPIRITUS
I
NIR
I

Let all this be guarded here in time, and there in eternity. Amen.

He put the pen away and repeated aloud:

"Beneath thy guardianship, I am safe from all tempests and all enemies."

Binns was staring. "What's all that for?"

"Two charms from a book called *The Long Lost Friend*," said Cobbett. "One written, one spoken, to protect a threatened house."

"Isn't that a Pennsylvania witchcraft book?" said Binns. "Listen, I've had about all the witchcraft I can stand."

"It's a good book, and I wish I had my copy here with me," Cobbett tried to reassure him. "John George Hohman, who wrote out its formulas long ago, was as devout a man as you could call for. I've found *The Long Lost Friend* to be a friend indeed. Since you won't leave —"

"I'm staying here for Trix!" Binns cried. "She's gone — I might as well die if she's gone."

"Well," said Cobbett evenly, "let's see if your tempest is going to rise."

He stepped to the door. Outside he heard a sort of whining, almost like a voice.

"You can't go out there!" protested Binns, out of his chair.

"I'm going out," Cobbett said firmly, "and I'll come back. Lock the door behind me. Don't open it until you hear my voice. Ignore any knocks or thumps."

He turned the key, pulled open the door, and stepped out into the evening.

There was no wind, only a soft, subdued whisper. He had enough fading light to see by. The willow scrub lay low and thick. He walked out to look at the raw stump. It stood inches high, its chewed top looked milky pale. The stump lived. It twitched like a wounded thumb.

Fronds crowded and huddled around Cobbett's feet.

"I didn't cut you down," said Cobbett aloud to whatever might hear.

"I've come to help. Maybe to help you as much as to help the one who cut you."

A movement in the shadowy thicket at the yard's edge. Something came his way.

A tree that walked — no, not a tree, it was too misty for a tree. It was like the dream of a tree, with sagging branches and long tussocks of leaves. It gave off the faintest of glows.

Willow, the ghost of willow.

Cobbett kicked loose from withes that clutched his shoes, and he ran for the door.

"Let me in!" he shouted.

The door flew open and he almost fell into the front room. Binns slammed the door, turned the key with a snap. Something pushed and strained against the stout panels. Under the bottom of the door came a sudden burst of sound, like the sniff of a great, searching beast.

"Not really a storm," said Cobbett.

Binns goggled. "If it's not a storm, what is it?"

Cobbett stood by the patched window, touched the glass, felt no pressure there. "What I wrote on the cardboard works here," he said, and looked out.

The scramble of willow shoots rolled and tossed in the yard, crept up on the stoop. He saw light, a pale misty glow, from the dancing tree that tossed its branches like arms. That was the felled willow tree, or its ghost. It did not look big, it seemed to stand no taller than Cobbett would. But it danced and gestured, directed the assault of all those seedlings.

For these surged together, each with its own life, and as they moved they seemed to grow larger, to increase in number. The stout front door was being pressed. It creaked on its hinges, it bulged.

"Thank God this house is made of stone and brick," mumbled Binns. "Wood would break. Thank God Trix isn't here."

"You expect her to come back," said Cobbett.

"I don't expect a damned thing." Binns rose, tossed his empty beer can into a wastebasket and poured more whiskey into their glasses. "Maybe a drink will help."

The front of the house shook. Binns spilled some of his drink. Cobbett held his own as steady as a gun rest.

"You thought you killed a willow," he said, "but it seems you didn't."

"I cut the thing down."

"Trees once ruled the earth," Cobbett went on. "All peoples know that. The Druids worshipped trees with human sacrifice. A woodsman used to hesitate, maybe pray, before he cut a tree."

"My grandfather would have prayed," said Binns. "My father would."

The house shook, as if in the angry grip of giant hands. A framed map

swayed on the wall.

"You cut down that willow," Cobbett pursued. "I know that your lady — Trix, you call her — made you do it, but it was you who did it. And the willow resented it, it rallied its children — all those wriggly seedlings — to tell you so."

"I know, I know," Binns protested unhappily. "I mean, I don't know. All I know is, I was wrong to do it."

The house rocked and grated its bricks together like teeth. Cobbett went to the window again. The fronds billowed toward the house, light showed them to him, though he could not make out what he thought of as the willow's ghost. He said under his breath another phrase from *The Long Lost Friend*:

"Make us safe from all enemies, visible and invisible."

He hoped it would work, as in the past it had worked for troubled people in Pennsylvania.

Again the house quivered. Cobbett wondered if the stones and bricks were starting from their mortar.

"What can we do?" Binns stammered.

"We'll make it through tonight," Cobbett tried to sound confident. "We'll hope the savagery doesn't get in here to us. Tomorrow morning, when things quiet down, we'll go into town —"

"You'll go, you'll go alone. I'll wait here, Trix might come back!"

"All right," Cobbett soothed him. "I'll go alone. I'll try to round up some help for us. Judge Pursuivant, if I can locate him. Possibly somebody I know in the mountains, a man named John. That's the name he goes by, John. Maybe get a task force here against the task force that we're facing."

Binns sagged in his chair. "You think I'm a fool, talking about Trix. You don't know how beautiful she is."

"You aren't angry because she left you," ventured Cobbett.

"No, she's a woman. She was too scared to know what she was doing." He drained his glass and rose to pour himself another. "Women can't face fear like men. It's not woman's nature."

He drank. The house trembled. Cobbett thought of women he knew who had faced fear, but he said nothing about them.

Instead, he listened to the tumult outside. The spirit of the willow, the slaughtered willow, was abroad, rousing its army of sprouts. His written spell had baffled it somewhat. But for how long? Willow he walk, ran the old saying. Willow walked, willow hated, willow planned a revenge to visit upon the house and those inside. A demented rage out there, but not a mindless rage. The willow knew what it wanted to do.

The night passed like that, one crawling hour after another. Binns lay down on the sofa and slept fitfully. Perhaps the liquor he had drunk, and

he had drunk a great deal, helped him sleep. Cobbett sat in his chair, wide awake. He listened to the turmoil outside, how it flowed at the house and then died down, as if weary for a moment. In his mind he marshaled every word of defensive mystery, spells and prayers, and said them under his breath as well as he could remember. Maybe his words had some effect. The house shook, but it stood. The stout door held, the prayer-protected window held, kept them sheltered within.

The troubled night seemed endless, but it ended. Faint rays of dawn seeped in at the window. Cobbett got out of his chair, and his movement wakened Binns.

"Well," Binns yawned, "We made it again. Wasn't it awful? What do you want for breakfast?"

They had coffee and canned orange juice and cereal, and then they went together to open the front door. There lay the swirled toss of the willow seedlings, looking bigger, ranker, denser than yesterday. The white jut of the stump stood among them, accusing them with its mutilation. It showed them that it was there, unavenged, demanding vengeance.

"I'll be going," said Cobbett. "The sooner I start, the better."

Binns looked at him with wide, scared eyes. "You'll be back before night?"

"As fast as I can make it back. I'll make some phone calls in town, and perhaps I'd better buy us some supplies."

"Yes, yes," chattered Binns. "Do that."

A motor rippled out on the road. A little red car nosed into the driveway and stopped. Its door opened, out got a plump woman in green slacks and a figured green top. Binns rushed into the yard among the willow sprouts.

"Trixi!" he squealed. She hurried toward him. She had a round, rosy face, her short, fair hair stuck up in all directions on her head. She carried a brown paper bag. She and Binns flung their arms around each other.

"I knew you'd come back," Binns blubbered, with complete untruth.

She twitched out of his arms and held out the bag for him to see. She panted with exertion. She was somewhere in her thirties, apple-cheeked, full-mouthed. Cobbett could find none of the beauty in her that Binns had described.

"When you couldn't get Judge Pursuivant on the phone, I drove all the way to Bucklin," she said.

"He wasn't there," said Binns.

"No, but I found out that he was speaking at the State Culture Week thing. I went there to look for him. Last night after he spoke, I saw him, talked to him — found out just what to do — and I drove the rest of the night to get back here."

"I knew you would," vowed Binns again.

Cobbett walked into the overgrown yard.

"This is Mr. Cobbett, Trix," said Binns. "He's a friend of Judge Pursuivant."

"Oh?" said Trix, and blinked her round eyes. "Judge Pursuivant is the sweetest man — his hair's so white — and he knows everything!" She gestured. "He told me how to placate the willow. Look, he told me to bring these things."

From inside the bag she rummaged a bottle, then a jar. "Wine," she said, "and honey. The honey's for atonement, he said, and the wine's for friendship. And he taught me a charm to say to fix everything. You and I have to say it together, Roy. Here now, kneel down."

Binns lowered himself limply. Trix did the same. She had the top off the jar of honey and was pouring it on the willow stump. Then she muttered words, and Binns said them after her. She opened the wine bottle and carefully trickled some on top of the honey on the stump. That stump suddenly looked less accusingly white. It might be healing. And Cobbett was aware that the willow twigs drooped laxly around his feet.

Watching the two, he suddenly saw why Binns thought Trix was so beautiful.



A Witch for All Seasons

UP THAT LONELY PATH he had found and followed in the snowy night, suddenly it was misty warm. Thickets showed green under the struggling light of a full moon. Did a hot spring flow here? He looked down at a stone, like an ancient marker for a grave.

"I was waiting for you," sang a soft voice. From the shadows a woman moved toward him, tall, proudly shaped, sheathed in silvery silk. Her hair was a dark storm around her pale face with its big eyes and wide, rich mouth.

"We've met before, Lee Cobbett," she said. "At Judge Pursuivant's birthday party."

"I remember," Lee Cobbett nodded. "Your name is Trine."

"I called you here, and you came."

She was as tall for a woman as he was for a man. Closer she came, to where he stood with booted feet set apart, his corduroy jacket hung open, his square-seamed face lifted to meet her gaze.

Surely she wore nothing under the silk. Her full breasts moved slowly, like bells. Her hips curved, her full-fashioned thighs were like columns. It would be a noble body, Cobbett decided, if she did not flaunt it so smugly.

"And I've heard that you practice black magic," he said. "I'm actively concerned with such things."

"You're actively concerned against such things," she corrected, smiling with small, pointed teeth. "Too meddlesomely concerned."

"I devote myself to the study of evil and its diminishment," said Cobbett. "Rather thanklessly for the most part. Many people don't even believe in witches, how they gather in covens, how they work to foul life and damage it."

"What is evil?" she asked. "Who are you to decide? What if I gave you a work worthy of your energies and talents, and much more to your profit?"

"What do you want of me, Trine?" he asked pleasantly.

"I want you." She had moved so close that her splendid body was al-

most against his. "All of you, for mine. And you are mine, now. I chose the proper season."

"But you chose winter," he said. "Spring has Beltane Tide. For a mid-summer witches' holiday, there's St. John's Eve. Another is Hallowe'en, in autumn. Informed people take their precautions at those times, but winter is full of safe, holy days. We tell winter's tales of ghosts and demons, because we feel safe."

"You're off guard by winter." Her chill fingers touched his hand. "You don't look for us then."

"Us, you say. This isn't your idea alone. You're here with company."

For he had a strong sense of lurking listeners. Amid branches overhead, a stir as of wings without feathers. Deep among leafy bushes, a stealthy rustle as of a heavy body, or more than one. More distantly, twin crumbs of light gleamed above a log. He wondered if they were eyes.

"You want me, you say," he elaborated. "Isn't it your friends who want you to have me? If I am to be yours, I'll be theirs."

"No," she said. "They'll be yours. You can rule the coven."

"Flattering," he said, and bowed. "But I doubt if the other members of the coven are a tenth as lovely as you."

"Lovely," she repeated. "Am I lovely? I will love you. You never dreamed of such love. And I'll help you, make you great. See."

Trine turned toward the stone that looked like a grave marker and pushed it over with her foot. She thrust her hand into the hole and tugged. Something rose in her grasp, a skull with empty holes for eyes and a grin of teeth and weedy hair twisted in her fingers. Cobbett heard the snap of the parting neckbone. Straightening, Trine held the skull up like a lantern.

"I'll bring it to life. The dead know everything. Ask a question, this one will answer you truthfully."

"Two or three times I've seen dead men come to life," said Cobbett. "Never with any real enjoyment."

She threw the skull down. Again she reached into the hole, and fetched out a dark book that seemed to be bound in hairy skin.

"Let me tell you about this volume," she said.

Cobbett recognized it well and said, not taking it: "A Grand Albert can't be burnt or drowned in the sea. To get rid of it, you must bury it in a grave, with highly elaborate funeral rights. I'd rather not look into it. I don't need that sort of knowledge."

She dropped it back into the hole. Stooping to a new place, she raked her long fingers in loose earth, then rose and turned to him again, holding out something.

"Money, then?" she asked. "It usually is, in these transactions."

Into his palm she trickled heavy coins.

"Gold," he said, peering in the moonlight. "Ancient coins. Probably

each is worth many times its gold weight to collectors.”

“And thousands more are waiting for you,” she told him. “Waiting for you to kneel down and scoop them out. Because they’re yours, and I’m yours and you’re mine.”

“I didn’t come here tonight to kneel down.”

“You’ll kneel if I say so.” Her voice turned sharp, and her pointed teeth showed, not in a smile this time. “I called you, and you came, and you’ll do as I say. The season was ripe for that.” She came close again. “Now, kiss me.”

That was an order. Her face floated near, her full lips trembled apart. But Cobbett did not kiss her.

“What season was right?” he asked.

“This season, the time of the stars that compel you. Oh, I found out your birthday — mid-January. You were born under Capricornus.”

“The Goat,” he said “An animal much employed in witchcraft. The symbol of your Grand Master. Worshipped as Baphomet.”

“And before Baphomet, worshipped as Pan,” she added. “Io, Pan!”

“Before Pan, at the very beginnings of Israel, a goat was loaded down with the sins of twelve tribes and driven out into the desert with them. The scapegoat.”

“Loaded down with the wisdom of those things, the power of those things,” she said. “Made strong and mighty with them. Your stars compel you. You were born under the rule of the Goat, and the Goat is ruled to do what I say here.”

“Indeed?”

“The Goat made summer in this grove, for us to meet here. The Goat brought the golden treasure. The Goat carried my voice to you, and made you obey me. You can’t stir hand or foot without my leave.” Her long hands crept up his arms to his shoulders. “Kiss me, I say.”

“With all your friends looking on?”

“For the third time, Kiss me.”

“The third time isn’t the charm,” said Lee Cobbett. He took a long stride, out of her clasp and away, and he laughed.

“You didn’t call me here,” he said. “One of a number of persons you trust told me all about your hopes and where you planned to bring them about. It happens that once I so frightened him that ever since he’s told me anything he thinks I would be grateful to know. I came here just to find out how you thought you would manage.”

“That’s a lie!” she snarled. “The Goat — Capricornus — ”

“Your research on me was incomplete, Trine. I wasn’t born under Capricornus.”

“You were born in mid-January!”

“Yes, but far, far down in Patagonia, on my grandfather’s estate. About

fifty degrees below the Equator. We don't see the signs of the northern Zodiac there."

He jingled the coins, and threw them on the ground at her feet.

"Don't call me again," he said. "I won't call you, either."

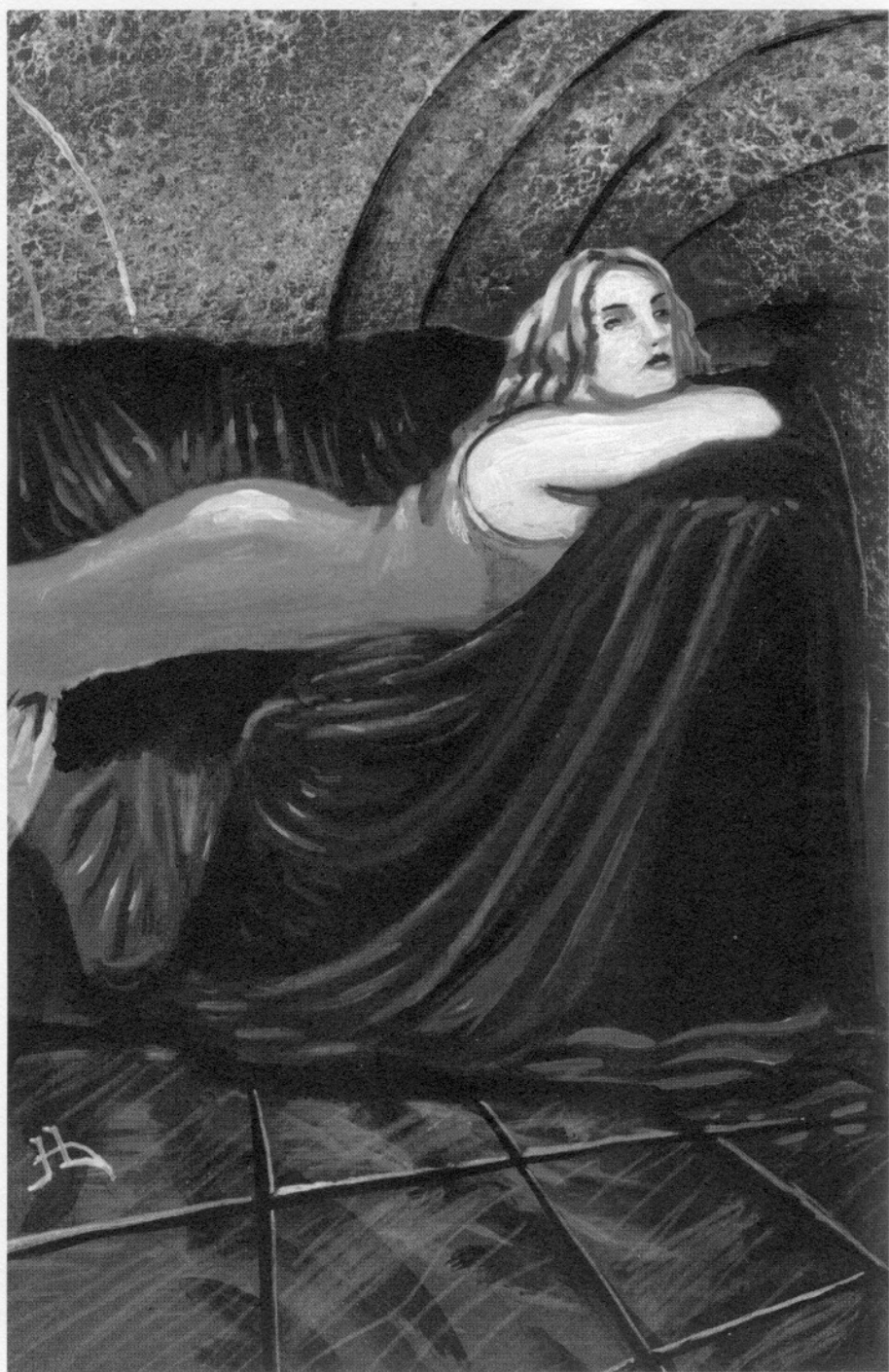
"You don't love me, you hate me," she stammered.

"No, Trine. Just now I pity you. Because you have failed tonight. And your friends have no use for failures."

He turned on his heel and walked away.

Something like laughter whispered behind him. As he cleared the thickets and came under snow falling in the open, the laughter rose, high and fierce. And louder than that laughter, Trine shrieked in pain and terror, as though talons had suddenly come upon that beautiful, tender body of hers.

Cobbett shuddered. He turned up the collar of his jacket against the broad, wet flakes and tramped away into the night.



Chastel

"THEN YOU WON'T LET Count Dracula rest in his tomb?" inquired Lee Cobbett, his square face creasing with a grin.

Five of them sat in the parlor of Judge Keith Hilary Pursuivant's hotel suite on Central Park West. The judge lounged in an armchair, a wineglass in his big old hand. On this, his eighty-seventh birthday, his blue eyes were clear, penetrating. His once tawny hair and mustache had gone blizzard white, but both grew thick, and his square face showed rosy in his tailored blue leisure suit, he still looked powerfully deep-chested and broad-shouldered.

Blocky Lee Cobbett wore jacket and slacks almost as brown as his face. Next to him sat Laurel Parcher, small and young and cinnamon-haired. The others were natty Phil Drumm the summer theater producer, and Isobel Arrington from a wire press service. She was blond, expensively dressed, she smoked a dark cigarette with a white tip. Her pen scribbled swiftly.

"Dracula's as much alive as Sherlock Holmes," argued Drumm. "All the revivals of the play, all the films —"

"Your musical should wake the dead, anyway," said Cobbett, drinking. "What's your main number, Phil? 'Garlic Time?' 'Gory, Gory Hallelujah?'"

"Let's have Christian charity here, Lee," Pursuivant came to Drumm's rescue. "Anyway, Miss Arrington came to interview me. Pour her some wine and let me try to answer her questions."

"I'm interested in Mr. Cobbett's remarks," said Isobel Arrington, her voice deliberately throaty. "He's an authority on the supernatural."

"Well, perhaps," admitted Cobbett, "and Miss Parcher has had some experiences. But Judge Pursuivant is the true authority, the author of *Vampiricon*."

"I've read it, in paperback," said Isobel Arrington. "Phil, it mentions a vampire belief up in Connecticut, where you're having your show. What's that town again?"

"Deslow," he told her. "We're making a wonderful old stone barn into

a theater. I've invited Lee and Miss Parcher to visit."

She looked at Drumm. "Is Deslow a resort town?"

"Not yet, but maybe the show will bring tourists. In Deslow, up to now, peace and quiet is the chief business. If you drop your shoe, everybody in town will think somebody's blowing the safe."

"Deslow's not far from Jewett City," observed Pursuivant. "There were vampires there about a century and a quarter ago. A family named Ray was afflicted. And to the east, in Rhode Island, there was a lively vampire folklore in recent years."

"Let's leave Rhode Island to H. P. Lovecraft's imitators," suggested Cobbett. "What do you call your show, Phil?"

"*The Land Beyond the Forest*," said Drumm. "We're casting it now. Using locals in bit parts. But we have Gonda Chastel to play Dracula's countess."

"I never knew that Dracula had a countess," said Laurel Parcher.

"There was a stage star named Chastel, long ago when I was young," said Pursuivant. "Just the one name — Chastel."

"Gonda's her daughter, and a year or so ago Gonda came to live in Deslow," Drumm told them. "Her mother's buried there. Gonda has invested in our production."

"Is that why she has a part in it?" asked Isobel Arrington.

"She has a part in it because she's beautiful and gifted," replied Drumm, rather stuffily. "Old people say she's the very picture of her mother. Speaking of pictures, here are some to prove it."

He offered two glossy prints to Isobel Arrington, who murmured "Very sweet," and passed them to Laurel Parcher. Cobbett leaned to see.

One picture seemed copied from an older one. It showed a woman who stood with unconscious stateliness, in a gracefully draped robe with a tiara binding her rich flow of dark hair. The other picture was of a woman in fashionable evening dress, her hair ordered in modern fashion, with a face strikingly like that of the woman in the other photograph.

"Oh, she's lovely," said Laurel. "Isn't she, Lee?"

"Isn't she?" echoed Drumm.

"Magnificent," said Cobbett, handing the pictures to Pursuivant, who studied them gravely.

"Chastel was in Richmond, just after the First World War," he said slowly. "A dazzling Lady Macbeth. I was in love with her. Everyone was."

"Did you tell her you loved her?" asked Laurel.

"Yes. We had supper together, twice. Then she went ahead with her tour, and I sailed to England and studied at Oxford. I never saw her again, but she's more or less why I never married."

Silence a moment. Then: "*The Land Beyond the Forest*," Laurel repeated. "Isn't there a book called that?"

"There is indeed, my child," said the Judge. "By Emily de Laszowska

Gerard. About Transylvania, where Dracula came from."

"That's why we use the title, that's what Transylvania means," put in Drumm. "It's all right, the book's out of copyright. But I'm surprised to find someone who's heard of it."

"I'll protect your guilty secret, Phil," promised Isobel Arrington. "What's over there in your window, Judge?"

Pursuivant turned to look. "Whatever it is," he said, "it's not Peter Pan."

Cobbett sprang up and ran toward the half-draped window. A silhouette with head and shoulders hung in the June night. He had a glimpse of a face, rich-mouthed, with bright eyes. Then it was gone. Laurel had hurried up behind him. He hoisted the window sash and leaned out.

Nothing. The street was fourteen stories down. The lights of moving cars crawled distantly. The wall below was course after course of dull brick, with recesses of other windows to right and left, below, above. Cobbett studied the wall, his hands braced on the sill.

"Be careful, Lee," Laurel's voice besought him.

He came back to face the others. "Nobody out there," he said evenly. "Nobody could have been. It's just a wall — nothing to hang to. Even that sill would be tricky to stand on."

"But I saw something, and so did Judge Pursuivant," said Isobel Arrington, the cigarette trembling in her fingers.

"So did I," said Cobbett. "Didn't you, Laurel?"

"Only a face."

Isobel Arrington was calm again. "If it's a trick, Phil, you played a good one. But don't expect me to put it in my story."

Drumm shook his head nervously. "I didn't play any trick, I swear."

"Don't try this on old friends," she jabbed at him. "First those pictures, then whatever was up against the glass. I'll use the pictures, but I won't write that a weird vision presided over this birthday party."

"How about a drink all around?" suggested Pursuivant.

He poured for them. Isobel Arrington wrote down answers to more questions, then said she must go. Drumm rose to escort her. "You'll be at Deslow tomorrow, Lee?" he asked.

"And Laurel, too. You said we could find quarters there."

"The Mapletree's a good auto court," said Drumm. "I've already reserved cabins for the two of you."

"On the spur of the moment," said Pursuivant suddenly, "I think I'll come along, if there's space for me."

"I'll check it out for you, Judge," said Drumm.

He departed with Isobel Arrington. Cobbett spoke to Pursuivant. "Isn't that rather offhand?" he asked. "Deciding to come with us?"

"I was thinking about Chastel," Pursuivant smiled gently. "About mak-

ing a pilgrimage to her grave."

"We'll drive up about nine tomorrow morning."

"I'll be ready, Lee."

Cobbett and Laurel, too, went out. They walked down a flight of stairs to the floor below, where both their rooms were located. "Do you think Phil Drumm rigged up that illusion for us?" asked Cobbett.

"If he did, he used the face of that actress, Chastel."

He glanced keenly at her. "You saw that."

"I thought I did, and so did you."

They kissed goodnight at the door to her room.

Pursuivant was ready next morning when Cobbett knocked. He had only one suitcase and a thick, brown-blotched malacca cane, banded with silver below its curved handle.

"I'm taking only a few necessities, I'll buy socks and such things in Deslow if we stay more than a couple of days," he said. "No, don't carry it for me, I'm quite capable."

When they reached the hotel garage, Laurel was putting her luggage in the trunk of Cobbett's black sedan. Judge Pursuivant declined the front seat beside Cobbett, held the door for Laurel to get in, and sat in the rear. They rolled out into bright June sunlight.

Cobbett drove them east on Interstate 95, mile after mile along the Connecticut shore, past service stations, markets, sandwich shops. Now and then they glimpsed Long Island Sound to the right. At toll gates, Cobbett threw quarters into hoppers and drove on.

"New Rochelle to Port Chester," Laurel half chanted, "Norwalk, Bridgeport, Stratford —"

"Where, in 1851, devils plagued a minister's home," put in Pursuivant.

"The names make a poem," said Laurel.

"You can get that effect by reading any timetable," said Cobbett. "We miss a couple of good names — Mystic and Giants Neck, though they aren't far off from our route. And Griswold — that means Gray Woods — where the Judge's book says Horace Ray was born."

"There's no Griswold on the Connecticut map anymore," said the Judge.

"Vanished?" said Laurel. "Maybe it appears at just a certain time of the day, along about sundown."

She laughed, but the Judge was grave.

"Here we'll pass by New Haven," he said. "I was at Yale here, seventy years ago."

They rolled across the Connecticut River between Old Saybrook and Old Lyme. Outside New London, Cobbett turned them north on State Highway 82 and, near Jewett City, took a two-lane road that brought them into Deslow, not long after noon.

There were pleasant clapboard cottages among elm trees and flower

beds. Main Street had bright shops with, farther along, the belfry of a sturdy old church. Cobbett drove them to a sign saying MAPLETREE COURT. A row of cabins faced along a cement-floored colonnade, their fronts painted white with blue doors and window frames. In the office, Phil Drumm stood at the desk, talking to the plump proprietress.

"Welcome home," he greeted them. "Judge, I was asking Mrs. Simpson here to reserve you a cabin."

"At the far end of the row, sir," the lady said. "I'd have put you next to your two friends, but so many theater folks have already moved in."

"Long ago I learned to be happy with any shelter," the Judge assured her.

They saw Laurel to her cabin and put her suitcases inside, then walked to the farthest cabin where Pursuivant would stay. Finally Drumm followed Cobbett to the space next to Laurel's. Inside, Cobbett produced a fifth of bourbon from his briefcase. Drumm trotted away to fetch ice. Pursuivant came to join them. "It's good of you to look after us," Cobbett said to Drumm above his glass.

"Oh, I'll get my own back," Drumm assured him. "The Judge and you, distinguished folklore experts — I'll have you in all the papers."

"Whatever you like," said Cobbett. "Let's have lunch, as soon as Laurel is freshened up."

The four ate crab cakes and flounder at a little restaurant while Drumm talked about *The Land Beyond the Forest*. He had signed the minor film star Caspar Merrick to play Dracula. "He has a fine baritone singing voice," said Drumm. "He'll be at afternoon rehearsal."

"And Gonda Chastel?" inquired Pursuivant, buttering a roll.

"She'll be there tonight." Drumm sounded happy about that. "This afternoon's mostly for bits and chorus numbers. I'm directing as well as producing." They finished their lunch, and Drumm rose. "If you're not tired, come see our theater."

It was only a short walk through town to the converted barn. Cobbett judged it had been built in Colonial times, with a recent roof of composition tile, but with walls of stubborn, brown-gray New England stone. Across a narrow side street stood the old white church, with a hedge-bordered cemetery.

"Quaint, that old burying ground," commented Drumm. "Nobody's spaded under there now, there's a modern cemetery on the far side, but Chastel's tomb is there. Quite a picturesque one."

"I'd like to see it," said Pursuivant, leaning on his silver-banded cane.

The barn's interior was set with rows of folding chairs, enough for several hundred spectators. On a stage at the far end, workmen moved here and there under lights. Drumm led his guests up steps at the side.

High in the loft, catwalks zigzagged and a dark curtain hung like a broad

guillotine blade. Drumm pointed out canvas flats, painted to resemble grim castle walls. Pursuivant nodded and questioned.

"I'm no authority on what you might find in Transylvania," he said, "but this looks convincing."

A man walked from the wings toward them. "Hello, Caspar," Drumm greeted him. "I want you to meet Judge Pursuivant and Lee Cobbett. And Miss Laurel Parcher, of course." He gestured the introductions. "This is Mr. Caspar Merrick, our Count Dracula."

Merrick was elegantly tall, handsome, with carefully groomed black hair. Sweepingly he bowed above Laurel's hand and smiled at them all. "Judge Pursuivant's writings I know, of course," he said richly. "I read what I can about vampires, inasmuch as I'm to be one."

"Places for the Delusion number!" called a stage manager.

Cobbett, Pursuivant and Laurel went down the steps and sat on chairs. Eight men and eight girls hurried into view, dressed in knockabout summer clothes. Someone struck chords on a piano, Drumm gestured importantly, and the chorus sang. Merritt, coming downstage, took solo on a verse. All joined in the refrain. Then Drumm made them sing it over again.

After that, two comedians made much of confusing the words vampire and empire. Cobbett found it tedious. He excused himself to his companions and strolled out and across to the old, tree-crowded churchyard.

The gravestones bore interesting epitaphs: not only the familiar PAUSE O STRANGER PASSING BY / AS YOU ARE NOW SO ONCE WAS I, and A BUD ON EARTH TO BLOOM IN HEAVEN, but several of more originality. One bewailed a man who, since he had been lost at sea, could hardly have been there at all. Another bore, beneath a bat-winged face, the declaration DEATH PAYS ALL DEBTS and the date 1907, which Cobbett associated with a financial panic.

Toward the center of the graveyard, under a drooping willow, stood a shedlike structure of heavy granite blocks. Cobbett picked his way to the door of heavy grillwork, which was fastened with a rusty padlock the size of a sardine can. On the lintel were strongly carved letters: CHASTEL.

Here, then, was the tomb of the stage beauty Pursuivant remembered so romantically. Cobbett peered through the bars.

It was murkily dusty in there. The floor was coarsely flagged, and among sooty shadows at the rear stood a sort of stone chest that must contain the body. Cobbett turned and went back to the theater. Inside, piano music rang wildly and the people of the chorus desperately rehearsed what must be meant for a folk dance.

"Oh, it's exciting," said Laurel as Cobbett sat down beside her. "Where have you been?"

"Visiting the tomb of Chastel."

"Chastel?" echoed Pursuivant. "I must see that tomb."

Songs and dance ensembles went on. In the midst of them, a brisk reporter from Hartford appeared, to interview Pursuivant and Cobbett. At last Drumm resoundingly dismissed the players on stage and joined his guests.

"Principals rehearse at eight o'clock," he announced. "Gonda Chastel will be here, she'll want to meet you. Could I count on you then?"

"Count on me, at least," said Pursuivant. "Just now, I feel like resting before dinner, and so, I think, does Laurel here."

"Yes, I'd like to lie down for a little," said Laurel.

"Why don't we all meet for dinner at the place where we had lunch?" said Cobbett. "You come too, Phil."

"Thanks, I have a date with some backers from New London."

It was half-past five when they went out.

Cobbett went to his quarters, stretched out on the bed, and gave himself to thought.

He hadn't come to Deslow because of this musical interpretation of the Dracula legend. Laurel had come because he was coming, and Pursuivant on a sudden impulse that might have been more than a wish to visit the grave of Chastel. But Cobbett was here because this, he knew, had been vampire country, maybe still was vampire country.

He remembered the story in Pursuivant's book about vampires at Jewett City, as reported in the *Norwich Courier* for 1854. Horace Ray, from the now vanished town of Griswold, had died of a "wasting disease." Thereafter his oldest son, then his second son had also gone to their graves. When a third son sickened, friends and relatives dug up Horace Ray and the two dead brothers and burned the bodies in a roaring fire. The surviving son got well. And something like that had happened in Exeter, near Providence in Rhode Island. Very well, why organize and present the Dracula musical here in Deslow, so near those places?

Cobbett had met Phil Drumm in the South the year before, knew him for a brilliant if erratic producer, who relished tales of devils and the dead who walk by night. Drumm might have known enough stage magic to have rigged that seeming appearance at Pursuivant's window in New York. That is, if indeed it was only a seeming appearance, not a real face. Might it have been real, a manifestation of the unreal? Cobbett had seen enough of what people dismissed as unreal, impossible, to wonder.

A soft knock came at the door. It was Laurel. She wore green slacks, a green jacket, and she smiled, as always, at sight of Cobbett's face. They sought Pursuivant's cabin. A note on the door said: MEET ME AT THE CAFÉ.

When they entered there, Pursuivant hailed them from the kitchen door. "Dinner's ready," he hailed them. "I've been supervising in person, and I

paid well for the privilege."

A waiter brought a laden tray. He arranged platters of red-drenched spaghetti and bowls of salad on a table. Pursuivant himself sprinkled Parmesan cheese. "No salt or pepper," he warned. "I seasoned it myself, and you can take my word it's exactly right."

Cobbett poured red wine into glasses. Laurel took a forkful of spaghetti. "Delicious," she cried. "What's in it, Judge?"

"Not only ground beef and tomatoes and onions and garlic," replied Pursuivant. "I added marjoram and green pepper and chile and thyme and bay leaf and oregano and parsley and a couple of other important ingredients. And I also minced in some Italian sausage."

Cobbett, too, ate with enthusiastic appetite. "I won't order any dessert," he declared. "I want to keep the taste of this in my mouth."

"There's more in the kitchen for dessert if you want it," the Judge assured him. "But here, I have a couple of keepsakes for you."

He handed each of them a small, silvery object. Cobbett examined his. It was smoothly wrapped in foil. He wondered if it was a nutmeat.

"You have pockets, I perceive," the Judge said. "Put those into them. And don't open them, or my wish for you won't come true."

When they had finished eating, a full moon had begun to rise in the darkening sky. They headed for the theater.

A number of visitors sat in the chairs and the stage lights looked bright. Drumm stood beside the piano, talking to two plump men in summer business suits. As Pursuivant and the others came down the aisle, Drumm beckoned them and introduced them to his companions, the financial backers with whom he had taken dinner.

"We're very much interested," said one. "This vampire legend intrigues anyone, if you forget that a vampire's motivation is simply nourishment."

"No, something more than that," offered Pursuivant. "A social motivation."

"Social motivation," repeated the other backer.

"A vampire wants company of its own kind. A victim infected becomes a vampire, too, and an associate. Otherwise the original vampire would be a disconsolate loner."

"There's a lot in what you say," said Drumm, impressed.

After that there was financial talk, something in which Cobbett could not intelligently join. Then someone else approached, and both the backers stared.

It was a tall, supremely graceful woman with red-lighted black hair in a bun at her nape, a woman of impressive figure and assurance. She wore a sweeping blue dress, fitted to her slim waist, with a frill-edged neckline. Her arms were bare and white and sweetly turned, with jeweled bracelets on them. Drumm almost ran to bring her close to the group.

"Gonda Chastel," he said, half-prayerfully. "Gonda, you'll want to meet these people."

The two backers stuttered admiringly at her. Pursuivant bowed and Laurel smiled. Gonda Chastel gave Cobbett her slim, cool hand. "You know so much about this thing we're trying to do here," she said, in a voice like cream.

Drumm watched them. His face looked plaintive.

"Judge Pursuivant has taught me a lot, Miss Chastel," said Cobbett. "He'll tell you that once he knew your mother."

"I remember her, not very clearly," said Gonda Chastel. "She died when I was just a little thing, thirty years ago. And I followed her here, now I make my home here."

"You look very like her," said Pursuivant.

"I'm proud to be like my mother in any way," she smiled at them. She could be overwhelming, Cobbett told himself.

"And Miss Parcher," went on Gonda Chastel, turning toward Laurel. "What a little presence she is. She should be in our show — I don't know what part, but she should." She smiled dazzlingly. "Now then, Phil wants me on stage."

"Knock-at-the-door number, Gonda," said Drumm.

Gracefully she mounted the steps. The piano sounded, and she sang. It was the best song, felt Cobbett, that he had heard so far in the rehearsals. "Are they seeking for a shelter from the night?" Gonda Chastel sang richly. Caspar Merritt entered, to join in a recitative. Then the chorus streamed on, singing somewhat shrilly.

Pursuivant and Laurel had sat down. Cobbett strode back up the aisle and out under a moon that rained silver-blue light.

He found his way to the churchyard. The trees that had offered pleasant afternoon shade now made a dubious darkness. He walked underneath branches that seemed to lower like hovering wings as he approached the tomb structure at the center.

The barred door that had been massively locked now stood open. He peered into the gloom within. After a moment he stepped across the threshold upon the flagged floor.

He had to grope, with one hand upon the rough wall. At last he almost stumbled upon the great stone chest at the rear. It, too, was flung open, its lid heaved back against the wall.

There was, of course, complete darkness within it. He flicked on his cigar lighter. The flame showed him the inside of the stone coffer, solidly made and about ten feet long. Its sides of gray marble were snugly fitted. Inside lay a coffin of rich dark wood with silver fittings and here, yet again, was an open lid.

Bending close to the smudged silk lining, Cobbett seemed to catch an

odor of stuffy sharpness, like dried herbs. He snapped off his light and frowned in the dark. Then he groped back to the door, emerged into the open, and headed for the theater again.

"Mr. Cobbett," said the beautiful voice of Gonda Chastel.

She stood at the graveyard's edge, beside a sagging willow. She was almost as tall as he. Her eyes glowed in the moonlight.

"You came to find the truth about my mother," she half-accused.

"I was bound to try," he replied. "Ever since I saw a certain face at a certain window of a certain New York hotel."

She stepped back from him. "You know that she's a —"

"A vampire," Cobbett finished for her. "Yes."

"I beg you to be helpful — merciful." But there was no supplication in her voice. "I already realized, long ago. That's why I live in little Deslow. I want to find a way to give her rest. Night after night, I wonder how."

"I understand that," said Cobbett.

Gonda Chastel breathed deeply. "You know all about these things. I think there's something about you that could daunt a vampire."

"If so, I don't know what it is," said Cobbett truthfully.

"Make me a solemn promise. That you won't return to her tomb, that you won't tell others what you and I know about her. I — I want to think how we two together can do something for her."

"If you wish, I'll say nothing," he promised.

Her hand clutched his.

"The cast took a five-minute break, it must be time to go to work again," she said, suddenly bright. "Let's go back and help the thing along."

They went.

Inside, the performers were gathering on stage. Drumm stared unhappily as Gonda Chastel and Cobbett came down the aisle. Cobbett sat with Laurel and Pursuivant and listened to the rehearsal.

Adaptation from Bram Stoker's novel was free, to say the least. Dracula's eerie plottings were much hampered by his having a countess, a walking dead beauty who strove to become a spirit of good. There were some songs, in interesting minor keys. There was a dance, in which men and women leaped like kangaroos. Finally Drumm called a halt, and the performers trooped wearily to the wings.

Gonda Chastel lingered, talking to Laurel. "I wonder, my dear, if you haven't had acting experience," she said.

"Only in school entertainments down South, when I was little."

"Phil," said Gonda Chastel, "Miss Parcher is a good type, has good presence. There ought to be something for her in the show."

"You're very kind, but I'm afraid that's impossible," said Laurel, smiling.

"You may change your mind, Miss Parcher. Will you and your friends

come to my house for a nightcap?"

"Thank you," said Pursuivant. "We have some notes to make, and we must make them together."

"Until tomorrow evening, then. Mr. Cobbett, we'll remember our agreement."

She went away toward the back of the stage. Pursuivant and Laurel walked out. Drumm hurried up the aisle and caught Cobbett's elbow.

"I saw you," he said harshly. "Saw you both as you came in."

"And we saw you, Phil. What's this about?"

"She likes you." It was half an accusation. "Fawns on you, almost."

Cobbett grinned and twitched his arm free. "What's the matter, Phil, are you in love with her?"

"Yes, God damn it, I am. I'm in love with her. She knows it but she won't let me come to her house. And you — the first time she meets you, she invites you."

"Easy does it, Phil," said Cobbett. "If it'll do you any good, I'm in love with someone else, and that takes just about all my spare time."

He hurried out to overtake his companions.

Pursuivant swung his cane almost jauntily as they returned through the moonlight to the auto court.

"What notes are you talking about, Judge?" asked Cobbett.

"I'll tell you at my quarters. What do you think of the show?"

"Perhaps I'll like it better after they've rehearsed more," said Laurel. "I don't follow it at present."

"Here and there, it strikes me as limp," added Cobbett.

They sat down in the Judge's cabin. He poured them drinks. "Now," he said, "there are certain things to recognize here. Things I more or less expected to find."

"A mystery, Judge?" asked Laurel.

"Not so much that, if I expected to find them. How far are we from Jewett City?"

"Twelve or fifteen miles as the crow flies," estimated Cobbett. "And Jewett City is where that vampire family, the Rays, lived and died."

"Died twice, you might say," nodded Pursuivant, stroking his white moustache. "Back about a century and a quarter ago. And here's what might be a matter of Ray family history. I've been thinking about Chastel, whom once I greatly admired. About her full name."

"But she had only one name, didn't she?" asked Laurel.

"On the stage she used one name, yes. So did Bernhardt, so did Duse, so later did Garbo. But all of them had full names. Now, before we went to dinner, I made two telephone calls to theatrical historians I know. To learn Chastel's full name."

"And she had a full name," prompted Cobbett.

"Indeed she did. Her full name was Chastel Ray."

Cobbett and Laurel looked at him in deep silence.

"Not apt to be just coincidence," elaborated Pursuivant. "Now then, I gave you some keepsakes today."

"Here's mine," said Cobbett, pulling the foil-wrapped bit from his shirt pocket.

"And I have mine here," said Laurel, her hand at her throat. "In a little locket I have on this chain."

"Keep it there," Pursuivant urged her. "Wear it around your neck at all times. Lee, have yours always on your person. Those are garlic cloves, and you know what they're good for. You can also guess why I cut up a lot of garlic in our spaghetti for dinner."

"You think there's a vampire here," offered Laurel.

"A specific vampire." The judge took a deep breath into his broad chest. "Chastel. Chastel Ray."

"I believe it, too," declared Cobbett tonelessly, and Laurel nodded. Cobbett looked at the watch on his wrist.

"It's past one in the morning," he said. "Perhaps we'd all be better off if we had some sleep."

They said their good nights and Laurel and Cobbett walked to where their two doors stood side by side. Laurel put her key into the lock, but did not turn it at once. She peered across the moonlit street.

"Who's that over there?" she whispered. "Maybe I ought to say, what's that?"

Cobbett looked. "Nothing, you're just nervous. Good night, dear."

She went in and shut the door. Cobbett quickly crossed the street.

"Mr. Cobbett," said the voice of Gonda Chastel.

"I wondered what you wanted, so late at night," he said, walking close to her.

She had undone her dark hair and let it flow to her shoulders. She was, Cobbett thought, as beautiful a woman as he had ever seen.

"I wanted to be sure about you," she said. "That you'd respect your promise to me, not to go into the churchyard."

"I keep my promises, Miss Chastel."

He felt a deep, hushed silence all around them. Not even the leaves rustled in the trees.

"I had hoped you wouldn't venture even this far," she went on. "You and your friends are new in town, you might tempt her specially." Her eyes burned at him. "You know I don't mean that as a compliment."

She turned to walk away. He fell into step beside her. "But you're not afraid of her," he said.

"Of my own mother?"

"She was a Ray," said Cobbett. "Each Ray sapped the blood of his kinsmen. Judge Pursuivant told me all about it."

Again the gaze of her dark, brilliant eyes. "Nothing like that has ever happened between my mother and me." She stopped, and so did he. Her slim, strong hand took him by the wrist.

"You're wise and brave," she said. "I think you may have come here for a good purpose, not just about the show."

"I try to have good purposes."

The light of the moon soaked through the overhead branches as they walked on. "Will you come to my house?" she invited.

"I'll walk to the churchyard," replied Cobbett. "I said I wouldn't go into it, but I can stand at the edge."

"Don't go in."

"I've promised that I wouldn't, Miss Chastel."

She walked back the way they had come. He followed the street on under silent elms until he reached the border of the churchyard. Moonlight flecked and spattered the tombstones. Deep shadows lay like pools. He had a sense of being watched from within.

As he gazed, he saw movement among the graves. He could not define it, but it was there. He glimpsed, or fancied he glimpsed, a head, indistinct in outline as though swathed in dark fabric. Then another. Another. They huddled in a group, as though to gaze at him.

"I wish you'd go back to your quarters," said Gonda Chastel beside him. She had drifted after him, silent as a shadow herself.

"Miss Chastel," he said, "tell me something if you can. Whatever happened to the town or village of Griswold?"

"Griswold?" she echoed. "What's Griswold? That means gray woods."

"Your ancestor, or your relative, Horace Ray, came from Griswold to die in Jewett City. And I've told you that I knew your mother was born a Ray."

Her shining eyes seemed to flood upon him. "I didn't know that," she said. He gazed into the churchyard, at those hints of furtive movement.

"The hands of the dead reach out for the living," murmured Gonda Chastel.

"Reach out for me?" he asked.

"Perhaps for both of us. Just now, we may be the only living souls awake in Deslow." She gazed at him again. "But you're able to defend yourself, somehow."

"What makes you think that?" he inquired, aware of the clove of garlic in his shirt pocket.

"Because they — in the churchyard there — they watch, but they hold away from you. You don't invite them."

"Nor do you, apparently," said Cobbett.

"I hope you're not trying to make fun of me," she said, her voice barely audible.

"On my soul, I'm not."

"On your soul," she repeated. "Good night, Mr. Cobbett."

Again she moved away, tall and proud and graceful. He watched her out of sight. Then he headed back toward the motor court.

Nothing moved in the empty street. Only one or two lights shone here and there in closed shops. He thought he heard a soft rustle behind him, but did not look back.

As he reached his own door, he heard Laurel scream behind hers.

Judge Pursuivant sat in his cubicle, his jacket off, studying a worn little brown book. Skinner, said letters on the spine, and *Myths and Legends of Our Own Land*. He had read the passage so often that he could almost repeat it from memory:

"To lay this monster he must be taken up and burned; at least his heart must be; and he must be disinterred in the daytime when he is asleep and unaware."

There were other ways, reflected Pursuivant.

It must be very late by now, rather it must be early. But he had no intention of going to sleep. Not when stirrings of motion sounded outside, along the concrete walkway in front of his cabin. Did motion stand still, just beyond the door there? Pursuivant's great, veined hand touched the front of his shirt, beneath which a bag of garlic hung like an amulet. Garlic — was that enough? He himself was fond of garlic, judiciously employed in sauces and salads. But then, he could see himself in the mirror of the bureau yonder, could see his broad old face with its white sweep of mustache like a wreath of snow on a sill. It was a clear image of a face, not a calm face just then, but a determined one. Pursuivant smiled at it, with a glimpse of even teeth that were still his own.

He flicked up his shirt cuff and looked at his watch. Half past one, about. In June, even with daylight savings time, dawn would come early. Dawn sent vampires back to the tombs that were their melancholy refuges, "asleep and unaware," as Skinner had specified.

Putting the book aside, he poured himself a small drink of bourbon, dropped in cubes of ice and a trickle of water, and sipped. He had drunk several times during that day, when on most days he partook of only a single highball, by advice of his doctor; but just now he was grateful for the pungent, walnutty taste of the liquor. It was one of earth's natural things, a good companion when not abused. From the table he took a folder of scribbled notes. He looked at jottings from the works of Montague Summers.

These offered the proposition that a plague of vampires usually stemmed

from a single source of infection, a king or queen vampire whose feasts of blood drove victims to their graves, to rise in their turn. If the original vampires were found and destroyed, the others relaxed to rest as normally dead bodies. Bram Stoker had followed the same gospel when he wrote *Dracula*, and doubtless Bram Stoker had known. Pursuivant looked at another page, this time a poem copied from James Grant's curious *Mysteries of All Nations*. It was a ballad in archaic language, that dealt with baleful happenings in "The Towne of Peste" — Budapest?

*It was the Corpses that our Churchyardes filled
That did at midnight lumberr up our Stayres;
They suck'd our Bloud, the gorie Banquet swilled,
And harried everie Soule with hydeous Feares...*

Several verses down:

*They barr'd with Boltes of Iron the Churchyard-pale
To keep them out; but all this wold not doe;
For when a Dead-Man has learn'd to draw a naile,
He can also burst an iron Bolte in two.*

Many times Pursuivant had tried to trace the author of that verse. He wondered if it was not something quaintly confected not long before 1880, when Grant published his work. At any rate, the judge felt that he knew what it meant, the experience that it remembered.

He put aside the notes, too, and picked up his spotted walking stick. Clamping the balance of it firmly in his left hand, he twisted the handle with his right and pulled. Out of the hollow shank slid a pale, bright blade, keen and lean and edged on both front and back.

Pursuivant permitted himself a smile above it. This was one of his most cherished possessions, this silver weapon said to have been forged a thousand years ago by St. Dunstan. Bending, he spelled out the runic writing upon it:

Sic pereant omnes inimici tui, Domine

That was the end of the fiercely triumphant song of Deborah in the Book of Judges: So perish all thine enemies, O Lord. Whether the work of St. Dunstan or not, the metal was silver, the writing was a warrior's prayer. Silver and writing had proved their strength against evil in the past.

Then, outside, a loud, tremulous cry of mortal terror.

Pursuivant sprang out of his chair on the instant. Blade in hand, he fairly ripped his door open and ran out. He saw Cobbett in front of Laurel's door, wrenching at the knob, and hurried there like a man half his age.

"Open up, Laurel," he heard Cobbett call. "It's Lee out here!"

The door gave inward as Pursuivant reached it, and he and Cobbett pressed into the lighted room.

Laurel half-crouched in the middle of the door. Her trembling hand pointed to a rear window. "She tried to come in," Laurel stammered.

"There's nothing at that window," said Cobbett, but even as he spoke, there was. A face, pale as tallow, crowded against the glass. They saw wide, staring eyes, a mouth that opened and squirmed. Teeth twinkled sharply.

Cobbett started forward, but Pursuivant caught him by the shoulder. "Let me," he said, advancing toward the window, the point of his blade lifted.

The face at the window writhed convulsively as the silver weapon came against the pane with a clink. The mouth opened as though to shout, but no sound came. The face fell back and vanished from their sight.

"I've seen that face before," said Cobbett hoarsely.

"Yes," said Pursuivant. "At my hotel window. And since."

He dropped the point of the blade to the floor. Outside came a whirling rush of sound, like feet, many of them.

"We ought to wake up the people at the office," said Cobbett.

"I doubt if anyone in this little town could be wakened," Pursuivant told him evenly. "I have it in mind that every living soul, except the three of us, is sound asleep. Entranced."

"But out there —" Laurel gestured at the door, where something seemed to be pressing.

"I said, every living soul," Pursuivant looked from her to Cobbett. "Living," he repeated.

He paced across the floor, and with his point scratched a perpendicular line upon it. Across this he carefully drove a horizontal line, making a cross. The pushing abruptly ceased.

"There it is, at the window again," breathed Laurel.

Pursuivant took long steps back to where the face hovered, with black hair streaming about it. He scraped the glass with his silver blade, up and down, then across, making lines upon it. The face drew away. He moved to mark similar crosses on the other windows.

"You see," he said, quietly triumphant, "the force of old, old charms."

He sat down in a chair, heavily. His face was weary, but he looked at Laurel and smiled.

"It might help if we managed to pity those poor things out there," he said.

"Pity?" she almost cried out.

"Yes," he said, and quoted:

" '...Think how sad it must be
To thirst always for a scorned elixir,

The salt of quotidian blood.' ”

“I know that,” volunteered Cobbett. “It’s from a poem by Richard Wilbur, a damned unhappy poet.”

“Quotidian,” repeated Laurel to herself.

“That means something that keeps coming back, that returns daily,” Cobbett said.

“It’s a term used to refer to a recurrent fever,” added Pursuivant.

Laurel and Cobbett sat down together on the bed.

“I would say that for the time being we’re safe here,” declared Pursuivant. “Not at ease, but at least safe. At dawn, danger will go to sleep and we can open the door.”

“But why are we safe, and nobody else?” Laurel cried out. “Why are we awake, with everyone else in this town asleep and helpless?”

“Apparently because we all of us wear garlic,” replied Pursuivant patiently, “and because we ate garlic, plenty of it, at dinnertime. And because there are crosses — crude, but unmistakable — wherever something might try to come in. I won’t ask you to be calm, but I’ll ask you to be resolute.”

“I’m resolute,” said Cobbett between clenched teeth. “I’m ready to go out there and face them.”

“If you did that, even with the garlic,” said Pursuivant, “you’d last about as long as a pint of whiskey in a five-handed poker game. No, Lee, relax as much as you can, and let’s talk.”

They talked, while outside strange presences could be felt rather than heard. Their talk was of anything and everything but where they were and why. Cobbett remembered strange things he had encountered, in towns, among mountains, along desolate roads, and what he had been able to do about them. Pursuivant told of a vampire he had known and defeated in upstate New York, of a werewolf in his own Southern countryside. Laurel, at Cobbett’s urging, sang songs, old songs, from her own rustic home place. Her voice was sweet. When she sang “Round is the Ring,” faces came and hung like smudges outside the cross-scored windows. She saw, and sang again, an old Appalachian carol called “Mary She Heard a Knock in the Night.” The faces drifted away again. And the hours, too, drifted away, one by one.

“There’s a horde of vampires on the night street here, then.” Cobbett at last brought up the subject of their problem.

“And they lull the people of Deslow to sleep, to be helpless victims,” agreed Pursuivant. “About this show, *The Land Beyond the Forest*, mightn’t it be welcomed as a chance to spread the infection? Even a townful of sleepers couldn’t feed a growing community of blood drinkers.”

“If we could deal with the source, the original infection — ” began Cobbett.

"The mistress of them, the queen," said Pursuivant. "Yes. The one whose walking by night rouses them all. If she could be destroyed, they'd all die properly."

He glanced at the front window. The moonlight had a touch of slaty gray.

"Almost morning," he pronounced. "Time for a visit to her tomb."

"I gave my promise I wouldn't go there," said Cobbett.

"But I didn't promise," said Pursuivant, rising. "You stay here with Laurel."

His silver blade in hand, he stepped out into darkness from which the moon had all but dropped away. Overhead, stars were fading out. Dawn was at hand.

He sensed a flutter of movement on the far side of the street, an almost inaudible gibbering of sound. Steadily he walked across. He saw nothing along the sidewalk there, heard nothing. Resolutely he tramped to the churchyard, his weapon poised. More grayness had come to dilute the dark.

He pushed his way through the hedge of shrubs, stepped in upon the grass, and paused at the side of a grave. Above it hung an eddy of soft mist, no larger than the swirl of water draining from a sink. As Pursuivant watched, it seemed to soak into the earth and disappear. That, he said to himself, is what a soul looks like when it seeks to regain its coffin.

On he walked, step by weary, purposeful step, toward the central crypt. A ray of the early sun, stealing between heavily leafed boughs, made his way more visible. In this dawn, he would find what he would find. He knew that.

The crypt's door of open bars was held shut by its heavy padlock. He examined that lock closely. After a moment, he slid the point of his blade into the rusted keyhole and judiciously pressed this way, then that, and back again the first way. The spring creakily relaxed and he dragged the door open. Holding his breath, he entered.

The lid of the great stone vault was closed down. He took hold of the edge and heaved. The lid was heavy, but rose with a complaining grate of the hinges. Inside he saw a dark, closed coffin. He lifted the lid of that, too.

She lay there, calm-faced, the eyes half shut as though dozing.

"Chastel," said Pursuivant to her. "Not Gonda. Chastel."

The eyelids fluttered. That was all, but he knew that she heard what he said.

"Now you can rest," he said. "Rest in peace, really in peace."

He set the point of his silver blade at the swell of her left breast. Leaning both his broad hands upon the curved handle, he drove downward with all his strength.

She made a faint squeak of sound.

Blood sprang up as he cleared his weapon. More light shone in. He could see a dark moisture fading from the blade, like evaporating dew.

In the coffin, Chastel's proud shape shriveled, darkened. Quickly he slammed the coffin shut, then lowered the lid of the vault into place and went quickly out. He pushed the door shut again and fastened the stubborn old lock. As he walked back through the churchyard among the graves, a bird twittered over his head. More distantly, he heard the hum of a car's motor. The town was waking up.

In the growing radiance, he walked back across the street. By now, his steps were the steps of an old man, old and very tired.

Inside Laurel's cabin, Laurel and Cobbett were stirring instant coffee into hot water in plastic cups. They questioned the Judge with their tired eyes.

"She's finished," he said shortly.

"What will you tell Gonda?" asked Cobbett.

"Chastel was Gonda."

"But —"

"She was Gonda," said Pursuivant again, sitting down. "Chastel died. The infection wakened her out of her tomb, and she told people she was Gonda, and naturally they believed her." He sagged wearily. "Now that she's finished and at rest, those others — the ones she had bled, who also rose at night — will rest, too."

Laurel took a sip of coffee. Above the cup, her face was pale.

"Why do you say Chastel was Gonda?" she asked the Judge. "How can you know that?"

"I wondered from the very beginning. I was utterly sure just now."

"Sure?" said Laurel. "How can you be sure?"

Pursuivant smiled at her, the very faintest of smiles.

"My dear, don't you think a man always recognizes a woman he has loved?"

He seemed to recover his characteristic defiant vigor. He rose and went to the door and put his hand on the knob. "Now, if you'll just excuse me for a while."

"Don't you think we'd better hurry and leave?" Cobbett asked him. "Before people miss her and ask questions?"

"Not at all," said Pursuivant, his voice strong again. "If we're gone, they'll ask questions about us, too, possibly embarrassing questions. No, we'll stay. We'll eat a good breakfast, or at least pretend to eat it. And we'll be as surprised as the rest of them about the disappearance of their leading lady."

"I'll do my best," vowed Laurel.

"I know you will, my child," said Pursuivant, and went out the door.



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