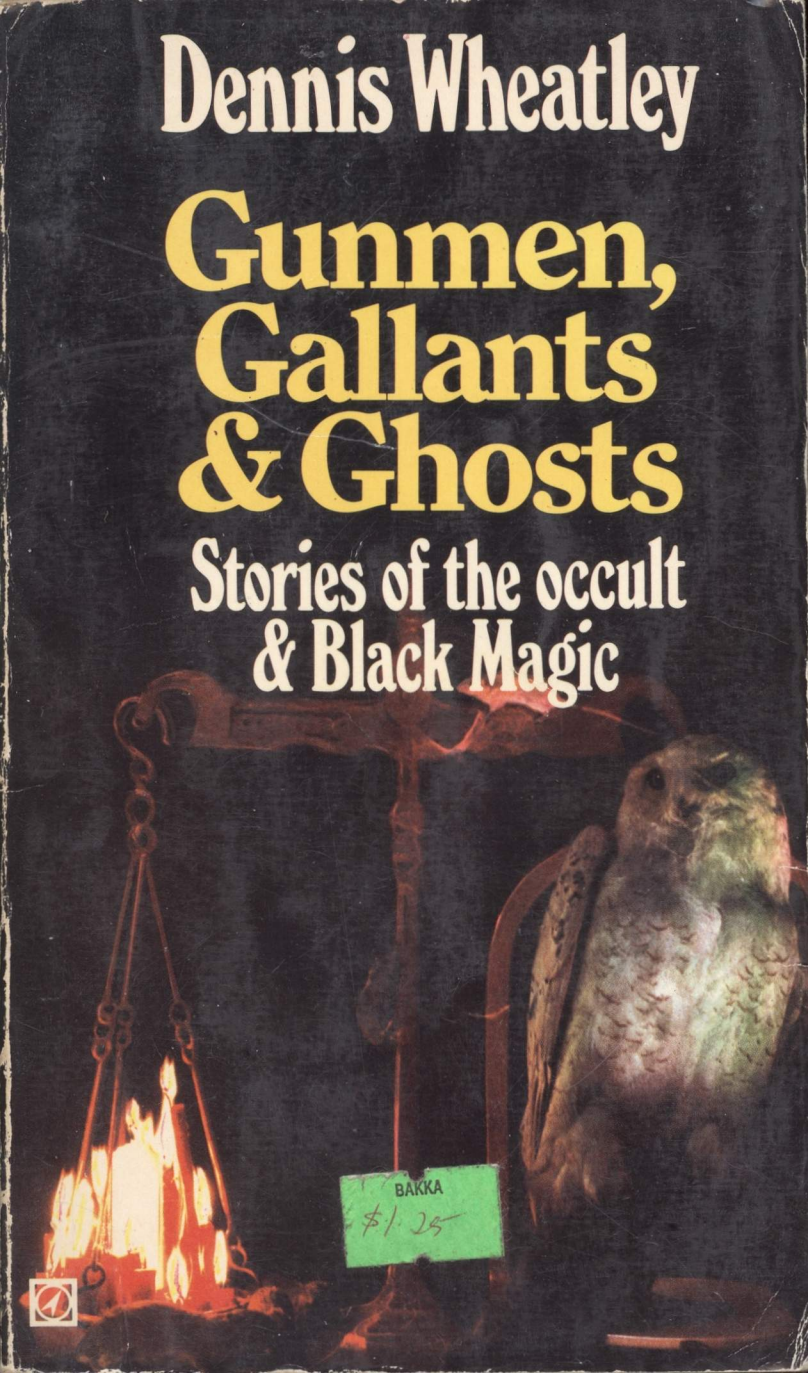
Dennis Wheatley

Gunmen, Gallants & Ghosts

Stories of the occult & Black Magic



GUNMEN, GALLANTS AND GHOSTS

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A mine of information about Black Magic, voodoo and the occult

BY DENNIS WHEATLEY

NOVELS

The Launching of Roger Brook
The Shadow of Tyburn Tree
The Rising Storm
The Man Who Killed the King
The Dark Secret of Josephine
The Rape of Venice
The Sultan's Daughter
The Wanton Princess
Evil in a Mask

The Scarlet Impostor
Faked Passports
The Black Baroness
V for Vengeance
Come Into My Parlour
Traitors' Gate
They Used Dark Forces

The Prisoner in the Mask
The Second Seal
Vendetta in Spain
Three Inquisitive People
The Forbidden Territory
The Devil Rides Out
The Golden Spaniard
Strange Conflict
Codeword—Golden Fleece
Dangerous Inheritance
Gateway to Hell

The Quest of Julian Day
The Sword of Fate
Bill for the Use of a Body

Black August
Contraband
The Island Where Time Stands Still
The White Witch of the South Seas

To the Devil—a Daughter
The Satanist

The Eunuch of Stamboul
The Secret War
The Fabulous Valley
Sixty Days to Live
Such Power is Dangerous
Uncharted Seas
The Man Who Missed the War
The Haunting of Toby Jugg
Star of Ill-Omen
They Found Atlantis
The Ka of Gifford Hillary
Curtain of Fear
Mayhem in Greece
Unholy Crusade

SHORT STORIES

Mediterranean Nights
Gunmen, Gallants and Ghosts

HISTORICAL

A Private Life of Charles II (*Illustrated by Frank C. Papé*)
Red Eagle (*The Story of the Russian Revolution*)

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL

Stranger than Fiction (*War Papers for the Joint Planning Staff*)
Saturdays with Bricks

IN PREPARATION

The Ravishing of Lady Mary Ware (*another Roger Brook story*)
The Devil and all his Works (*Illustrated in colour*)

Dennis Wheatley

Gunmen, Gallants and Ghosts

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DEDICATION

1933—1943

FOR

My darling wife

JOAN

As a very small acknowledgement of all the help she has given me in my ten years as an author.

D.W.

Contents

A Few Words From the Author

On September 4th, 1939, I offered my services free for the duration of the war to the announced, but as yet unformed, Ministry of Information. As my work had already been translated into nineteen languages and I was over forty, to use such talents as I have been blessed with on propaganda seemed the best way in which I could serve my country. Most fortunately, as it turned out, not one of the three applications I made for enrolment received even the courtesy of a reply.

For the following nine months, much disgruntled at being unable to find suitable war employment, in contrast to my family, every member of which had done so, I wrote the first of my Gregory Sallust spy thrillers—*The Scarlet Impostor*. Then, in May 1940, Hitler, of all people, secured me a break. The Germans' victorious advance to the Channel ports and the imminent collapse of the French army made it appear as good as certain that his next move would be the invasion of Britain. People in high places began taking urgent measures to oppose enemy landings and showed sudden willingness to consider useful suggestions from any quarter. My wife was working in MI.5 and suggested that I might produce a few ideas. In consequence, I wrote a paper on *Resistance to Invasion*.

Shortly afterwards, fantastic as it may seem, I was told that all three of the Chiefs-of-Staff had read my paper.

Of the hectic months that followed I have given an account in my book *Stranger than Fiction*. But to put it briefly: between June 1940 and the autumn of 1941 I wrote twenty papers, amounting to half a million words, on such diverse problems as *Village Defence, How to Keep Turkey Neutral* and *Strategy in the Mediterranean* at the request of members of the Joint Planning Staff of the War Cabinet. Extraordinary to relate, these papers were read even by His Majesty the King, who did me the honour to send me his commendation upon them.

As this work was entirely voluntary, during that period I remained my own master; so between writing my War Papers I was able to continue chronicling Gregory's exploits against the Nazis in *Faked Passports, The Black Baroness* and *V for Vengeance*. But in December 1941 I received a truly great reward for having burned so much midnight oil while thinking up real ways of bringing pain and grief to our enemies. Hitherto, regulations had forbidden my being given any secret information on the conduct of the war; but it was then decided that my work would be of more value if I were put into uniform and so become eligible to receive full particulars of our resources and intentions. This led to a special appointment being created for me on the Future Operations Planning Staff, and my being the only civilian ever directly commissioned to become a member of that strategic stratosphere.

For the following three years I worked in the famous fortress basement as one of Sir Winston Churchill's Staff Officers and made my very small contribution to planning all our great operations of war.

I count myself extremely fortunate to have been privileged to help in formulating Cover Plans and other devices calculated to mystify and mislead our enemies, but such work was continuous and exhausting. It entailed not only endless conferences with officers of the three

Services and Foreign Office officials, but also, in order to be able to express a well-founded opinion at such meetings, an up-to-date knowledge of every aspect of the war.

This entailed reading many thousands of words every day—Minutes from the Prime Minister; the minutes of the War Cabinet, of the Defence Committee, of the Chiefs-of-Staff Committee, of the Joint Intelligence Committee and of the Inter-Service Security Board; Foreign Office telegrams 'In' and 'Out', the Intelligence summaries of the three Services, and, during the course of the week, a dozen other papers such as Directives to Force Commanders, despatches from the battle-fronts, operations under consideration, submarine sinkings, state of tank production, food resources in Britain, civilian morale, estimated arrival of U.S. Forces, analyses of the effect of bombing on German cities, measures to be taken in the event of gas warfare, bacteriological warfare and bombardment by Hitler's secret weapon—and so on and so on.

It will, therefore, be readily understood that during those years I could give neither thought nor time to writing a novel. But my publishers were insistent that by some means I should endeavour to keep my name before the public. Somewhat dubiously, therefore, I agreed to collect together a number of pieces; short stories published and unpublished, extracts from my two biographies that made stories in themselves and other items, for publication in volume form; and when we examined the material we found that we had enough for two volumes.

To add a little to the interest of this hotch-potch, I managed to find time to write a brief introduction to each piece, telling how I had come to write it; so, to some extent, these notes are a record of several periods of my life. The two volumes were published with the titles of *Mediterranean Nights* and *Gunmen, Gallants and Ghosts.*

Before the war, it was generally accepted by publishers that a volume of short stories by a well-known author would sell only one sixth of the copies that could be sold of a novel by him. Having little hope that these would do more than bring my name back temporarily into the review columns and even feeling distinctly uneasy about the reception of such patchy work, my surprise and delight can be imagined when *Mediterranean Nights* sold more copies in its first six months than had my last full-length book. In that period it earned me over £2,000 and *Gunmen, Gallants and Ghosts* proved equally successful.

It will be remarked that nearly half the stories in *Mediterranean Nights* form a series, from which the book takes its title. This is no accident as, years ago, when I was writing these stories, I chose their localities in accordance with a scheme to collect them, after they had been published in magazines, and republish them under that title in book form. But alas, like many another plan, it achieved only partial fulfilment. There should also have been stories set in Marseilles, Naples, Alexandria, Istanbul, Gibraltar, Malaga and half a dozen other romantic places, but these never got written, or were later used as the scenes in my full-length novels. Instead, a few that are not strictly Mediterranean territory are included together with a series of six short spy stories, a one-act play and my earliest effort as an author—age eleven—which readers may find amusing.

Since the Second World War, I have written very few short stories, but to the new Arrow Edition we have added six stories that have never before appeared between the covers of a book.

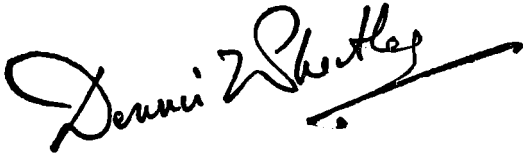
In *Gunmen, Gallants and Ghosts* there is a series of stories generally entitled 'The Ghost Hunter', which have the same central character. As in real life that character was a most exceptional person I have, in the introduction

to the first of the series, given some particulars about him. Originally it was my intention to write a dozen or more Ghost Hunter stories and later publish them in book form. But, unfortunately, other work interfered, so only four got written. However, this volume includes three other stories of the occult, and eight stories about crooks or spies—four of which are new to this collection—and a passage which makes a story in itself from each of my biographies, *A Private Life of Charles II* and *Red Eagle,* an account of the Russian Revolution; both of which were out of print for many years owing to their type having been destroyed in the blitz on Plymouth.

In addition, in this new Arrow Edition, we have added seven articles on Black Magic, the unexpurgated versions of six of which have never before appeared in print.

The initial success of these two collections must, in part at least, be attributed to the fact that by 1942 and '43, the blackout had denied people many normal recreations for so long that there had been an enormous increase in the demand for books. Yet the sequel was even more gratifying. These two volumes have had to be reprinted again and again. Over twenty years they must have provided a few hours of entertainment for tens of thousands of people, for the demand for them in hard-back covers has never waned.

That is my publishers' ample justification for now offering them to the public in a paper-back edition. If the reader of this collection, whether it be *Mediterranean Nights* or *Gunmen, Gallants and Ghosts,* enjoys these oddments of my invention, I hope that he or she will equally enjoy its companion volume.



P.S. In this introduction I have mentioned my Gregory Sallust spy stories. In 1946 and 1958 the publication of *Come into My Parlour* and *Traitor's Gate* continued his adventures as a secret agent, but only up to 1942. So many people later wrote to me insisting that I should carry on the chronicle of the battle of wits with the loathsome Gruppenführer Grauber up to the end of the war, that I obeyed the wishes of these faithful readers. Shortly after this volume appeared for the first time my account of the last round between Gregory and the Nazis and Hitler's desperate reliance on Black Magic to save him from defeat was published under the title of *They Used Dark Forces*. I have every hope that readers have found it even more gripping than its predecessors.

STORY I

This is the first of the Ghost Hunter series; and, as I have mentioned in the General Introduction, their central character is based on the personality of a most exceptional man whom I came to know well.

He was the only man I have ever met who could foretell the future. I do not mean in a vague, indeterminate way which might be interpreted by the credulous to fit in, more or less, with whatever befell; but as a genuine seer who could describe actual scenes many months before they occurred and give definite dates for the fulfilment of his prophecies.

For the purpose of the stories I have called him Neils Orsen but his real name was Henry Dewhirst and any charm both of appearance and character which I may have succeeded in giving to Neils Orsen is derived from my memories of his wise and greatly gifted original.

I visited Dewhirst some five or six times between 1928 and 1932 and I think the professional procedure of this great occultist is worthy of record. He always told his visitors that, if they wished to send their friends to see him, such friends should ring up and ask for an appointment, without mentioning their own names or that of their introducer. In this way he covered himself from any suggestion that he had found out by normal means about the prospective client before his first visit.

Dewhirst's flat was a bright, sunny place on the top floor of a tall building. It was furnished in a comfortable modern style and for his work he used neither crystal, cards, tea-leaves nor any other aids to focussing the subconscious which are normally necessary to less gifted practitioners of the secret arts. When I arrived he sat me down in an armchair on one side of the fireplace, gave me a cigarette and taking the chair opposite began to talk in a swift, rambling monologue; having told me that I was not to reply to any questions he might put to me. Such questions as he did ask he answered himself immediately afterwards, somewhat on the following lines.

'Are you an only child? Yes, you are—at least, if you have a sister there is a big gap in your ages and you see little of her.'

'Have you a sister a lot younger than yourself? Yes, you have, but only one and no brothers and for all practical purposes you were brought up as an only child.'

The monologue was evidently a tuning-in process because from a vague groping to begin with, in which pointless remarks about the weather, travel, politics and trade were mingled, it soon crystallised into a series of statements, made with complete confidence, about myself, my history and my personal affairs. Quite early in the first interview he told me that to 'see' the names of people who were strangers to him was beyond his powers but that he thought that my initials were D.I.W. which was pretty good, as the middle one is, actually, Y. Later he reminded me of events in my childhood which had loomed large at the time but were known to very few and had been almost forgotten by myself.

Towards the end of this session he said that I should marry again but not for some years to come; that I had not yet met my second wife; that she would be the sister of a friend but that we should meet through complete strangers and in connection with a business matter. He

saw us sitting in a wood-panelled room at an oval table. This meeting took place with no prearrangement some four years later, exactly as Dewhirst had foretold, even to the manner in which my future wife did her hair!

The second thing on which he always insisted was that I should become an author and one who would win fame in that profession. At the time I was a wine-merchant in a business which I owned and I was making a good income, but still Dewhirst never ceased to urge me to forsake the glass for the book, an idea which seemed crazy to me who, as far as I knew, had no gift for writing. At each interview he never failed to ask me:

'Well, have you written anything yet? No. I can see that you haven't—but you must!'

The last time I saw him, early in June 1932, he was already a sick man. There was nothing organically wrong with him as far as the doctors could make out but it seemed to me that his spirit was brighter than ever and gradually devouring the frail frame which was such an inadequate prison. It was the first time that I had seen him for nearly two years. They were the years of the great slump and I had been desperately trying to save my business as many others were trying to save theirs. My efforts were not altogether unsuccessful but resulted in many changes so that when at last the storm subsided I found myself with less money but more leisure than I had had before. It was some months later that I went to see Dewhirst. His face lit up when he saw me come in at the door.

'You've written a book at last,' he cried. 'I know it. I can see it!'

'Yes,' I admitted. 'I've written a book and sent it to a literary agent but goodness knows if it will ever find a publisher.'

He laughed. 'It will. Nothing can stop you now that you are on your real road. You will sell books by the million and be read in every country under the sun.'

He must have sensed my doubts that his prophecy could be a true one because he proceeded to dot the 'i's' and cross the 't's'. 'A man whose name begins with H will be a great help to you in your literary career and good news about this book of yours will reach you towards the end of next month. You should hear that it has been taken on the 26th of August.'

Some seven weeks later I was on holiday in Normandy. The 26th of August came and went without a word about my book. But, on the 28th, I had a letter from my agent saying that Mr. Walter Hutchinson's firm had made an offer for it. The letter had been sent to my home address and forwarded on. The postmark was the 25th, and if I had been in London it would have reached me on the 26th.

In recording these strange facts it is only right to add that I believe seers such as Dewhirst to be very rare beings. While by no means a seeker-out of 'fortune' tellers I have, like most people, consulted quite a number in my time, mainly for amusement; but I have never found another who could foretell the future except in, possibly lucky, generalisations.

With the idea of giving variety to this series I decided that some of Neils's 'cases' should prove to be genuine hauntings and that the others should turn out to be fakes arranged by people who had some axe to grind and therefore be capable of a natural explanation ascertainable by normal detection methods.

When you have read enough of each case to be as fully informed of the situation as Neils, it may give you additional amusement to lay aside the book for a moment and see if you can guess if he is up against a fake or a real haunting, before reading on to the dénouement.

The Case of the Thing that Whimpered

It would have been hard to find two men more different in appearance, character, or way of living than the pair who were crossing the sunny lawn of old Mark Hemmingway's home at Oyster Bay, Long Island.

Bruce, the old man's nephew, six-feet-two, with thick black hair and a strong handsome face, was an astute, hard-headed, international lawyer, whose firm had offices in London, Paris, and New York. His companion, Neils Orsen, a frail little man with a big, domed head, and enormous pale-blue eyes like those of a Siamese cat, was a Swede with adequate private means who had chosen to devote his life to psychical research.

They had not discovered until three days out from England in the S.S. *Orion* that, when in London, they both occupied chambers in the Temple. It was Orsen's first trip to the States and Bruce, with that spontaneous hospitality for which Americans are famous, had insisted that he should spend at least a week at Oyster Bay to see what a real American home was like. At first, Orsen had been rather shy about accepting, but, little knowing that his invitation might result in that diminutive Swede nearly losing his life, Bruce had insisted, and they had come straight out to Long Island after the liner docked that morning.

Bruce nodded towards a plump, grey-haired figure reclining in a hammock outside the summer-house. 'There's Uncle Mark, taking his usual Saturday afternoon nap.'

'Then please don't let's disturb him,' Orsen said tactfully.

'No, we won't do that; tea will be out in a minute and he'll wake up then.'

They lowered themselves quietly into basket chairs and while Orsen leant back closing his eyes, content to enjoy the balmy scented air of the garden, the big American bent down to pick up a newspaper from the grass. Bruce had a passion for facts and could never resist the opportunity to acquire information.

His eye roved over the headlines. There was more trouble in Europe, but that was nothing new; things had looked pretty black there for some time. Steel King Morgenfeld had ante-ed up the reward for the return of his kidnapped daughter, the six-year-old Angela, to half a million dollars. She had been missing now for close on two months, so the kidnapping racket was still alive in spite of all that Dewey and his G-men had done to kill it. From her photographs she seemed a lovely kid. There was the usual crop of heat-wave suicides in New York, and among them Bruce was shocked to see the name of Una Kotzner, a stenographer who had once worked for him. The poor girl had thrown herself out of a twenty-fifth storey window.

Suddenly Uncle Mark began to make weird noises in his sleep

'Wake him,' said Orsen, opening his eyes. 'Wake him at once.'

Bruce leant over and shook the hammock slightly. 'Wake up, Uncle. Wake up!'

Mark Hemmingway growled, sat up and blinked at them.

'Hello! So you've arrived. It's good to see you again, Bruce; and this'll be Mr. Orsen whom you radioed me about, eh?'

Orsen smiled. 'I am sorry if we disturbed you, sir, but you were having a bad dream, were you not?'

'Bad dream! Why, yes. How did you know?'

'That was not difficult—the noise you were making. But I am considered quite an authority on "dreams" and

I will try to interpret it if you care to tell me what it was about.'

'It's that confounded warehouse. I can't get the place out of my thoughts.'

His nephew looked puzzled. 'Warehouse?'

'Yes, yes, warehouse. But never mind my troubles. I don't want to bore Mr. Orsen with them the moment he's arrived, and the dream was only a nightmare jumble, anyhow.'

'His real speciality is ghost-hunting,' Bruce grinned, 'and though I don't think he'll find any spooks round here I hope we'll be able to give him a good time.'

'We'll certainly do our best,' came the cordial response. 'As far as ghosts go, though, I just don't believe in such things, although I've had cause enough to believe in anything these last few weeks.'

'Thanks, Mr. Hemmingway,' Orsen replied good-humouredly. 'It is most kind of you to receive me in your lovely home. But what you say naturally excites my curiosity. I am not surprised that you don't believe in ghosts, because genuine psychical manifestations are very rare. The things that people take to be ghosts are nearly always hallucinations or some form of trickery produced for a specific purpose. Do tell me what it is that has recently caused you so much worry.'

'It's the ghastly series of events that have taken place in this darned warehouse that I was dreaming about just now.'

Bruce sat back and lit a cigarette. 'Let's have the murky details.'

His uncle hesitated for a moment, then, glancing quizzically at the stranger, he began: 'As Bruce may have told you, I'm a director of one of the biggest stores in New York. In recent months we have had to take a new warehouse in East 20th Street. It's not a good location, since it's a long way from the Store and situated among

blocks of poor tenement houses down on the lower East Side, but we needed it quickly and it was the best proposition our agents could find. The building stands ten storeys high, and the night-watchman occupies two rooms on the top floor; the foreman's office and a sitting-room. These are connected by a short gallery, one side of which is the outer wall and the other is open except for a single hand-rail so that the guard can look down upon the whole of the main warehouse. The two rooms and the gallery are built on a platform which is only accessible from the ground by an iron staircase. I'm giving you these details because the happenings in this place have provided a riddle which the smartest "dicks" at Central have failed to solve; but stop me if you're bored.'

'No, no; please go on.'

'Right, then. The morning after we took the place over the night-watchman was found on the ground floor bruised and battered, his ribs broken in, and half-dead. There had been no burglary; all the doors and windows were still locked, the burglar alarm had not rung, yet somehow this unfortunate man had been attacked while he was going his rounds and mauled in the most savage manner by someone or something possessing incredible strength.'

'Something! Oh, come, Uncle Mark! We don't have ghosts in New York,' Bruce interrupted, a half-smile twisting his mouth. 'What did the man say when he came round?'

'The poor fellow could tell us very little; the last thing he remembered was just having left the sitting-room to make his midnight round. He says that he paused a moment outside because he thought he had heard a curious whining sound like that of an animal in pain, when suddenly the whole place seemed to dissolve—that's how he described it—and he found himself hurtling through the air to crash upon the concrete. He knew nothing more

until he recovered consciousness in hospital.'

'Surely he can give some description of the thing that attacked him?' Bruce broke in.

'No. In the dim light he saw nothing. He had no time to look round; he says his legs gave way under him and he was flung with awful force forward and downward.'

'That doesn't make sense.'

'It's the best description he could give us, and we were lucky to get that, as his brain was affected by his ghastly experience.' Mark Hemmingway paused as two servants approached with tea trays. When they had gone and he had poured out for his guests, he went on:

'But that's not the half of it. We put a second night-watchman in, and on the third night of his stay he was found just like the other, only this man's neck was broken in addition to other terrible injuries, so he had no tale to tell.'

'And the police, what did they say?' Orsen asked.

'Their search revealed absolutely nothing; there was not a single trace of any living thing ever having entered the building after it had been closed for the night. They did advance one theory, however. It was this: that as the place had been unoccupied for nearly three years before we took it over a bunch of gangsters might have been using it for illicit purposes; and by these attacks on night-watchmen hoped to scare the new tenants away so that they might continue to operate there undisturbed. That's O.K. as a theory, but the "dicks" could not produce one jot of proof that the warehouse had ever been used for anything, and although hundreds of people who live in that congested neighbourhood were questioned not one of them could remember ever having seen any van which might contain stolen goods drive up to the place either by day or night until we arrived.'

'Why should they?' Bruce shrugged. 'People who live down on the lower East Side don't generally regard the

cops as their blood brothers and if a gang *is* operating there no one who knows of it is going to ask deliberately for a slug in his guts.'

'That's so. Yes, I guess you're right about that. Anyhow, after the death of the second night-watchman it was mighty hard to find another. However, two days ago we engaged a big buck nigger who knew nothing of the history of the place. This morning he was found living, but in one helluva state; his face bashed in, one arm wrenched and broken behind his back, and three ribs smashed. It was just as though some giant force had picked him up and battered him against the warehouse floor like a toy. In hospital they brought him round; he could scarcely talk and the only thing the Police Captain could get out of him as he rolled scared eyeballs in his bandaged face was: "Something whimpered at me —something whimpered, and then—oh, Lordie!—I were flung right through the air." '

'So they both heard the peculiar whimpering,' Orsen said thoughtfully. 'What did the Police Chief have to say about that?'

'Nothing—couldn't account for it at all. They can't even establish yet the exact spot where the attacks occurred. The first chap doesn't *remember* going down to the main warehouse by the iron stairs; but that doesn't mean much, as there were no signs of a struggle in the gallery and all three bodies were found down below. One of the younger of the men who're on the job did advance a theory this morning, though he was pretty shy about it; he suggested that the place might be haunted and that this is the work of some sort of devil. Naturally it was greeted by ribald laughter from the rest, but, quite honestly, I have a nasty feeling that the boy may be right. No human has the strength to batter men to pulp like that. Even if he had, they would remember something

of what had happened to them. So, there it is,' the old man finished wearily.

'I see,' Neils Orsen nodded. 'Of course there are rare cases when such manifestations of embodied evil do exist; but I find myself inclined to believe the first theory, that your warehouse has been used for illicit purposes and that somebody is particularly anxious to terrorise you into giving it up. . . . Still, I'd very much like to investigate. May I take on the duties of night-watchman tonight?'

'Good gracious, no! You're my guest; and in any case I wouldn't hear of—well, anyone like yourself spending a night in that place alone.'

Orsen smiled. 'I see you're thinking of my size, Mr. Hemmingway. But "forewarned is forearmed", and I should carry a gun. We could have a police guard posted outside the building and if a gang is at the bottom of it my shots would bring instant help; while if it really is an entity from the "Outer Circle" I'm far more capable of dealing with such things than the toughest policeman in New York.'

'No, no. You've never been up against the sort of bad men we have on this side. They're killers and they'd bump you off before the police even got through the door. Tell you what I'll do, though, since you're so interested; I'll take you and Bruce to have a look round the place tomorrow afternoon.'

The three of them, accompanied by a Police Lieutenant, made a careful inspection of the warehouse but their search revealed nothing fresh. The Lieutenant felt convinced that the attacks had taken place on the floor of the warehouse, but Orsen was inclined to think that they had occurred while the watchman was up in the gallery, because the only man who could give even a partially coherent account of what had happened had no recollection of having come down the iron stairs.

For this reason it was up in the gallery that he erected the scientific apparatus he had brought with him. This consisted of two cameras with flashlights and trip-wires which would set them off if anyone crossed the gallery, and a sound-recording machine of his own invention, the mechanism of which was so sensitive that, he assured them, it could even pick up voices from the astral plane.

The Police Lieutenant watched his preparation with open scorn, while old man Hemmingway and Bruce only hid their scepticism out of politeness; but Orsen remained quite unperturbed, declaring with great confidence that whether the monster were ghost or man he meant to find it.

On the following morning they visited the warehouse again. The fastenings of the door and windows showed not the least signs of having been tampered with—yet Orsen's two cameras and his sound machine were no longer up in the gallery; they lay smashed to pieces on the floor below.

With a rueful shrug the little Swede began to collect the bits and with Bruce's aid put them all in a sack. Back at Oyster Bay, with considerable difficulty they managed to piece the plates together and develop them. Both had been exposed but both were completely blank. The celluloid spool of the sound machine was still intact and on another machine Orsen tested it.

For a moment a low, heartrending, sobbing cry wavered through the pleasantly sunny room, filling it with the cold breath of evil; then the sound ceased abruptly.

'Well, the watchmen certainly didn't imagine that!' said Bruce with a nervous laugh.

'No,' Orsen's large, pale-blue eyes filled with a sudden light; 'and that's not the sort of noise a gangster makes when he's about to murder someone. I really do believe now that we're on the track of an Ab-human.'

'What sort of horror would that be?'

'It's not a ghost in the ordinary sense at all. By that I mean it is not the spirit of a departed human which is earthbound, but a disembodied force—something that has groped its way up out of the Great Depths and found a gateway by which it can get back into this world. Such manifestations are very rare but to a scientist like myself incredibly intriguing. Wild horses cannot prevent me now from going back to that warehouse this evening and passing the night there.'

'I'll not have you do that alone,' Bruce said quickly.

'I shall be delighted to have your company,' Orsen smiled; and when Mark Hemmingway got home from his office he, all against his will, had to give way to the frail little Swede's determination.

Orsen made many careful preparations for the night's vigil, because he knew that he and Bruce might be called upon to face grave danger. Both carried guns in case the ghost proved to be a murderous human after all, but both also went equipped with talismans of proved power against the evils that affect the spirit. Bruce was half-inclined to laugh at their rituals of personal purification which Orsen performed on both their bodies; it seemed such childish mumbo-jumbo. But the little man was so serious about it all that Bruce had no difficulty in restraining his levity.

At nine o'clock they made their way through the silent warehouse. The place was sparsely lit and every packing-case seemed to throw the shadow of some vast and horrible monster after their echoing footsteps.

Bruce shivered. 'Brrr—I don't envy any man who has to stay here all night, haunted or not.'

'It'll be more cheerful upstairs in the watchman's sitting-room,' Orsen murmured, and when they had climbed the iron staircase he began to outline his plans.

'I mean to go round the whole place every hour but I want you to remain in this room, Bruce. You're not to

leave it whatever happens. You'll stay by the door and keep the gallery outside covered with your gun and protect my back each time I go downstairs. If you see so much as a shadow—shoot instantly. Light will always drive back the powers of Darkness, at least temporarily, and the flash of your gun will give me sufficient respite to pronounce an adjuration.'

At ten Orsen made his first round. Standing in the doorway of the sitting-room Bruce covered the gallery until his frail little friend had disappeared into the shadows, then relaxing, he returned to his seat by the empty grate. A quarter of an hour later Orsen noiselessly reappeared and Bruce started nervously to his feet, exclaiming : 'Well?'

'No; nothing.'

Conversation was difficult. The awful silence seemed to close in round them forbidding even the sacrilege of a whisper. The sun had beaten down all day on the roof under which they sat and the heat was stifling. Both men were sitting in their shirt sleeves.

The minutes dragged on and outside they could hear the gentle hum of traffic beating like the pulse of a giant. The ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece sounded loud and defiant and Bruce felt his hands growing clammy. Eleven came at last, and once again the little Swede went out into the eerie gloom beyond the friendly sitting-room while Bruce covered him from the doorway. Once again he returned with nothing to report.

Time seemed to stand still. Bruce suddenly began to think of night-clubs—and dancing. Only a few miles away up-town, people were laughing and talking without a care in the world. They would later go home, tired and contented, to sleep in warm, comfortable beds whilst he sat waiting for some horrible unknown thing to come out of semi-darkness and maul him with ruthless savag-

ery, finally casting him away like some broken plaything. He might never again feel the warmth of the Miami sun on his sea-wetted body! Never again feel the pride of having won a difficult lawsuit; never again know the intoxication of flying his Tiger-Moth, high over forest and plain to some gay week-end party.

He shook himself. He was by no means a coward and if a gun or fists could have talked there would have been no fear in his heart, but the calm, clever little man opposite him sincerely believed in apparitions, had even told him stories of their awful power against humans, and although when he had first heard them, lounging comfortably in the bar of the S.S. *Orion*, he had laughed disbelievingly, tonight, sitting here in this place of monstrous shadows and unknown sounds, an icy hand seemed to clutch at his nerves drawing them taut as the strings of a violin. The minutes crept on. Suddenly Orsen began to fidget, long tapering fingers tapping on his knees, and Bruce watched him with quick apprehension; then a low whimpering sob broke the stillness of the quiet room.

Instantly Orsen leapt to his feet and ran to the door calling aloud some Latin phrase from an ancient exorcism. Bruce grabbed his gun and followed. As Orsen stepped out on to the gallery the whole structure seemed to give way beneath him like an oubliette. The floor was falling at a sharp angle. He staggered. His legs gave way under him, and he was violently catapulted forward into space.

At the same instant Bruce, still on the threshold of the, sitting-room, had seen that as the floor of the gallery tilted so the wall behind moved downward at right angles to it. Another moment and the slab of wall falling outward would fill the place where the gallery floor had been. In the dark cavity behind the falling wall Bruce glimpsed a shadowy shape. His finger closed upon the trigger of his automatic. The pistol spat and spat with

lurid flame until the magazine was empty, its reports echoing like thunder round the dark warehouse. There was a coughing gasp and the slab of wall began to fall back again, bringing the floor of the gallery up with it.

'Neils! Neils!' Bruce yelled, peering into the semi-darkness. To his intense relief a cry came back to him. By the Grace of God, which he would have termed the Decree of the Lords of Light, Orsen had managed to clutch the single rail of the gallery as he was pitched outwards. It was a frightful moment as he clung there, suspended by one hand, eighty feet above the concrete floor below; but as the slab of wall fell back into place the floor of the gallery moved with it, carrying him up again to safety. Bruce, his face grey and streaming with sweat, pulled him into the sitting-room and for a few minutes they both stood there panting.

When they had recovered they set to work investigating the hidden entrance. With the aid of a crowbar they managed to lever down the block of wall and with horror saw the flooring of the gallery automatically falling away as they did so.

'That's what happened to the unfortunate night-watchmen!' Orsen murmured grimly. 'An eighty-foot drop! No wonder they remembered nothing and were bashed to pieces.'

'Come on! Let's see what's in here,' Bruce whispered, pointing to the black cavity the opening of the wall had left. As he stepped forward his foot touched something. Flashing his torch he bent down and saw that it was the body of a man. Together they dragged it out into the light. It was not a pretty sight. The victim had obviously harboured an intense distrust of soap and water; he was bleeding profusely from several bullet wounds and was quite dead.

'I guess I must have killed him,' Bruce said slowly. 'I wonder what his game was.'

'I wonder. Evidently he's been coming and going to this secret room for some time and entering it by a trap-door; then when your uncle's people moved in he thought he'd scare them away by killing off your night-watchmen. He just had to wait for the poor wretches to begin their midnight round and then pull the lever. Too simple!'

Suddenly the pathetic whimpering came again. Bruce felt the hair prickle on the back of his scalp but Orsen calmly switched on his torch and flashed it round the secret room. Its beam fell upon a child crouching, terrified, against some old sacks.

'Angela Morgenfeld!' Bruce gasped. In two strides he had reached her, and picking the frail, half-starved little thing up in his arms he cried: 'Orsen, d'you realise—this is the millionaire's kid daughter the gangsters snatched over two months ago!'

He laughed then with mingled relief and excitement. 'That racketeer I killed must have been coming in every night over the roof to feed her. And this poor poppet is your great Ab-human monster.'

Orsen smiled. 'I would rather have found her, though, than the most interesting psychic phenomena. But wait till we are back in England next month and I will show you a real ghost, sure as I am a Dutchman.'

'You're not, you're a Swede!' Bruce laughed. 'But you don't often slip up on the English language, and anyway I'll be with you.'

STORY II

When I first left the cares of a business behind me and settled down to writing, the subconscious urge of years must have been released, for plots and characters simply tumbled over each other in my mind demanding expression far quicker than I could put pen to paper.

In the year 1932, while my affairs were gradually adjusting themselves, I wrote three full-length thrillers: *Three Inquisitive People, The Forbidden Territory,* and *Such Power is Dangerous*: also a biography of Charles II, *Old Rowley,* and some fifteen short stories.

So enthusiastic was I about my new occupation that I was willing to try my inexperienced hand on any subject. The vaguest suggestion from one of my friends resulted in the rapid hatching of yet another plot. This one was born at a dinner party given by Alan now Lord Sainsbury and his wife Doreen. They lived in a lovely house in Chelsea. He was interested in politics—she in the Ballet. He was a gourmet and she a most charming hostess. Conversation at their table was always good, which did not mean that it was necessarily serious. It was after one of these dinners that Doreen remarked in her lazy drawl:

'I thought of the *most* lovely title for a story the other day. I am sure it has *enormous* possibilities, though I can't think *what* they are. Dennis, do write a story called:

Orchids on Monday

'I don't 'old wiv it, and what I says I means,' Mr. Horatio Nelson Clegg's husky voice was emphatic as he eyed his small companion. 'Why can't 'e come darn 'ere?—that's what I wants ter know—take 'is pint wiv us like a reel pal and give us the strite abart the 'ole business, 'stead o' sending 'is stoopid messiges. 'E'll make a mucker one day—you mark my words.'

' 'Ow come off it, 'oratio,' the smaller man flicked over the pages of his little black book with a grimy finger. He spoke impatiently, his hair was ginger, and his eyes close set. 'Come off it,' he repeated in his cockney whine, 'brains never was your strong point—'e's a toff that what 'e is, and 'e can't afford to be seen arand wiv chaps like us. 'E's on the level—so what's the odds?'

Perhaps there was some truth in the suggestion about the limitations of Mr. Horatio Nelson Clegg's supply of cerebral matter. His heavy jowl and low receding forehead were features which are rarely seen in senior wranglers or leading counsel, but he was a man who understood his own particular business. With the accuracy born of long practice he spat on the exact spot where he had spat several times before, closed one rheumy eye, and said hoarsely, 'I never did 'old wiv 'is way of doing things. Flowers is fer funerals.'

. . . . .

'Allan, darling, we can give Doreen a lift, can't we?'

'Of course we can.' Allan Sybarite was already at the wheel of his car. He looked casually at the two girls on the pavement, then interest positively leapt into his eyes.

So her name was Doreen—he had hardly been able to take his eyes off her all the evening, but the Wyburns' party had been a large one; Virginia had taken him and he hardly knew a soul; he had found it impossible to get an introduction. 'Where can I drop you?' he asked.

'Ninety-six Sloane Gardens.' It was Virginia who answered, and he noticed with annoyance that she did not introduce him. As soon as the two girls were settled in the back she had begun to chatter to the other girl; they were both laughing softly.

Allan let his clutch in and the car began to move; he was thinking quickly—what could be done? Sloan Gardens was only just round the corner. To suggest eggs and bacon at the 'Bat' flashed into his mind, but it couldn't be done—curse this wretched journalism, the hours upset his whole existence; anyhow, it would be finished, thank God, in another six months.

Allan was going into politics, and he was taking the business seriously. The influence of the Press on modern politics had become so powerful in recent years that he was putting in two years in Fleet Street. He considered that the knowledge he was gaining would prove far more useful than all the time he had spent in the school of economics.

No, he must get back to Fleet Street directly he had dropped Virginia—the 'Bat' was out of the question. Reluctantly he turned the car into Sloane Gardens and stopped in front of number ninety-six.

The girl hopped out, light as a fairy. 'Thank you so much.' She smiled into the darkness of the car, and the next moment she was running up the steps of the house.

Virginia got out of the back and climbed in beside Allan; he did not attempt to drive on, but lit a cigarette.

'Who is she?' he asked.

'Doreen?—oh, she's Doreen Eve,' Virginia answered vaguely.

'Tell me more,' he said.

'Well—she lives with her people—and dances, ballet and that sort of thing, you know.'

He nodded. 'I thought as much, all her movements are so light; a lovely figure, too.'

'Oh, of course, she's too, too lovely—everyone agrees about that.' Virginia's voice had just a trace of sharpness in it. She had been carrying on a mild affair with Allan for some time; she was not in the least in love with him and found him difficult and wayward, but he was amusing to go about with and she had not the least intention of letting anyone else have him if she could help it.

Allan knew Virginia too well to expect any assistance from her in the matter of Miss Eve; he therefore drove her home at a highly dangerous speed, refused to come in for a last cigarette, and wished her good night with a brevity which was not due to rudeness, but abstraction.

. . . . .

With a practised eye Allan ran through the long damp sheets of copy which awaited him on his desk in Fleet Street. His present job was the unpleasant one of going through all that his colleagues had written after the matter came finally from the Press. He had to note errors of fact in articles, mistakes in composition, badly set type—all the thousand and one minor misfortunes that are apt to beset a great daily paper in its hurried nightly printing, despite the care of editors, sub-editors, and master compositors. His report must be in the office of the Sub-Editor before three-thirty, and then in the morning—woe to those who had been careless or blundered.

Allan glanced swiftly down the 'Personal' Column, and suddenly a notice caught his eye.

'ORCHIDS ON MONDAY, 96 SLOANE GARDENS, 11.30 P.M.'

Ninety-six Sloane Gardens, that was the address of the delightful Doreen Eve. Allan tilted back his swivel chair.

What could it mean, he wondered, as he gazed intently at the ceiling. 'Orchids on Monday', very queer—of course, orchids were eminently suitable to Doreen—could it be a message to some man that she was interested in—her choice of flowers for some occasion perhaps; such an advertisement could hardly emanate from her parents.

'Advertisement.' The word stuck in Allan's mind. People advertised for things they wanted—Doreen wanted orchids on Monday—all right, Doreen should have her orchids.

. . . . .

'Orkidds hon Monday.' Mr. Horatio Nelson Clegg sniffed contemptuously. 'What next I'd like ter know—it was Disies we 'ad larst time, "Disies hon Wednesday", weren't it? Meant we 'ad to bash the flunkey at the harea door, and but for 'im the 'ouse was empty. Strewth—why can't 'e tip us off proper 'stead of all this rigmarole?'

Neddy the Crack. Mr. Clegg's companion, had out his little black book; he pushed aside the paper in which had appeared that intriguing notice under the personal column: 'I 'as an idea,' he remarked, 'that Orkidds is—ground-floor window back of 'ouse, no servants kept, but mind the dawg. No, it ain't', he went on quickly, 'that's Oxalis—'ere we are, "Orchids—wait thirty yards from front door, will let you in, family away, no men servants". Now what yer grousin' abart, 'oratio?—the bloke's doin' the necessary 'imself this toime—it's easy as fallin' orf a lawg.'

''ave it yer own wye, Neddy, I 'opes yer right.' Mr. Clegg drew the back of his large hand across his mouth as he set down the tankard of bitter. 'All I ses is, I don't 'old wiv 'is wye of doin' things—we'll mistake 'ollyocks fer lilies one fine night and find ourselves in choke.'

. . . . .

Allan paced slowly up and down Sloane Gardens. In his hand carefully encased in tissue paper and cotton wool he held the orchids.

He had telephoned to number ninety-six earlier in the day, and been told that Mr. and Mrs. Eve were away in the country—they would not be back for some days. He had rung off without giving any name and felt more certain than ever that the notice in the personal column had been inserted by the girl—who else could have done it? But why? that was the mystery. Allan had a wild but slender hope that she had put that notice in the paper out of sheer romance, just to see if some unknown young man—a young man such as himself, for example—should chance to read it and send her the flowers in token of his interest.

The plan which he had decided on before he reached Sloane Gardens had the grand simplicity which scorns all detail. He would ring the bell—perhaps she would answer it herself if the servants had gone to bed; if not he would ask for her and say 'Orchids on Monday' as he handed her the flowers. She would be surprised, not altogether pleased at first perhaps, if she was expecting flowers from someone else—quickly he would mention Virginia's name—the Wyburns' party, the lift that he had given her a few nights before—the amazing coincidence that he should have seen her message—then he would say that he simply could not resist the temptation to surprise her. They would both laugh—and once that happened Allan knew he could trust himself to do the rest. He would make a strategic withdrawal almost at once in order not to embarrass her if she had other plans; but the ice would have been broken—he could ring her up tomorrow; and he contemplated with sudden pleasure the fact that he was almost free of luncheon engagements for the coming week.

There had been a slight hitch in his arrangements

when he rang the bell at a quarter past eleven, for the maid told him that Miss Doreen Eve was out. That did not distress Allan unduly—she was at a theatre probably, the night was fine—he would stroll about for a while, keeping the house in view.

* * * * *

At eleven twenty-five a taxi drew up in front of number ninety-six. A tall man in evening dress got out first, then the lovely Doreen. As she took out her key she was quite unaware that three pairs of eyes were watching her with interest from across the street. A young man in evening dress, standing in the shadow of one of the plane trees, holding a spray of orchids in his hand, a beery-faced, burly gentleman who rejoiced in the name of Horatio Nelson Clegg, and beside him on some area steps a little red-headed man known to his familiars as Neddy the Crack.

'Strewth—'e ain't 'arf got a fairy this time,' remarked the husky Mr. Clegg.

'Yuss—'e do find 'em, don't 'e?' Neddy agreed with a little smirk.

The tall man entered the house with Miss Eve; moreover, the taxi was paid off. This was hardly Allan's idea as to how things should have happened, but he determined to wait a little—perhaps the visitor would not stay long. His perseverance was justified; within five minutes the man came out. Allan noticed that he no longer wore a hat.

To Allan's disappointment he did not walk off in the direction of the taxi rank, instead, he slowly strolled across the street and took up a position opposite the door.

Allan could see him plainly now, a good-looking chap, fortyish perhaps, dark, and in the light of a nearby lamp his chin showed faintly blue. He showed no sign of moving, but stood quietly watching number ninety-six. The

hall light had gone out some moments before, one in an upper window went on—Doreen's bedroom, Allan guessed. He swore softly to himself—he had not foreseen that she might go to bed. His opportunity was lost, and all through that tall fool standing under the lamp—the fellow was in love with her, that was plain. Why else should he watch her window till the light went out? Allan felt sulky, he had no conceivable right to be jealous, but he was—he knew the symptoms well, and felt them coming on. Damn the man, why couldn't he go away?—Allan made up his mind to outstay the man even though he knew it was sheer waste of time.

The upper window suddenly went black, the adorable Doreen was safe in bed. Well, that was that. Allan regarded his orchids ruefully; no earthly good to send them round tomorrow. Orchids on Tuesday entirely lost their point. He must comb his acquaintances for someone other than Virginia who knew Doreen, and seek a prosaic introduction in the usual way.

The dark man did not attempt to move from under his tree, and it must have been a good twenty minutes after Doreen's light went out that he crossed the road again and ran swiftly up the steps of number ninety-six. He pushed the front door gently and it opened at once; he slipped inside. Allan watched him with sudden interest—'chap couldn't have shut it properly after him when he came out,' he thought; 'this is all very queer.'

He had not long to wait for further developments. The tall man reappeared in the porch and threw a lighted cigarette into the gutter. Was it a signal? What was going on? Yes, it was a signal; two figures detached themselves from the shadow of the railings some way down the street and shambled across the road. What the deuce was happening? Should he go up to the square and get a policeman? Allan wondered. No, by that time anything might have happened. Still carrying his or-

chids, Allan walked quickly across the street. The front door was still open—a moment later he entered the house.

* * * * *

The hall was in darkness. Allan could just make out two doors on the right—from under the farther one came a faint ray of light. If he went in they'd be on him like a shot. Perhaps the two rooms had a communicating door, if so, he might be able to see what they were doing from an unsuspected angle. Very quietly he tried the handle of the nearest door. It turned—the door opened without a sound.

Inside it was as black as pitch, but Allan's surmise had proved correct. As his eyes got accustomed to the darkness he could make out the slenderest pencil of light running down the far end of the wall to his left. That must be the door into the other room, and as luck would have it that door must be just the least little crack open.

He did the only sensible thing in the darkness of that unknown room—got to his knees and crawled slowly forward on the floor. He reached the door in safety and without making any sound that could disturb the intruders.

Very gently he eased the door open the fraction of an inch. The room beyond was a library—yes, there were the two men who had entered just before him; they were kneeling on the floor, a collection of curious-looking instruments was spread out in front of them, and they were working swiftly and silently on a safe.

Allan lost no time. The third man must be about somewhere. He could not tackle three of them; the only thing to do was to run for the police. He moved the door silently back to its former position and recrossed the room; the door into the hall he had left ajar—it opened to his touch.

A deeper patch of blackness showed in the doorway against the greyness of the hall, it was the back of the third man who stood there silently keeping watch. He had no suspicion that Allan was just behind him.

Allan paused, undecided. Should he rush the fellow from behind? If he did the other two would be on him in a minute and off into the street, leaving him half murered in the hall.

He gently pulled the door to again, deciding to wait for a better opportunity and tiptoed back to resume his observation on the library.

The two men had got the safe open now, and they were hastily cramming papers and packets into a small black bag. As he watched, they looked up quickly. Evidently the third man had come into the room. Allan heard a sharp whisper.

'Leave that—get it on the way out—upstairs now—first floor, first door on the right—small safe under the dressing-table—old lady's got a heap of stuff. Look sharp!'

The smaller man collected his tools, the burly one closed the bag with a snap, and picked up his torch. The light faded and the library went black—they had left the room—Allan waited silently a few moments.

In the library he had seen a telephone. Could he reach it and dial operator and ask for the police without the tall chap in the hall hearing him? It was the only chance. He went down on his knees again and crept forward carefully. His hand struck something—it was the black bag. Well, he would save the swag anyhow. Better put it in the other room now before the men had time to come back. He took it by the handle and stood up, then moved softly towards the other room.

'Got you!' said a quiet voice as the light clicked on. 'Got you, my friend.' There was a hint of quiet laughter in the voice.

Allan guessed that it was Doreen, even as he swung round, but there was no laughter in her face, and she was pointing a very dangerous-looking pistol at the exact spot where his double-breasted white waistcoat made a neat line across his trousers.

'Put down the little bag,' she said evenly. 'Thank you, and now your hands above your head.'

Allan felt an utter fool, the girl actually seemed to be enjoying herself.

'Look here,' he protested, 'you're making a mistake, I'm not a burglar, I'm Allan Sybarite, a friend of Virginia Townley's. I gave you a lift home the other night from the Wyburns' party.'

She shook her head with a characteristic little wriggle of her neck, and tilted up her chin. In any other circumstances Allan would have thought her divine.

'Oh, no,' she said, 'that won't work. *He* was an ugly man in specs; you're rather nice looking! What a pity that you've got to be locked up.'

'But honestly,' he assured her, 'I only came to the house because—because . . .' he broke off lamely. The matter of the orchids hardly seemed an adequate explanation now. His interview with Doreen was not turning out as he had planned at all. 'Your advertisement, you know,' he added quickly; 'orchids on Monday,' and he nodded to the neat paper parcel at his feet.

'The man's mad,' she said with a little lift of her eyebrows, 'quite mad, but a real society crook. How thrilled the Wyburns will be to know that you were at their party.' She moved towards the telephone. 'I'm afraid I must hand you over to the police.'

'Listen,' cried Allan desperately. 'Do what you like about me, but there *are* burglars in the house. I came in because . . .' His sentence was cut short; the door opened and the tall man walked in.

'Hullo,' he said quietly, 'what's all this?'

'George,' exclaimed the girl, 'what a fright you gave me. Look—I've caught a Raffles.'

George smiled grimly. 'Good work, my dear. Lucky I came back. I forgot my hat, thought you might still be up reading or something, then I found the front door open.'

The calmness of the man—it staggered Allan. 'This man's the burglar,' he cried indignantly. 'He let in two others as well—I saw him.'

Doreen gave a delighted chuckle. 'Oh, George, isn't he sweet? And do you know, he was actually at the Wyburns' party.'

'George' nodded. 'A real top-notcher of the genus crook, eh?' He lit a cigarette. His hand was as steady as a rock and he continued quietly: 'You don't want the police round here, Doreen. Tomorrow morning's time enough—I'll run this bird round to the station.'

'That will be best,' Doreen agreed. 'I don't think anything is missing. All Daddy's papers are in that bag, I expect.'

'Come along, young man.' George spoke in a firm voice. 'I shall treat you rough if you give any trouble. You'd better come quietly.'

Again Allan considered. George was several sizes larger than he was, and the other two were still somewhere upstairs; if there were real trouble they might knock out Doreen as well.

He took his notecase out of his pocket and extracted a card, 'For the flowers,' he explained.

'Flowers?' echoed Doreen with a puzzled look.

He picked up the orchids and pulled back the tissue paper. 'For you,' he said.

'But how marvellous,' she smiled. 'A burglar who leaves flowers—George, isn't that too, too wonderful?'

But George only frowned.

'May I write something suitable on the card?' Allan asked.

'Oh, do!' she cried. 'I'll frame it.'

Allan took out a pencil and scribbled a few words on the back. He tucked it among the orchids and handed them to the girl. 'I'm ready now,' he said.

'Right—come on, my lad.' George took him firmly by the arm and led him out.

. . . . .

When they were out in the street Allan wondered what would happen. Poor George must be very embarrassed by his prisoner. Allan fully expected that he would give him a chance to escape and then disappear himself; but Allan did not want to escape. If George tried any tricks he meant to hang on to him and holler for the police. Perhaps George was even now racking his brains for some way to square him. 'Nothing doing, George, my boy—you can try that on the police.' Then with a little shock he realised that George showed no disposition to try and square him, nor did he offer any opportunity of escape. Instead, he marched rapidly along, gripping Allan's arm, if anything more firmly than before. Surely, thought Allan, his captor would not have the audacity to hand him over to the police? Well, what matter if he did? They would charge each other. Allan smiled again. He had written no useless tribute of admiration on that card, but a sharp imperative message: 'Phone police immediately—two more upstairs—will take care of George.'

If only she acted on his message everything would be all right; but would she? A sudden doubt filled Allan's mind. Suppose she thought it was just another piece of bluff? She had shown no signs of believing him before. Allan ceased smiling, a still more unpleasant thought had come to him—George must have been in the hall

when Doreen came downstairs. Perhaps he had slipped up and warned the other two. If so, they would be gone even if she did ring up the police. The Devil! This was getting serious: George had come back for his hat; he knew Doreen; he had an excuse for being in the house; Allan had none! How could he possibly tell the story of the orchids?

Surely George did not mean to carry out this bluff—but as they turned into Gerald Row Allan became certain that he *did*, and got hot all over at the thought. Say George got away with it? What then? A night in the cells for Allan; but worse—much worse—he would be the laughing stock of London in the morning. It might have a devastating effect on that political career he was so keen about—he would be known as 'the chap who was arrested by the burglar'. *That* was going to take some living down!

For one moment Allan thought wildly of trying to break away. But could he? There would be a hue and cry—they were only twenty yards from the police-station. A flaring headline flashed into his mind: '*Well-known Newspaper Man Arrested by Crook.*' He groaned—the whole thing was a nightmare.

He was in the station now. A jolly round-faced sergeant was eyeing him across a desk; Allan determined to be first.

'Sergeant,' he cried, before his captor had a chance to speak, 'I charge this man with house-breaking, at ninety-six Sloane Gardens—he was one of three.'

The sergeant smiled as he looked at the large hand that gripped Allan's arm—so did the man called George.

'It's all right, Sergeant,' he said, 'he's only bluffing. He doesn't look a crook, but he is one. I thought I'd better bring him round. If you want confirmation that he's the right man just ring up Miss Doreen Eve, Sloane 9060.'

Allan went scarlet. The impudence of the brute; and, of course, the girl would back him up. What a howling mess!

George took a card from his pocket and laid it on the desk beside the sergeant. 'Better ring up Miss Eve, Sergeant, and get the business straightened out,' he laughed. 'She caught this chap herself, I only came on the scene later, but I'd like to get away as soon as possible as the garage where I've parked my car shuts at one o'clock, and I've got to get back to Richmond.'

The telephone shrilled at the sergeant's side; he picked up the receiver. 'Hullo,' he said, 'that you, Cooper. . . . Got 'em both? That's good; bring 'em in.' He hung up the receiver and grinned at Allan.

'It's quite all right, sir; when the lady telephoned the first time she said to keep you both, but it's the tall one we're wanting.'

. . . . .

Allan was back in the library of ninety-six. Mr. Horatio Nelson Clegg and Neddy the Crack stood, handcuffed together, in a corner. A policeman was still taking notes.

Doreen threw back her hair with that same little shake of the head and tilt of the chin that Allan had seen before, though he had not then appreciated it as he did now. She smiled at him.

'How terribly clever to think of writing on that card.'

He laughed. 'D'you know, I can't help feeling sorry for "George"—he nearly landed me—but it was the orchids that let him in.'

She picked up the flowers and held them against her cheek. Mr. Horatio Nelson Clegg glowered at them from his corner. In his husky voice he said to Neddy: 'That's them—*orkidds* they is. I never did 'old wiv 'is way of doin' things. Flowers is fer funerals.'

STORY III

During the first weeks of the war my failure to find any suitable war employment greatly depressed me. But an old friend of mine in MI.5 endeavoured to console me by saying:

'Don't take it too badly that the Ministry of Information have ignored your offers of service. Out of nearly a thousand people that they have taken on, fewer than thirty are professional journalists and writers, so it's a hopeless mess. One might just as well send a battleship to sea with only thirty trained seamen in her and the rest landlubbers, then order them to seek out and destroy the enemy. It would break your heart to be mixed up with such a crew. Sooner or later some job will come along in which you will be able to make much better use of your abilities. In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of people will be in camps or spending long periods of duty in A.R.P. centres. Their only way of passing the time will be to read and it's up to chaps like you to help entertain them.'

He was, of course, right—and about the 'job' turning up; but that was not until nine months later. So I got back to my desk and concentrated on my normal work. Soon I found myself imbued with another surge of that creative energy which I had experienced during my first year as a writer. Having completed *The Scarlet Impostor*

—which ran to 186,000 words and was the longest book I had so far written—I wrote several short stories, among them *The Born Actor, Love Trap* and the following little tale. It appeared as No. 1 of a series published in the *Evening Standard* in which each contributor had to use the Black-out as a background.

Special Leave

'Look, Daddy, a telegram from John—he's coming on leave—tonight. "Meet me leave train Waterloo 8.30, dine and dance", it says—oh, I'm so happy.' Lorna Bancroft flung her arms joyously round her father's neck, whirling him into a mad dance.

'There, there,' Mr. Bancroft disentangled himself, panting slightly, 'if you want to be in time to meet his train, you'd better hurry up and get yourself dressed. It's past six now.'

'Goodness, yes, you're right.' Turning swiftly Lorna fled back up the stairs singing at the top of her voice.

An hour and a half later she reappeared, and her father's eyes softened as he saw her. She was radiantly lovely in a white satin dress with gardenias in her hair.

'Enjoy yourself, darling!' he called out.

'I will,' came the laughing reply.

Outside in the porch she stood still for a moment. The darkness of the night was impenetrable, unrelieved even by stars; then, as she flashed her torch, she noticed that the switch for the 'No Road' sign at one end of the semi-circular drive was up. The maid must have forgotten to turn it on at black-out time, and clicking it down Lorna got into her car.

The business of backing it out of the IN gate always annoyed her but the big A.R.P. shelter her father had built now partially blocked the OUT drive and it had been necessary to fix a permanent two-way electric sign beyond the curve of the shrubs to prevent strangers crashing in the darkness if they tried to use the wrong entrance. Then she smiled to herself. Anyway, what did such petty annoyances matter tonight? John was coming back; she'd be with him in an hour.

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She arrived at Waterloo ten minutes too early so, buying a platform ticket, she sat down. A few yards away two men turned and stared at her—appraisingly, insolently. 'These *something* refugees—they behave as though they own England and all its inhabitants!' Lorna thought angrily, forgetting for the moment that her furs and evening dress made her conspicuous in such a setting.

Suddenly the train was in, and John was holding her in his arms as though he would never let her go; then, grabbing his suitcase, he cried: 'Come on, darling! I've only got forty-eight hours and I don't want to lose a moment of it. That's why I wired you to dress. Where shall we go? What about the Café de Paris?'

'That would be heavenly—let's!'

Captain John Grayson was tall with broad shoulders and a chin that betrayed the fact that he was used to getting his own way, so, although the restaurant was full to overflowing, they soon had the only remaining sofa table. When the fluster of the waiters had subsided Lorna turned to John.

'Darling, you haven't yet told me how you managed to get this leave.'

He smiled mockingly. 'Isn't it enough that I'm here?'

'Of course, but how did you? I'm simply panting to know—it was so unexpected.'

'Well, as a matter of fact, it's no secret. I had to bring over some special reports that were too important to be posted.'

Her eyes widened. 'But oughtn't you to have given them in right away?'

'No. The man I have to see wouldn't be in his office at this hour.'

'But where are they?'

'Oh, they're in my suitcase.' He turned and beckoned the waiter to refill their glasses with champagne as though tired of the subject.

'And you left it in the cloakroom?' she persisted. 'Darling, they might be stolen!'

'Now, stop worrying your lovely little head; they'll be perfectly all right. It's locked, anyway.'

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They danced then and Lorna forgot everything save that she was young and loved and very much in love, but as the evening wore on she became puzzled and uneasy. John was drinking a lot, a thing he never used to do, and he was getting very gay on it. At twelve o'clock, really worried, she suggested going home.

'Go home? Nonsense, darling! Why, the evening's only just begun. Come and dance again.' He leaned over and covered her hand with his own. 'I do love you so and it's just heaven to see you after all this time.'

Lorna's heart softened and she rose to her feet. He was quite right. It seemed years since he had left for France, and his letters had shown how deadly he found life there, even after he had been given a job at Corps Headquarters.

They both loved dancing and were very good together,

so it was not until the band had played 'God Save the King' that John settled the bill.

While she was waiting for him to collect his suitcase she noticed two men standing by the bar. Involuntarily she gave a start of surprise. They were the foreigners who had eyed her so unpleasantly on Waterloo Station.

John came unsteadily towards her. 'Whoopee, darling! Let's face the cold winter winds on the hilly heights of Hampstead!' He laughed loudly and several people turned to stare.

It took them five minutes to reach the garage, and as she climbed into the car Lorna said: 'Wouldn't you rather I dropped you at your flat in Down-street?'

'Good Lord, no! I wouldn't dream of letting you go home alone.'

She shrugged and slipped in the clutch.

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John sang all the way back, his arm flung negligently round her shoulders each time she had to check the car at traffic lights. He had never done this before, and he knew she hated anyone who got drunk. Somehow it frightened her. He knew that, too, yet he had done it just the same. Her eyes shone angrily in the green light of the dashboard.

At last she swung up the drive and came to an abrupt halt in front of the house. John pulled her towards him and buried his face in her neck.

'Oh, darling, you're so beautiful,' he murmured.

Lorna caught her breath. It was no good—she couldn't be angry with him for long—he was too precious, and once these few brief hours were over, heaven only knew when she might see him again.

'It may take ages to get you a taxi,' she said, as they walked into the house.

'The longer it takes the better,' he laughed quite naturally, and putting his arms round her looked down into her large, blue eyes. 'Are you very angry with me, sweetheart?'

She shook her head. 'Not really. Go into the lounge and sit down. I'll be back in a minute.'

He thought she meant to slip upstairs, but she had suddenly remembered his suitcase. If she didn't fetch it from the car they might forget it when he left. As he walked into the lounge she re-crossed the hall to the front door.

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For a moment Lorna was blinded by the inky darkness. A faint wind was whispering in the trees and it wasn't until she had the car door open that she realised someone had opened the opposite door and was groping about inside.

As her fingers touched the suitcase it was snatched away from under them. The gravel crunched behind her. She opened her mouth to scream but an arm was thrown round her neck, choking her cry. Rough hands hauled her backwards, whirled her round and flung her headlong on to the flag-stones of the porch.

Half-dazed from her fall she heard a voice exclaim: 'Quick! Jump in the car! Our taximan will questions ask if the girl begins to shout.'

Lorna's thoughts reeled. The two foreigners—John's reports—he would be disgraced—cashiered. Then like a flash the heaven-sent inspiration came to her. Staggering to her feet, she snapped off the 'No Road' switch just as the car leaped forward.

For an awful moment she remained there, breathless. Suddenly there was a rending crash, followed by the tinkling of broken glass, and John came running out of the house.

'What on earth was that?' he gasped.

'Those men—they followed us to steal your suitcase—but I stopped them—I stopped them by turning off the "No Road" sign—they've crashed into our dug-out.'

'Good Lord!' he cried, grabbing her hand. 'You may have killed them. Come on, run!'

They raced down the drive to the hidden entrance that was now a death-trap. The car was completely overturned but both the men and the suitcase were gone. Only the faint patter of swift, receding footsteps broke the stillness.

Lorna gave a sob of despair. 'Oh, John, we'll never catch them now—your reports—you'll get into the most frightful trouble.'

'Well, that's that,' his voice was calm. 'It would have been mighty awkward if you'd killed them both, but you put up a jolly good show.'

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Suddenly Lorna realised that he was perfectly sober, as he went on: 'Sorry I had to put on an act and pretend I was tight tonight. It must have been rotten for you.'

'Put on an act?'

'Why yes. We knew those chaps would be waiting for me on the leave train. It was for their benefit that I did my drunk stuff and sang so that they shouldn't lose us on the way home, but, sweet little idiot that you are, you nearly wrecked our whole plan. Those reports were faked and they were *meant* to be stolen.'

'Well!' exclaimed Lorna, with mingled anger and relief. 'I do think you might have told me. Just look what they've done to my car!'

STORY IV

This macabre piece is the direct result of *The Devil Rides Out*, a long novel with an occult background which I published in 1935. For many months, in fact for years, after its appearance I had the most amazing mail about it from readers all over the world. The majority of these letters were from people who had enjoyed the book and wanted me to write others on the same subject, or who asked for further information on various aspects of the occult. Quite a number of writers covered many pages in a curiously similar type of scrawl which, after a time, I came to recognise as indicating that my correspondent was a mental case, whether certifiable or not.

One gentleman signed himself 'The Christ' (no address, postmark Edinburgh) and wrote to me frequently for a long time giving the most fantastic explanations of the Book of Revelations. Another advanced the interesting theory that, the worship of Christ having failed to stop wars or materially to improve the conditions of the human race during the best part of 2,000 years, it might not be a bad idea if we transferred our allegiance to the Devil and gave him a chance. The author of this original idea was actually an inmate of Broadmoor.

Fortunately, however, in addition to these there reached me many letters from doctors, lawyers, police officials, magistrates, clergymen and others—all obvi-

ously sane—expressing appreciation of the warning conveyed in the book that nothing but harm could come of dabbling with the occult and often giving extraordinarily interesting accounts of its manifestations for the truth of which they could personally vouch. One such letter came from a woman who wrote so convincingly of supernatural matters and offered me data of such an intriguing nature that I could not resist the temptation to break off my work one afternoon for the purpose of meeting her. The salient points of her story were as follows:

In the Essex village where she was born her grandmother had been well known as a witch. When she was very young her father had sold her to the Devil. She had not realised that until many years later when, after a violent quarrel with her elder sister, that sister had accused her of being 'Devil's Spawn' and, in support of her accusation, recalled a scene of her childhood to her in which her father had opened a vein in her arm and made her scrawl her name on a piece of parchment in her own blood. As she grew up she had found to her alarm that she had the power to bring accidents and ill-fortune to people by merely wishing them bad luck; she also developed second sight and could induce manifestations such as wall-rappings. To her distress all animals were terrified of her and she had never been able to keep a pet. Strangest of all it was impossible for her to go into a church without being physically sick.

Naturally I do not expect my readers to believe her fantastic tale, and I had neither the time nor the opportunity to check up on any part of it. I can only record the impression that she made on me.

She was a motherly-looking middle-aged woman and she spoke of these things without any suggestion that her case was unusual or dramatic; but rather with a quiet resignation as though she had been suffering for many years from a well-known but incurable disease which had

defeated all the doctors' efforts to bring her relief.

She had trained herself not to make impulsive wishes detrimental to people who caused her annoyance; she had long since given up the cheap triumph of telling fortunes and table-turning, in order to avoid, as far as possible, drawing occult forces to herself; she would have nothing whatever to do with mediums, spiritualists or psychic healers for the same reason. I am convinced that there was nothing whatever evil about her but it certainly seemed that she was a *focus for evil* and she spoke of her sad fate with such simple candour that I found it extraordinarily difficult to believe that she was romancing deliberately.

She did not give the impression of being in any way an erudite woman, yet, in the space of some two hours, she told me many episodes from her supernatural experiences which were entirely in keeping with occult tradition and the details of which could only have been invented by a master of the subject. She did not attempt to borrow money from me, to enlist my aid in the publication of literary work or to persuade me to give a talk on 'Ghosts' to some club or society. She came only to beg me to continue to warn people in my writings of the ghastly death-in-life which might overtake those who attempted to peer behind the veil. Finally she described to me in a rather hesitant way but with great vividness a dream which she had had on several occasions and of her conviction that one night this 'vampire of the tomb' would overcome her and that she would be found dead in bed in the morning.

She said that, if I liked, I might use the idea as the basis of a story and here it is. May God have mercy on her Spirit.

A Life for a Life

'Well, good night, Doctor—it was nice of you to drop in so friendly.' Mrs. Sandmeyer's yellowish face broke into an artificial smile as she spoke from the doorway of the parlour. Her pale eyes travelled with faint disapproval to the half-empty whisky bottle among the cheap ornate china on the narrow mantelpiece, then across to her husband.

'You won't be long, Herbert, will you?' She smiled again, half-archly, half-apologetically, at the doctor. 'I can never get off to sleep without him beside me—I'm funny that way.'

The tired-looking little doctor stroked back his scanty hair and nodded to her. 'Not more than a few minutes, Mrs. Sandmeyer. Good night to you.'

As the door closed behind his wife, Herbert Sandmeyer heaved a sigh of relief. He had only thought of consulting the doctor about his trouble after supper that evening when it was too late to frame an excuse for leaving the house again. It had needed considerable stage managing to get the doctor round, on an apparently unofficial call and even more to manœuvre his wife off to bed so as to get his visitor alone.

'Well, what's the trouble?' the doctor asked, pulling thoughtfully at his ragged brown moustache as he watched Sandmeyer pour another tot of whisky into his glass.

'I hardly know how to tell you, Doc'—you'll think I'm crazy.'

'Don't be silly, now.' The doctor took the proffered glass. 'I've got a maternity case which should come off

about eleven, so I can't give you very long. Out with it, man.'

Sandmeyer poured himself a drink with an unsteady hand, and turning, caught the reflection of his dead-white face in the narrow mirror of the overmantel. He stared at it for a moment and then exclaimed:

'I'm afraid! That's what it is—I'm afraid!'

'What of,' asked the doctor quickly.

Sandmeyer turned upon him with sudden truculence. 'Tell me I'm a loonie! Tell me I ought to be ashamed of myself at my age, if you like, but it's a fact! I'm afraid to go up to bed!'

'You've been overworking, I expect. Can't sleep, eh! I get like that at times, especially when we get an epidemic of 'flu going round the district.'

Sandmeyer gulped down his whisky, then violently shook his head. 'It isn't that. It isn't ordinary nerves, either. Promise—promise you won't laugh at me if I tell you about it.'

'Of course not. As a professional man I'm used to confidences, so you can tell me and it won't go any further. Patients often tell me things they wouldn't care for the rest of the world to know.'

'No—no. It's nothing like that. I've been having dreams lately and I tell you I'm just scared stiff of going up to bed.'

The doctor nodded. 'I can see your nerves are in a pretty rotten state. You need a tonic and a change if you could manage it.' His eye fell again on the whisky bottle from which Sandmeyer was already pouring himself another drink.

'This isn't ordinary nerves, I tell you.' Sandmeyer hit the table angrily with his fist. 'It's psychic trouble. That's the only way I can describe it. Tell me, Doc', do you believe in the old Biblical saying "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life"?'

'Well, hardly.' The tired little doctor demurred with a patient smile. 'Although I'm by no means an atheist in the full sense of the word. I take it you have not told your wife anything about this.'

'Not a thing. She's Chapel and set in her beliefs. If I tried to tell her about it, she'd think I was going out of my mind. When I wake from these—these nightmares, gasping for breath and shaking just like I had a fit, she puts it down to chronic indigestion.'

'You are sure that it is not something of that kind?'

'Certain. I've got a digestion like an ostrich. This is psychic, I tell you; I don't suppose you can do me any good but I had to talk it over with someone.'

The doctor adjusted the pince-nez on his bulbous nose. 'Perhaps you had better tell me how it started,' he said, a little wearily.

'That's a long way back.' Sandmeyer regarded him for a moment with a despairing look, then he went on hurriedly. 'You see, I was what they call psychic even as a child. I've always known things about people without being told and at one time I used to do a bit of fortune-telling, just among friends, you know, but I cut it out because sometimes misfortunes I'd predicted came about so that they said afterwards that I'd wished it on them. I can do that, too, if I want, and I did once with a fellow who did me a dirty trick. I wished him ill and he got it —never mind how. A fellow called Dawson, it was. He was after Maggie—Mrs. Sandmeyer, that is—and told her all sorts of lies about me, but I got even with him —more than even—and I got her, too. You can say that was coincidence, if you like, but I know better. Anyway, I was so scared afterwards at the thought of what I'd done that I determined to cut it out for the future.

'I've never told her anything, of course, and I thought I'd been clear of the whole business for years now, but my brother-in-law came up from the country to stay for

a bit about a month ago and, like a fool, I allowed him to persuade me into going to the British Museum with him to see the Egyptian galleries.

'It's wrong to show those mummies the way they do. I've always thought that. After all, they're dead people —aren't they—and directly I got inside that Egyptian gallery I could feel all sorts of forces moving around me.

'I had a sort of feeling that Frank Dawson was somewhere in the place, watching me, as it were, though I haven't even thought of him for years and he might have been in China for all I know. Then as we were moving round we stopped opposite one of the wall cases. There was a wooden coffin inside, all painted over with hieroglyphics and what-not, made in the shape of a body, and over the head part it had a kind of mask. This wasn't the mummy itself, but the coffin that I'm speaking of.

'Then—well, I can hardly expect you to believe me—but the black eyes in that mask suddenly became alive. They stared up at me out of that painted face deep and dark and liquid. I'm not raving—they were living eyes, black as pitch and full of smouldering fire. They held me rooted there like I was being hypnotised until my brother-in-law said something. It gave me such a turn that I darn near fainted; anyhow, I pulled myself together and got out of the place just as quickly as I could.

'Well, that's just on a month back, and I certainly wasn't thinking about it when I went up to bed three nights ago.

'We turned in about ten as usual and I dropped off to sleep without a worry in the world, but I had an extraordinary dream later.

'I seemed to be walking down a flight of broken stairs into a sort of crypt. All round the walls there were rows of things like great bath tubs, some stone, some wood, and they were carved or painted with hieroglyphics all

along their sides, just as you see them in the Egyptian rooms at the museum.

'I walked over to one at the far end of the place and found myself looking down into it. The lid was off. There was just enough light for me to see that it was a woman and that she didn't seem to be dead at all. Instead of being dark and parchmenty, her flesh was white and healthy where it showed through the decayed stuff of her shroud. Then I saw that her head was covered with long golden hair. That was strange, wasn't it, because in a place like that one would naturally have expected her to be black-haired like all the Egyptian women, but perhaps she was one of those slaves that they imported from Greece, or a Princess who had married into Egypt from some country far away in the north.

'After a little time her eyes opened and she lay there staring up at me. I felt a kind of chill run right through my body because they were the same dark living eyes that I had seen on the coffin lid at the museum. There was a horrid sort of soullessness about them.

'She spoke then, or rather, she sent a message to my brain, for her lips never moved although I heard her just as clearly as if she had said the words.

' "You must help me to get up."

'It was terribly cold down in that crypt, and I could feel myself shivering as I stood there. I wanted most terribly to get away from it. Then I found myself stooping down and putting my arms round her naked shoulders.

'She was cold as an icicle, and try as I would I couldn't lift her up; it was as though she was made of marble and screwed down inside that box.

'After a moment, though, a little colour just tinged her cheeks, then, very slowly, she raised her hands and laid them on my shoulders while the faintest flicker of a smile twisted her pale lips. Those hands of hers seemed to weigh on my arms like lumps of solid lead, but her

shoulders shifted and raised a little from the bottom of the coffin.

' "Help me—help me," she was saying all the time, and it seemed to me as if I struggled for hours to get her up.

'I'm fairly strong, you know, and I could carry an average-sized woman upstairs without turning a hair, but this girl seemed to weigh a ton. As I hauled at her shoulders her grip on my arms tightened, and she seemed to gain strength, but mine was ebbing from me. With a last frantic heave I managed to pull her into a sitting position. Then I woke up.

'I was panting as though I'd run a mile and shivering in a cold sweat from one end of my body to the other. It took me a good ten minutes to get back my breath and even then I was so exhausted I could hardly turn in my bed. Afterwards I fell into a sort of lethargy and then dropped off to sleep.

'All next day I felt tired and depressed, but then I thought it was only a darned unpleasant nightmare as a kind of after-effect of my visit to the museum. I dismissed it as that more or less and went to bed the following night quite cheerfully as usual, but I had hardly fallen asleep when I had the same dream again.

'There she was, sitting upright in the long wooden box, her white flesh showing through the shreds of her grave clothes just as I had left her.

' "You must help me to get up," she said again.

'I was struggling with myself already to get away, and the chill of the place seemed to eat into my very bones, but I could not help bending down towards her.

'She had some strength of her own, too, now, for before I even touched her she lifted her arms, and next moment, as I stooped there, I felt them close like a vice round my neck.

'For a little I struggled to break away from her, but

I had my arms round her body all the time, and, in spite of myself, I was trying to lift her up. I felt the terrible weight of her again just as though she were a life-size stone figure. As she pressed against me I could feel her flesh was cold as ice but soft and yielding. Then as she stood upright I felt her heart suddenly begin to pound and beat just below my breast.

'I seemed to be falling. Then I must have cried out, for I woke to find myself sitting up in bed screaming fit to bring the house down.

'Maggie had woken, of course, and we put on the light. She lectured me for eating too many baked beans for supper, which is what we'd had, and told me to dose myself with bicarbonate. I was so weak that I could hardly crawl out of bed, but she's that fixed in her opinions she would have thought I was going potty if I'd tried to tell her the truth, so I made a pretence of getting the bicarbonate although I knew that it wasn't the least use.

'Afterwards I slept from sheer exhaustion, and next morning I felt like death. I dragged myself off to work as usual, but I couldn't add a column of figures to save my life, and the boss was pretty shirty with me. It wasn't so much that I was scared and obsessed with this thing then but that I was just utterly tired out.

'That evening—last night it was—I began to get the wind up. I made up my mind that somehow I'd got to keep awake. If I had been able to do as I liked I would have gone out to some place where there was a band and a lot of people and when it closed down I would have walked the streets till dawn, but with Maggie being the way she is I simply didn't dare.

'She put her foot down on my going out with my men friends when we first married—years ago—and she even hates me sitting up reading of a night. Says that she can't sleep comfortable without me, and that if I do come up

late when she's dropped off it always wakes her and then she can never get to sleep again—you know how it is when you've lived with a woman year in year out as I have. She's a good sort, too, even if she is narrow in her views. I cudgelled my wits for hours trying to think up some excuse for going out or staying down here in the parlour, but I couldn't think of one that would pass muster with her, so in the end I had to throw my hand in, and we went up to bed round about half-past ten.

'When I had to pretend to go to sleep, I began to recite things to myself—bits of songs and poems that I had learnt as a kid—the names of all the customers in my ledger and all the seaside places I could remember—working round the British Isles from John o' Groats.

'It's a ghastly business trying to keep awake when you're lying in the dark, and hardly dare to turn over. As it was I stuck it out till after three. Then I was stumbling down those beastly stairs again.

'I crossed the crypt place, just as I had before, and there was the golden-haired woman waiting for me on the other side. I tried not to look at her. I was just terrified by then, but, standing in her coffin, she stretched out a hand and laid it on my arm, and I felt her speak again.

' "You must help me out of here."

'Next minute she half-jumped and half-fell out of the wooden box. I turned and tried to run, but she threw her bare arms round my neck and staggered along at my side.

'As I tried to unloose her grip I saw her face for a moment within an inch or two of mine. It was human yet somehow not human if you understand what I mean. Lovely as that of any woman that I've ever looked on but set with a positively devilish determination.

' "Help me out—help me out!" I felt her screaming from between her white clenched teeth, and she clung

to me as if her slender arms were made of steel.

' "I can't!" I kind of felt myself saying, although I never even opened my mouth. "You're stronger than I am now. You must help me."

'She laughed then, and I've never heard anything like it. People talk about their flesh creeping—well, mine did then—and with me fighting like mad all the time to get away from her we stumbled along together until we reached the middle of the chamber.

' "Up the stairs—up the stairs," she was panting, and those dark eyes of hers were set like flaming things on the entrance of the vault.

'Her grip on me was so strong that I can feel it now. Her nails absolutely bit into my arm and shoulder, and every second I felt my strength ebbing from my body into hers. My knees were giving under me, and I suddenly knew with an awful certainty that if I could not free myself from her I should never wake in this life again.

'I remember making a last gigantic effort. I saw her swaying there in the middle of the crypt glaring at me with those wild dark eyes, then everything went black for a moment, and next thing I remember I was lying, too weak to move, upstairs beside Maggie in my bed.

'I didn't sleep again. Something seemed to tell me that if I dropped off I'd have to return to her. She was strong now, powerful with the life she had sucked out of me—and evil. She seemed to be calling to me the whole time that I lay there, with set teeth and my eyes wide open in the darkness—although of course I could hardly lift a limb.

'By five o'clock I'd just strength enough to hoist myself out of bed and douse my face in cold water. That revived me a bit. Maggie had woken naturally and became a bit peevish, but I was too scared to worry much over that. I shut her up by saying that I had the pains

again and told her that I was going down to the kitchen to make myself some hot coffee. I did too, although I was so weak that I could hardly lift the saucepan on to the stove.

'When the light came I was still there. The coffee had done me good and I cut myself some cold meat sandwiches. I was hungry as if I hadn't eaten for a week.

'Maggie had fallen into a doze again, she told me afterwards. She couldn't do else, since I found her snoring when I went up to the bedroom round about seven o'clock.

'We breakfasted and I found that the sandwiches hadn't even taken the edge off my appetite. I was ravenous like a starving man. Then I went off to work, leaving Maggie in none too good a temper. At least she *thinks* I went to work. Actually I cut the office for the day. I was so dead beat that I simply could not face it. Instead I slept most of the morning in the free library and, when I was turned out from there, on a park bench well into the afternoon.

'I had to get back home, of course, same time as if I'd been to work, and it just shows how little things can worry you when you're faced with a real big trouble like this. I was scared stiff that Maggie would have heard from the boss some way that I had cut my job.

'He was too busy with other things, I reckon. Anyhow, I didn't have to face the grilling I'd expected, only a lot of questions as to why I'd brought home the bottle of whisky that's on the mantel there. I thought I'd go barmy at supper and begin to break things or rush out of the house, but I'm terribly fond of Maggie. Then I suddenly thought that I might be able to save myself if I could get hold of you.'

Sandmeyer paused, his eyes, purple-rimmed, bore down into those of the doctor. He shivered slightly and then exclaimed :

'Well! There you are! You don't believe me—do you? But I'm afraid, I tell you. Just terrified of going upstairs to bed.'

The doctor was a little man with a little practice, the greater part of which lay in a slum area. In his mind he had already diagnosed the case of Herbert Sandmeyer. A steady fellow who through secret worry had taken to drink. As he stood up his eye fell upon the now nearly empty whisky bottle and then, looking at Herbert again, he decided that given a day or two he might be able to check these alcoholic ravings which were bordering on D.T.s

'I'm not saying that I don't believe you,' he soothed the haggard man a little wearily. 'But this sort of thing is a bit outside my sphere. I'll give you some stuff which will make you sleep tonight, and then I think you had better come and see me at my consulting-room—round about ten o'clock tomorrow morning.'

'But you don't understand!' Sandmeyer burst out. 'I don't want to sleep. I've got to keep awake all night. If I don't I'll be drawn to that place again. That she-devil will draw all the life I've got left out of me and I'll never come back—never wake up any more.'

A heavy rapping sounded on the floor of the room above. Both men glanced up at the ceiling.

'That's your wife,' said the doctor. 'You had really better take this bromide.' He produced a small bottle from his shabby black bag and shook a few pellets from it into the palm of his hand.

Herbert Sandmeyer's body suddenly seemed to go limp. He leaned heavily on the mantelpiece. The feverish light died out of his eyes, and they took on a dull, glazed, despairing look.

With a feeble gesture he brushed the proffered pellets aside. 'No, thanks. If you don't believe me—but then —I hardly thought you would.'

The doctor glanced at his wrist-watch. 'By Jove! It's just on eleven. I must hurry, or that poor woman may be having her baby with only the district nurse to help her.'

'Life's queer, isn't it, Doc'?' said Sandmeyer slowly. 'Whenever any of us go out of it there's always another coming in to take our place.'

'What?' said the doctor as he shuffled into his worn brown coat.

'Oh, nothing.' Sandmeyer led the way out into the narrow hall.

'I think I know what's wrong with you,' the doctor remarked as they stood on the doorstep. 'Come and see me in the morning.'

'Thanks, Doc',' Herbert Sandmeyer replied evenly. 'It was nice of you to call. Good night.'

As he closed the front door a thin, querulous voice floated down the steep stairs to the hallway.

'Herbert! Are you coming up?'

'All right, Maggie, I'll be with you in a moment,' he called over his shoulder as he went back into the stuffy sitting-room. Then he poured the last of the whisky into his glass.

For a moment he gazed again at his reflection in the mirror of the overmantel. The eyes he saw were panic-stricken and great furrows had appeared in his cheeks.

'By God, she'll get me—I know she will!' he exclaimed hoarsely.

Then the flicker of a smile spread over his pallid features and he murmured to his reflection in a puzzled tone:

'I wonder why I told the Doc' that Frank Dawson might be in China or some place? He's dead as door nails, and I wished it on him, too. But he's getting back on me now after all these years—or something is. It's a Life for a Life all right.'

He tilted his glass and swallowed the neat spirit, then shuddered and coughed a little as the fiery liquid caught his throat.

'Herbert!'

The strident, now angry call came from the room above.

'And to think that I did it to get Maggie,' he whispered to himself.

'HERBERT!' the voice came again.

'All right—I'm coming!' he called back.

Then Herbert Sandmeyer took a last glance round the sitting-room, turned out the gas, and went up to bed.

STORY V

This is another of my early stories. Of the dozen or so that I wrote in 1932 about half were taken for publication and the remainder were returned to me with 'The Editor regrets. . . .'

By the time the rejected scripts came back I was much too deeply immersed in other plots to hold a post-mortem on them with a view to discovering where they had failed to please and, possibly, re-writing them so that they might find a market. I simply parked them in a bottom drawer and ten years slipped by before I looked at them again.

Now that I have re-read them one thing rather puzzles me. Why should some of these stories—all of which were written in the same period, when I was an enthusiastic amateur without a line published to my credit—have been taken by magazines of the first rank while others could not find a buyer?

The present story is a little on the light side but I think it has point and quite a neat twist at its end which, I fear, is more than can be said for this introductory note. Therefore, I will only add that, having read the tale, it may intrigue you to decide whether you would have bought it for publication at the modest beginner's price which I should have been happy to accept, had you been an editor to whom it had been submitted.

In the Underground

'Now isn't that extraordinary?' said Wendy. 'That's the second time today that I've run into Vera Nichols, and I haven't seen her once in the last five years—not since I left school, in fact.'

'Yes,' I nodded, 'it is queer how that sort of thing seems to happen sometimes. It's just coincidence, I suppose, but it's the sort of thing that may cost a man his life.'

Wendy's large blue eyes grew round with surprise. 'What do you mean?' she exclaimed.

I laughed. 'Didn't I ever tell you about that extraordinary adventure I had a year or two ago in the Underground?'

She shook her charming head. 'Do tell me,' she said eagerly.

'All right,' I agreed; 'when we get home I will.'

A quarter of an hour later Wendy set a lavish ration of her father's Scotch whisky at my elbow. I pulled her down beside me, and there was a short interlude about which we need not bother, then I went on with the story.

'It was when I was going down to the city one morning—a Monday, I remember, and I had been staying with the Jervises for a week-end's golf; that was why I was so late. The usual crush had gone to their treadmill long before, and the train was three parts empty.

'It got in at South Ken; you see, we'd motored up, and I'd dropped my bag at the flat. I'd left the paper in Bill Jervis's car, so I had nothing to read on my way to the city, and just sat there looking vaguely at the advertise-

ments. That thing "Monsol for colds" caught my eye, you know, the one that says "see how your neighbour's looking", with the funny picture of a man peering at the chap next door who's got a stinking cold. But *I* couldn't, I hadn't got a neighbour. My side of the train was completely empty, there were only two chaps opposite.

'They were an extraordinary couple; at least, one man was pretty odd—a real homosexual. He had a long, grey-looking face, with a pursed-up mouth, weak blue eyes, and one of those thin, mean-looking noses. He was about sixty, I suppose, but it was his kit that gave him character. A neat dark grey suiting, rather worn and early Edwardian in cut—a waistcoat that buttoned almost up to his neck, his coat collar only about an inch deep, and the lapels so small that they looked absurd. He wore a stiff collar, of course—one of the single kind—and the narrowest of little black ties, a sixpence would have covered the knot. A bowler and an unrolled umbrella completed his outfit. Oh—and a heavy gold watch-chain, with a little truncated cross made of some black stuff dangling from it.

'He was D.O.R.A.'s husband in the flesh—a real old Nonconformist killjoy if ever there was one. The other chap was more ordinary, but he wasn't quite like a Londoner, all the same. His face was large, and bronzed, as though he'd lived in the tropics. There was something about his soft hat, too, which gave that impression. His suit was of very thin brown stripy material, and his shirt and socks were silk. I could hardly take my eyes off old Killjoy, he was such a perfect type. He seemed to be acting up to my idea of him too. The Brown Man was evidently trying to urge something on him—but the old boy wouldn't play. He sat there with his little mouth all buttoned up, just frowning down his nose, and shaking his head every now and then.

'After a bit, Brown Man produced some papers out of

a case and thrust them in front of Killjoy, but Killjoy wouldn't play—not he. He just sat there as though he'd swallowed a poker with his knobbly hands clasped on top of his umbrella. He glanced sideways at the papers with one pale eye, and then looked sharply away again.

'The Brown Man positively scowled at him—then he seemed to give it up. He slipped his papers back into the case, and sat, silent and sulky, for about three stations.

'I couldn't sit there staring all the time, so I started to study the advertisements again. When I did glance at the couple opposite I saw the Brown Man give old Killjoy the most curious look—it was a mixture of fear and hate. If looks could have killed, that old man would have dropped dead there and then, but he didn't seem to notice. A few minutes later I caught the Brown Man looking sideways at him just that way again, then he dipped his hand quickly into his pocket and took out a little box. It looked like one of those Chinese puzzle boxes with doors that open on every side; quite a tiny thing but beautifully made. He thrust it at old Killjoy.

'The old chap took it with a grudging look, the Brown Man tapped it twice with his finger-nail, and gave a curious, unpleasant laugh. The little box sprang open, and Killjoy almost smiled. 'You haven't got one like that,' I heard the Brown Man say, and although I only caught his words faintly through the roar of the train, I could see the malicious way he said it.

'Old Killjoy had propped his umbrella between his knees and was examining the box carefully. He sniffed at it, and seemed to like the smell—he sniffed again and held it to his long thin nose for about a minute, then he rested it on his bony knee while a puzzled look came over his prim face. After that he sniffed it two or three times more.

'The train had run into Blackfriars Station, and the Brown Man stood up. With one hand he snatched the

little box from Killjoy, and with the other thrust a packet of papers into the old man's palm. Then he got out.

'I had one more glimpse of him as the train moved off. He was standing on the platform staring at old Killjoy's back, and there was that curious look of mingled fear and hate on his face again. He followed us with his eyes until we disappeared from view.

'Killjoy looked stupidly at the papers for a moment, then he opened them out. He gave a little dry double cough, as though he was about to address a meeting, and began to read them through.

'He didn't like those papers—not one little bit, I could see that. After he'd been reading for a minute he wriggled his skinny neck as though his collar hurt him, and turned a nasty yellow colour.

'For a second he put them down and stared across at me. His pale blue eyes seemed to be positively bulging. I thought he was going to have a fit. Then he went on reading again, and was still at it when I got out at the Mansion House.

'That was the last I saw of Killjoy—but not of the man in brown. I had an appointment in the West End early that afternoon, so I lunched on my way back at Romano's in the Strand. There he was, sitting at the very next table.

'At first I couldn't remember where I'd seen him—thought I'd met him somewhere—in business, you know. His face was just vaguely familiar. Then I suddenly remembered that it was only that morning I had seen him in the Tube. Just the same sort of coincidence as your running into Vera Nichols twice today.

'He had a very different companion with him this time. It—or rather she—was a very pretty girl. Blue eyes, golden hair, a chic little hat, a real lovely. But the Brown Man didn't seem at all happy or cheerful, as might have been expected. He seemed worried out of

his wits—she was looking pretty anxious, too.

'I was lunching on my own, so I had heaps of time to study them and I must confess I was interested although I didn't want to appear rude. Snatches of their conversation came to me quite clearly.

' "I've done it," he kept on saying to her in an excited voice, "I've done it," and each time he beat a sharp tattoo on the table.

' "Oh, Jim," she put a hand on his quickly, "it would be too ghastly if anything goes wrong."

' "It won't," he said fiercely; "I've seen to that," but he looked furtively up and down the restaurant as though he expected to see a policeman walk in at any moment.

'She drew a quick sigh. "And it's all over, Jim?—you're certain?"

' "Sure as I'm sitting here," he nodded. "The old devil simply wouldn't see reason. He asked for it, and he got it."

" 'Oh, Jim," her blue eyes filled with tears, "I don't know whether to be glad or sorry."

' "I don't care if he was your father," the man broke out; "he was the meanest, rottenest old screw that ever lived—he had his chance and he wouldn't take it—thank God I've seen the last of him."

'The girl looked round quickly, then she leaned forward and said in a whisper that only just reached my ears: "But—but—if they were to arrest you?"

'He pushed away his plate with a jerky movement and shook his head. "They won't. Why should they pick on me?"

' "Won't there be an inquiry?" she hazarded.

' "Of course," he replied impatiently; "but I shall leave on the night-boat. I was sailing, anyhow, in a couple of days—they won't have a chance to drag me

into it. You must join me in Paris when things have blown over."

'My waiter appeared with coffee at that moment, so I lost the next portion of the conversation. Then I found it difficult to pick up the threads, and I only got one other bit clearly before I realised that I must bolt if I was to be in time for my appointment. It was the girl who asked :

' "Will it be in the evening papers, Jim?"

' "Sure to be," he nodded; "they wouldn't miss a thing like this."

'As I went to my meeting I thought over that strange conversation. They were talking about old Killjoy, of course—the girl must be his daughter—but what had Brown Man done? And what was it that the old chap had asked for—and now got? Then there was that frightened whisper about arrest, and Brown Man's talk of clearing off on the night-boat. It certainly looked as if there were dirty work somewhere.

'Of course, if I hadn't seen the Brown Man in the Underground to begin with, the whole conversation in the restaurant would have been meaningless as far as I was concerned. I doubt if I should ever have let my bad manners run away with me to the extent of listening at all.

'When I got back to the flat that evening I grabbed the paper at once. I hadn't the ghost of a notion what Killjoy's name was, or the Brown Man's either, but I thought, with any luck, I might stumble on something which might help me to identify one of them. The Brown Man had seemed so certain that whatever it was would be in the evening paper.

'I hadn't far to seek either; there it was glaring headlines. Look, here's a cutting that I kept.

'MYSTERIOUS DEATH ON UNDERGROUND

Tobias Meakin Dies in Strange Circumstances

FRAUDULENT TRANSACTIONS ALLEGED AGAINST DIRECTORS OF MEAKIN, WILDE AND CO.

At eleven-twenty today officials of the Underground discovered the body of a well-dressed man in an empty compartment, when one of the Company's trains ran into Mark Lane Station. The body was later identified as that of Tobias Meakin, chairman of the well-known house of Meakin, Wilde and Co., China merchants. Foul play was first suspected, since upon examination the police were of the opinion that Mr. Meakin's death was the result of poison. In the afternoon, however, rumours were in circulation in the city that a series of frauds had been perpetrated by Mr. Meakin and other directors of his company. It is reported that a Mr. James Bondman, the Company's Shanghai representative, who is at present in England, had threatened to make certain disclosures, and it is now believed that Mr. Meakin took his own life rather than face an inquiry. Mr. Meakin was a man of considerable wealth and maintained a large establishment at Richmond. He was an ardent prohibitionist, and a prominent member of the Anti-Saloon League. His collection of Chinese curios is said to be the finest in the country. He leaves one daughter, Miss Violet Meakin, but it is understood that the bulk of his fortune will go to swell the funds of those movements to which he devoted so much of his energy during his life. The police are anxious to get in touch with any person or persons who may have seen Mr. Meakin travelling to the city this morning. Will any such kindly communicate with New Scotland Yard?

'There followed a long description, but, of course, I did not need that to recognise poor old Killjoy. It was he without a doubt—beyond a doubt, too, the little Chinese box had contained the subtle Oriental poison that had killed him when he sniffed it up. It was murder plain and simple.

'Naturally I had no wish to go to Scotland Yard and be lugged in as principal witness at a murder trial, but what else could I do? I telephoned at once and they asked me to come down immediately—so off I went.

'I told my story to a nice jovial inspector man, and very interested he was. Apparently they had made up their minds it was suicide. Old Meakin was actually holding in his hand a copy of the disclosures which Bondman had threatened to make when they found him.

'Bondman, of course, was my friend of the brown suit, and those must have been the papers he handed to old Killjoy as he got out.

'They circulated Bondman's description, and put out an all-station call for him at once. The inspector rang up the following morning to tell me that they had pinched Bondman at the passport office, just about to take the Channel boat. Would I go down to the Yard and identify him as the man I had seen in the train.

'It was a rotten job, and I just hated it. It's no fun, you know, to be called in to swear to a man, when you know that on your word alone that man may hang—but there was nothing else for it.

'They took me round the corner to Cannon Row police-station, and staged an identity parade. Brown Man was in it all right, and I picked him out at once; the poor devil was looking more worried than ever, and I didn't wonder.

'Of course, he swore that he hadn't done the murder, but he admitted to having been in the Underground with Meakin and to having shown him the Chinese box. He admitted, too, that he had threatened to disclose the frauds—and he had disclosed them that same morning after he left the Underground.

'When he was questioned about his conversation with the girl, he swore by all his gods that the only reason she was frightened that he might be arrested was in connection with the frauds. It seemed that he had been mixed up in them himself in a minor degree—that was the reason he gave for trying to get out of the country,

once he had blown the old man up. Before I left the station I had a chat with the Inspector.

' "He'll swing," he told me with a grin. "We know he was keen on the girl—thought she'd inherit, too, maybe. Motive and opportunity—that's the thing. Novelists may have all sorts of high-flown theories about crime, but if you can prove motive and opportunity in a case of murder, ninety-nine times out of a hundred you've got your man."

'But that wasn't the end of it. Next morning my inspector man rang up again to say that Killjoy's Chinese servant had committed suicide and left a confession behind.

'That staggered me a bit, as you can imagine, but when I sat down to think it over I realised one thing; if there were traces of poison in Killjoy's nose it was a hundred to one that he had sniffed it up out of Brown Man's little box, and the servant's suicide wasn't going to help him, so I hurried off to get details.

'I saw the police-surgeon and persuaded him to tell me about his report; Old Meakin had died by inhaling a noxious drug which had gone to his brain—so it seemed that my theory was right after all. Then, just as I was leaving, the Inspector arrived back from Richmond with the Chink's confession. It stated that he had done Killjoy in by sprinkling an Oriental powder on his breakfast napkin—so, you see, the Brown Man got away with it after all.'

'But how ghastly!' exclaimed Wendy. 'Do you realise, Dick, that if the Chinese hadn't committed suicide that wretched man might have been hung, just because you happened to see him twice in one day?'

'That's true,' I said slowly as I helped myself to another peg of Papa's Scotch, 'but the Chinese are queer people. Plenty of them will sell their lives for a hundred

pounds if you send the money to their family and I saw the Brown Man's face, remember, when he gave old Killjoy the box. It's my belief that he ought to have swung—but his girl bought the Chink's life to get him off.'

STORY VI

This, too, is an early story which was amongst the rejected but it differs from its half-dozen companions in that, although it lay forgotten with the rest for some seven years, it was at last taken out, duly re-written and published.

The reason for this exception is that when I had written my first Ghost Hunter story I suddenly remembered this tale of a Scottish haunting. All I had to do was to dig it up and put Neils Orsen into it and there was Number 2 of the Ghost Hunter series. Otherwise the story remains unaltered.

I would like, however, to add that the yarn owes much more to my wife than to myself. It was she who originally gave me the plot and put into the story all the nice touches of local colour which help so much to convey the lonely and inviolate beauty of the shores of the Moray Firth. Yet the plot was not altogether the product of her imagination. For some years she lived near Fort George and on more than one occasion when passing Castle Stuart at dusk—and once by moonlight—on her bicycle, pedalled with the fury of near-panic to escape the almost tangible and sinister influence which emanates from that ancient ruin.

The Case of the Long-dead Lord

'Thank God you've come,' Bruce Hemmingway cried, as he gripped the hand of the little man for whom he'd been waiting on the platform at Inverness.

'Your wire interested me,' Neils Orsen replied with a gentle smile. 'What's this about my being a naturalist?'

'I'll tell you in a minute. Let's go over to the hotel.'

As the two men walked across the street they made an oddly assorted couple. Neils Orsen was small and lightly built, with transparently pale skin and large, luminous blue eyes. His domed head with a high intelligent brow and mass of soft fair hair appeared too large for his diminutive body. Hatless, dressed in pale grey, carrying a basket conspicuously labelled 'Live Cat', he made a striking contrast to the tall, dark-haired American by his side.

Over coffee in the hotel Bruce explained while the Siamese cat, Pāst, sat on a chair beside them, lapping cream.

'Arkon Clyde, a friend of mine from back home, has taken Castle Stuart for the shooting. I drew up the lease and as the Clydes have never been in Scotland before they asked me to see them settled in. At the moment there's just the old man, who is completely absorbed in books, and his glamorous daughter Fiona; their guests don't arrive for about a week. I've known the girl for some time; she's typical of her generation; sensible, a bit hard-boiled, but full of fun. Yet, when I arrived two days after them, I found her all shot to pieces.

'Well, that puzzled me quite a bit, but the only thing I could get out of her was that for the first time in her

life she was suffering from the most appalling nightmares.

'The day before yesterday I took her a walk to explore the ruins of the old castle which are some two miles away. Leading to it there's a lovely avenue of old beeches. We'd only got halfway along it when suddenly she stopped dead, and a queer look came into her eyes: "I've been here before," she whispered to herself, then she began to mutter in what seemed to me like Gaelic. I took hold of her hands and shook her and she looked at me with wide, blinded eyes. As I called her name the spell seemed to snap. She just said she was tired of walking and wanted to go back.

'Maybe I'm wrong, but it didn't seem to me a case for an ordinary doctor, so I asked Arkon if I might have a friend of mine who was a naturalist to stay for a few days, because I didn't want them to know you are a ghost-hunter, and wired you that night.'

'Has anything happened since?' the little Swede asked in his careful English that held hardly a trace of accent.

'No, nothing; except that she never goes into her room if she can help it and spends most of her time wandering alone round the grounds.'

'Does she strike you as an imaginative young woman?'

'Far from it. She has brains as well as looks and graduated in Law at Columbus.'

Neils leaned back, placing the tips of his fingers together.

'So she doesn't like her room? Have you been into it?'

'Yes; I even spent the night before last there, but I slept like a top and yesterday she insisted on returning to it. I can't understand it—I'm sure she's terrified of it and yet she refuses to move.'

'The girl may be abnormally psychic; as neither you nor, apparently, her father are in the least disturbed.'

'Oh, one thing I forgot. She said that her door

wouldn't stay shut. Well, the night I spent there it didn't budge an inch. I know, because I fixed a piece of cotton over the opening and it wasn't broken in the morning.'

'At certain phases of the moon, perhaps,' Neils hazarded, 'the Force—if there is a Force—might be stronger.'

'Maybe. But she didn't sleep any better in my room. It's killing her, Neils. A few days ago she was at least scared, and fighting it. Now she's just vague and won't talk. She looked like death at breakfast this morning, but of course her father didn't notice anything; he was buried in some book or other. I don't like leaving her alone. If only I could get that dog to stay with her.'

'What dog?'

'The boar-hound that belongs to the place. He liked her at first, but now he runs away as soon as she appears. Can people be possessed, Neils?'

'Certainly; but we've hardly enough evidence to presuppose such a thing in this case. Miss Clyde sounds like a girl suffering from a species of nervous collapse. Of course, a place having the history of Castle Stuart behind it would be filled with vibrations from the past, but apart from the dog's behaviour there is nothing to suggest that her condition is the result of psychic causes.'

'I know, Neils. But I'll swear something queer is going on. Ten days ago, in London, Fiona was a normal, healthy girl with bags of energy; now she's a nervous wreck and so washed out that one might—yes, one might even think that a vampire was sapping her vitality.'

Pāst closed his eyes and purred softly. 'Let us go,' said Neils, 'to Castle Stuart.'

. . . . .

As Bruce turned the car into the gateway the sun was brilliant over the Firth and mountain heads, and he

felt a little ashamed at having summoned the famous psychic investigator for so nebulous a purpose. The Castle looked a mild architectural curiosity, but no more. There was nothing sinister here where the drive wound among the sun-burnished scrub and pines. Neils, with the cat upon his knees, glanced up at the brown stone battlements.

'But this is not very old,' he said smiling.

'Oh, no, only about a hundred and fifty years. It's just a copy. The ruins of the original castle are about two miles away. It marks one boundary of the estate.'

In the great hall sunlight stabbed the worn surfaces of ancient flags that hung motionless, dropping long, twisted shadows across the stairway. While the servants were taking up Orsen's luggage the Swede stood very still, his head inclined as though he listened. Bruce had left him, to look for Fiona. He brought her through the garden door into the hall, where she stood, bathed in the dusty sunlight, her golden hair responding to its caresses; but her lovely green eyes were cold and distant as she shook hands with Orsen.

Her father rushed upon them from the library, American hospitality in every gesture. He was delighted to welcome Bruce's friend . . . Pāst was cute . . . He had found some interesting material on the bird-life of the island . . . and the books were ready beside the sherry for the attention of Mr. Orsen.

But Neils refused the wine, and Bruce said sadly, 'I'm afraid he never touches alcohol.'

Throughout luncheon Neils contrived to show a surprising knowledge of his purported subject and Arkon Clyde took to him immediately; but Fiona obviously found it an effort to concentrate her attention sufficiently to appear barely civil, and directly the meal was over she excused herself abruptly.

' 'Fraid my girl doesn't take to this sort of life very

easily,' Clyde said in apology as the door closed behind her. 'I guess she finds it a bit dull after New York.'

'I'll go and see if I can amuse her,' Bruce volunteered. Neils made no sign. His small, gnome-like figure remained bowed in contemplation; one hand was playing with a lock of hair.

Bruce found Fiona curled up on a garden seat behind the Castle. Sitting down, he said earnestly: 'Fiona, do tell me what's wrong. It's sticking out a mile that you've got something on your mind.'

'No! If I tell, you'll say I'm crazy.' She turned away from him and he saw the scarlet mouth tremble. 'I'm beginning to think I must be; no sane person could feel the way I do—could'—she spoke in a hard, strained voice '—could feel *haunted*!'

As he remained silent she went on desperately: 'Dammit, Bruce, the Castle *is* haunted, and you know it. Why did you let Father bring me here?'

Bruce nodded. 'So I was right! Now listen, Fiona. My friend, Neils Orsen, is not really a naturalist but the world's greatest psychic investigator. I wired for him when I saw how things were with you, and I'm darned glad I did, because if anyone can help you, he can. Let me fetch him; then you can tell him all about it.'

'I don't think anyone can help me, but you can get him if you promise that Father shan't be worried about me.'

When Bruce returned with Orsen, she was sitting in the same position, staring at the ground. She turned her head slightly as they sat down. 'Give me a cigarette, please, Bruce.' Her hand shook as she held it. 'There's something after me in this place,' she began. 'It won't let me alone. I felt odd when I first saw the Castle as we came up the drive. I knew just how it would look. That gave me a kind of shock, and I didn't tell Father, but I wanted to run away. I knew I oughtn't to go in

or stay here. I lost the feeling a little until the evening—I was busy unpacking and getting the place straight. Then, when I was alone in my room before dinner, the door swung open suddenly and made me jump. It was perfectly light, and I could see nothing, but I was scared and ran out of the room. That damned door's been opening every night—except when Bruce slept there—and there's a queer, cold feeling in my head, as though I were forgetting how to think. All the time I have the idea that I know this place—that something is going to happen to me again. If only I could remember what—I might prevent it; but I can't. Wherever I go the air is full of whispers that I can't quite hear—and that was all—until last night.'

'Last night,' Bruce repeated.

She nodded. 'Yes; I was so frightened and wretched that I decided to sleep downstairs. I waited until you and Father were in your rooms. I thought perhaps the boar-hound would be sleeping in the hall; so I stood at the head of the stairs and whistled to him. And from my room—I'd left the door open—there came the most horrible chuckle, very hoarse and—and liquid. The Thing was there—it was watching me—laughing at me. I could feel it.'

'What did you do?' Orsen said quietly.

'I heard the dog growl and I ran down to him—but he was scared of something and wouldn't come near me. I stayed in the hall till about four o'clock. I couldn't sit still and I couldn't sleep, so when the light came I went for a walk. I got back about seven, had a bath and came down to breakfast. Oh, God! I'm frightened, Bruce—and I've never been frightened before. It'll get me and keep me for ever and ever. Don't let it! For God's sake don't let it!' She began to sob hysterically.

Neils stroked her hand soothingly. 'I'll do my very best to help you, I promise. Meanwhile, I suggest that

you come and lie down in the hall. You have nothing to fear for the moment and you might be able to get some sleep.'

When they had made her comfortable Bruce offered to show Orsen his room. The man-servant had unpacked all the suitcases save one. 'I kept the key,' Neils smiled, 'and I'll see to it later. It contains my cameras.'

Bruce had already seen the cameras in Orsen's company on one strange adventure, but their process—Orsen's invention—was a mystery to him. Neils explained them only by saying that their plates were abnormally sensitive. He said the same thing of his sound-recorder, an instrument like a miniature dictaphone. Bruce wondered what his friend thought of Fiona's story but knew from past experience that he would have to wait until the little man chose to enlighten him.

'Where is Miss Clyde's room?' Orsen was asking.

'Across the passage, the second door; I'll sleep in it again if you like.'

Neils shook his head. 'No, Pāst and I will occupy it tonight.'

He strayed towards the window and looked out across the Firth to where the blue hills melted into the horizon. 'What a history those moors could tell,' he said thoughtfully. 'Can you hear the skirl of pipes, Bruce, or see the kilted ghosts marching up across the heather?'

'No,' said Bruce uncomfortably. 'All the same, I'm jolly glad I asked you to come up here. I'll leave you now, as I expect you'd like to get your things straight.' Bruce was a normal practical person, but as he left his small friend, standing with arms folded, heavy head sunk forward, and eyes half-closed, he thought—Neils himself gives me the creeps at times.

Fiona was no longer in the hall, and going outside he found her lying on the grass at the entrance to the wild garden. As he approached she sat up and said coldly:

'By the way, your friend is not thinking of spending the night in my room, is he?'

'He certainly is.'

'Well, he won't find anything. Tell him not to fuss.' She stretched her arms above her head. '*I'm* not worrying any more; I feel too tired to care.'

Bruce stared at her. He could hardly believe that this calm aloof creature had been sobbing hysterically on his shoulder half an hour before. 'Fiona,' he pleaded, 'there's one thing you must promise. Stick by me and Neils. We won't let any harm come to you.'

She smiled queerly. 'I think the harm has come to me already, and I'm living with it. Let me alone, Bruce; I'm not frightened any more.' She turned away from him towards the house; but half an hour later through sheer inertia she had consented to move into the other wing of the Castle for the coming night.

. . . . .

'Everything is ready,' Neils said to Bruce after dinner. 'I have the cameras fixed and I've taken other precautions.' He ran his fingers through his hair. 'By the way, where's the girl?'

'She's in the music-room; I'll go to her, I think.'

'Let me. Without her knowing it I may be able to strengthen her sub-conscious defences so that she gets some sleep. You go into the library and talk to Mr. Clyde.' Neils was gone as quietly as a shadow.

On their way to bed he halted Bruce at the door of his own room. 'I'll come in here with you for half an hour in case the servants are about.' He shut the door and drew back the window curtains. Pāst watched him with colourless, unblinking eyes as he added quietly:

'There *is* something here.'

'What d'you think it is?'

'I can't say for certain. There are earth-bound spirits which can do great harm. You've heard me talk of such things before—of the dark places where those who have not yet passed over must lurk, and long to return. Alternatively, although this place is not old as castles go, it may have seen bloodshed. Torture or murder done for power cause vibrations and echoes that never die. If they can find some material thing to focus on they may become evil entities of great power, and even materialise at times. I have not felt any strong evil here, but when I was with Miss Clyde tonight I needed all my strength to resist a sense of bitterness, of seeking for justice, a cold and lost feeling at the heart. Perhaps that room'—he pointed across the passage—'holds the secret. We shall see.'

'May I watch with you?'

'No. I want you to go to the other wing and stay beside her door until it is light.'

While the hours crept by and silence held Castle Stuart as though with a mighty hand, Bruce sat leaning his head against the lintels of Fiona's door. At times he watched the slowly gathering shadows that touched the angles of wall and stairway and crawled along the vaulted ceiling; swirling like an eddying tide around his feet. Twice the door at his cheek swung open and he heard Fiona come to shut it. Down in the well of the hall he heard the boar-hound whining in its sleep, but no sound of alarm came from Fiona's room and none came from the far side of the great staircase where Orsen kept vigil. By four o'clock the short northern night was over, and having seen the cold grey dawn begin to steal through the windows, Bruce sought his bed.

He slept late and found no opportunity to be alone with Neils until Clyde retired into the libary and Fiona had set out on her morning walk.

Neils looked pale and weary; his eyelids drooped.

'There was nothing,' he said, 'nothing at all. And you?'

'Nothing. Her door opened twice, but she didn't look out.'

'Did she open it?'

'I don't know. I heard her come and shut it, but this morning when I asked her how she had slept she didn't complain of anything.'

'I have never passed a night in a room so free of vibrations,' the Swede said slowly. 'It is most perplexing. Pāst, too, felt nothing or he would certainly have shown it; and he is perhaps the severest of all tests. I think.' he added, 'I will spend tonight down in the hall.'

They passed an uneasy day and were glad when Fiona and her father retired to bed.

Again Bruce kept watch. Again, save for the opening and shutting of the door, he was not disturbed, and in the morning Neils, too, reported an untroubled night.

Fiona had now become so far withdrawn from the three men that, to Bruce's mind at least, she seemed to move among them like a spirit. She did not appear unhappy, but her wide green eyes were heavy and shadowed, contrasting violently with the transparent pallor of her face, and her lovely hair seemed to reflect the moon rather than the sun. She made polite conversation at meals, and escaped after them. Every effort that Bruce made to talk to her was coldly received.

At dinner on the third evening Neils spoke only when addressed. For the rest of the time he was silent, his gaze fixed on Fiona. She had not changed from the tweeds she had worn all day and sat calm and composed, her eyes staring vacantly at the table.

'Only six days to the twelfth,' Clyde said. 'I hope I shall have the pleasure of Bruce's company and yours, Mr. Orsen, for the first few days at least.'

'Not mine, I fear,' Orsen said absently.

'But you won't be leaving us so soon?'

'Tomorrow, I'm afraid.'

Bruce checked his astonishment. By no look, by no lift of the eyebrow or whispered word had Neils given him a hint. Fiona heard of Orsen's projected departure without speaking. She ate practically nothing. Before coffee was served she got abruptly to her feet and left the room. Her father stared after her with a worried frown creasing his forehead.

'I think Fiona must have gone *fey*,' he said, 'she looks mighty queer tonight.'

Orsen glanced quickly at his host. 'Why should she go *fey*? Only Scottish people are supposed to do that.'

'Well, she is Scotch—or anyway, a good half. Her mother was a McAin.'

Bruce saw that Orsen's enormous eyes were gleaming with suppressed excitement. But it was not until they had left the table and were alone that he whispered urgently:

'Her Scottish ancestry! I felt just now we should learn something important tonight. Quick! We must hunt the library for any books dealing with the history of Castle Stuart.'

For an hour the two men searched, dragging out volume after volume and frantically scanning their pages for a clue; they had almost despaired, when suddenly Orsen gave a cry of relief.

'This—this should give us the link we seek. It's the history of Castle Stuart, translated into English by the Reverend Father Cox, Chaplain to the Castle from 1698 to 1717.' He ran his finger down the index and turning to a page half-way through the book, began to read:

'Of all the Lordes of Castle Stuart, they do tell that Donald Stuart was the blackest of them all. He were fitter companie for men-at-arms in their drunken brawls than for the fair young maide he did bring to be his bryde.

'She was the Ladie Fiona McAin, own daughter to

the McAin of Crath, a winsome lass of sixteen summers who did grieve most sorely to leave her mother's side.'

'Good God!' Bruce broke in. 'D'you realise Fiona's mother was a McAin and there's the extraordinary coincidence of the Christian names?'

'Of course,' Orsen nodded impatiently. 'It's something of this kind that I've been hunting for.' And he read on:

'It becometh us not to linger on that mating, for of a truth it was of an eagle and a dove, contrarie to the laws of nature and a thing offensive in the eyes of God. Poor maide how could she find happiness with such a spouse, and who shall caste blame upon her that she did welcome the young Lorde Ninan when fresh from the Court of France and full of the gracies of the French he did come as a guest for a while beneath Black Donald's roof?

'Lorde Ninan was a courtly, slender man, with smiling face and witty tongue. He did strum upon the lute for the Ladie Fiona's pleasure, write poesie for her and in the French fashion oft did kiss her hand.

'Some say that no more passed between the twain than this, for well did the Ladie Fiona know the jealous heart of her own dark Lorde. Yet on a night of feasting —so the tale is told—when the women had withdrawn and the men were in their cups, Black Donald did suddenlie miss the Lorde Ninan from his board and calling for his claymore he did stagger up the stairs to his Ladie's chamber.

'The lovers herde his loud approach, and knowing there to be murder in his drunken vengeful heart, the Ladie Fiona took Lorde Ninan's hande and guided him by a secret stair behind the tapestry down to the inner court.

'But Black Donald knew well the secret stair, and

swift for all the liquor he had drunk, followed cursing upon their heels.

'They had but reached the postern gate when he espied them and shouting to his men-at-arms rushed after. Near-by the well Lorde Ninan turned at bay, but the Stuart clansmen fell upon him piercing him with a dozen pikes and skean dhus, so that he fell backwards over the well's rim, saving himself from plunging into its rockie depths onlie by the clutch of one stronge hande.

'The Ladie Fiona screamed for them to spare him but he knew his life was done, and as he hung there he cried aloud:

' "Fiona! I'll wait for thee, m'darling!" Then with one stroke did Black Donald slice off the clutching hande and the young Lorde fell to his death in the icie water sixty feet below.

' 'Tis said that the Lorde Ninan's spirit doth wait there, uneasy stille, so that in passing the end of the avenue that leads up to that grim stronghold, the belated traveller yet may hear the last laugh of Black Donald when his bloodie wille was done, and that last heart-cry of the Lorde Ninan:

' "Fiona! I'll wait for thee, m'darling—I'll wait for thee." '

Orsen closed the book and stood up. 'The whole thing is clear now. It may be a case of re-incarnation or merely the McAin strain in Fiona's blood coupled with her given name. The restless spirit of Lord Ninan still waits for his love to join him. This world is a misty, timeless place to earth-bound spirits and that of Lord Ninan cannot distinguish between our Fiona and the Fiona who lived three hundred years ago; but it has become vaguely aware of her presence in the neighbourhood and is using all the power it can command to draw her to it.'

'Then her father must be told at once,' Bruce said

quickly, 'and arrangements made for her to leave Scotland for good tomorrow.'

Neils nodded. 'Yes. It is she who is haunted; not the Castle or her room. That is why no manifestation occurs when she is not present. She must be got away as soon as possible, and, in the meantime it's most important that she should not be allowed to go anywhere near the old ruin. The gravest possible danger awaits her there. If she were drawn to the place it's a virtual certainty that her mental resistance would be overcome and she'd feel herself compelled to throw herself down that well.'

'Right,' said Bruce. 'I'll go and tell her that you've found the root of the trouble and warn her not to leave the house.' He turned abruptly as Clyde came into the room, saying with a worried look :

'Bruce, I'm anxious about Fiona. The servants tell me she went out half an hour ago. She didn't even take a coat and it gets damp at this time of night. I wish you'd go and . . .'

Before he had time to complete his sentence Bruce leaped for the door and they heard his footsteps thunder across the hall.

Clyde had glimpsed the look of horror in Bruce's eyes and now he saw the strained expression on Orsen's face.

'What's this,' he exclaimed. 'What's happened?'

'We can only pray,' Orsen said quietly. 'Bruce can run faster than we can. Please God he will be in time.'

Up the rough track with the queer grey sky overhead and the lone moors hunched and darkening on either side, Bruce ran like a man possessed. A mist had risen off the sea; rags and rafes of it danced on the air. Here and there it came down solidly. He stumbled and fell over a tuft of heather. And now the mist came more shrouding and more white. A curlew sobbed its cry somewhere in the silence, and the trees at the roadside reared their great arms heavenwards in mockery.

He ran on, his breath coming in short gasps, knowing nothing but the blind necessity to be in time. As he topped the rise above the old castle, something told him he was too late. Down into the eerie mist he plunged and instantly felt a chill, as if a cold hand grasped his throat. He fell again, staggered to his feet, and ran on desperately across the turf. His footsteps dragged as though he were wading through a bog. A cold whiteness was all about him and with its physical desolation there bore upon his brain another darkness— a sense of evil, too sickening to be borne. He was crouched and groping. He muttered a prayer that died in his throat. Out of the gloom the stones reared, spectral and forbidding. 'Fiona!' he shouted. 'Fiona!'

The swathes of fog beat at his face. 'Fiona!' he called again. 'For God's sake answer.'

Cold, he thought suddenly. Cold—cold—cold. A faint wind whispered through the ruins. He passed his hand across his forehead. He did not know what thoughts they were which seized his brain and cramped it until no feeling came to him but one of intense fear. The wind whispered louder. Now he was up again and running forward. The evil mist was throttling him, but ahead he saw the figure of a girl—a girl who stayed at the edge of a dark, yawning pit. The mist had become a solid wall blocking his way; the wind rose to a shrill scream. He shut his eyes.

'Oh, Lord God, help me because'—strangely inspired the words came to his lips—'because there is none other that fighteth for us but only Thou, Oh God.' Then the mist was rent as though two great hands had torn it asunder and he was at Fiona's side, dragging her back. He felt her body fall limply against him; and now where the dark pit had gaped there was only the shallow, rock-filled ruin of an old well.

Lifting his head he saw that the mist had gone. Cool

and grey under the evening sky lay the stones of old Castle Stuart. He stood there for a time holding Fiona in his arms. She stirred and smiled at him :

'What happened, Bruce? . . . Why are we here? . . . He called me . . . Why did he call me so urgently? . . . Why did he want me?'

'He's gone.'

'Did you send him away?' she asked faintly. 'Thank you, Bruce.'

'I think,' he said, 'we should thank Neils Orsen.'

STORY VII

Old Rowley. A Very Private Life of Charles II was, I think, one of the brighter inspirations of my first year as a writer. I had already completed two thrillers and a number of short stories and, although none of these had so far been accepted for publication, I was optimistically wondering what to try my hand at next when the first acquaintance I ever made in the publishing world—Bertie van Thal—came to dine.

At that time Bertie was manager to Messrs. Peter Davies, who were in the process of publishing a most excellent series of short biographies at 5*s*. a volume. With touching faith Bertie suggested that I was just the man to do a volume for this series.

Had they been weighty, academic tomes crammed with erudition and supported by exhaustive bibliographies I should never have had the temerity to fall for the suggestion, but, since they were just brief readable accounts of famous historical characters without any 'copious notes' or other garnishings, I swallowed the bait, hook, line, and sinker.

Charles II has always been one of my heroes, so I declared there and then that I would gladly write a life of England's most maligned, but most brilliant and attractive, king. Bertie hastened to cover himself by saying that, of course, he could not guarantee its accept-

ance, but that his firm would be delighted to give it their consideration when completed.

Some two months later I delivered the manuscript. By that time I'd received the good news that Messrs. Hutchinson had accepted my thriller, *The Forbidden Territory*, and were to publish it in January. There were still three months to go, and it occurred to me that it would be an excellent thing if Peter Davies's took *Old Rowley* and brought it out on the same day as the Hutchinson-published novel. Surely, for an entirely unknown writer to make his debut with a thriller and a biography simultaneously would be unique and arouse far more interest in the literary world than either book could hope to do if published separately.

But alas! for these rosy dreams of taking critics and book-lovers by storm. Peter Davies's reader reported well on the book, but for commercial reasons it was out of the question for them to accept it for their series. These reasons were that each book had been commissioned from an already famous author, and it was upon this that they depended mainly for their sales. Suddenly to include a volume by an entirely unknown writer was quite impossible.

Naturally, I was disappointed at the time, but later on I had cause to be glad about this decision. Having published two of my thrillers Hutchinson's agreed not only to take *Old Rowley*, but to commission that great artist, Frank C. Papé, to do eight original engravings as illustrations. Thus, when it appeared in time for Christmas 1933, my account of the adventures of this wise, courageous, gentle king came to the public in a far more attractive form than would have been possible had I succeeded in getting it taken a year earlier.

Some months later it occurred to me that Chapters II and III of the book would provide the most excellent background for an *original* historical film. In conse-

quence I submitted the following introduction, basic material, and draft treatment. Unfortunately, costume pieces are always difficult to place owing to the expense of production, so I failed to interest any of my film friends in this project; but I do not yet despair of one day seeing this epic of English history as a movie.

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Innumerable romances and a considerable number of plays have been written about Charles II, and to the best of my belief every one of these has been based upon that portion of the King's life which earned him the nickname of 'The Merry Monarch'.

With certain variations of plot he is always depicted as a middle-aged or elderly roué, and the action of the story takes place at the Court of Whitehall as portrayed in *Pepys's Diary*. Nell Gwynn is generally the heroine of the piece, and the Great Fire of London or the Plague utilised for dramatic interest—despite the fact that at the date of the Plague Nell was still only fifteen and had not yet met the King, while the Duchess of Portsmouth, who is usually given the role of the hated rival, was still a girl at the Court of France.

A new treatment of the old subject might well prove popular since the Restoration Court gives an excellent background for romance, yet I submit that THE GREAT STORY of Charles's life has never been dramatised at all, and offers a theme, unsurpassed for human interest and thrilling adventure, in the whole of English history.

In brief it runs as follows :

At the age of nineteen, already a man, old beyond his years from the bitter experience of the Civil Wars, Charles, with a few loyal ships, was hovering in the Channel. There he received the news of his father's execution by the Puritans, and thus became in theory

King of England, yet after eight years' fighting the Royalist cause was in a hopeless state, and it looked unlikely that he would ever come to wear the crown.

With a few loyal followers, the principal of whom were George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham; Lord Wilmot; Edward Hyde, afterwards Earl of Clarendon; the Duke of Ormond, and Lord Taaffe, Charles retired to The Hague and there, a few months later, he received an invitation to Scotland.

In Scotland, with amazing tact and diplomacy, he manœuvred the Covenanters into reorganising the Scottish Army for the purpose of invading England, gathered together as many of the Cavaliers as he was able and, in September 1651, marched south.

He was met by Cromwell at Worcester, and there, owing largely to the fact that 3,000 Scottish cavalry refrained from participating in the battle, heavily defeated. The defeat speedily becoming a rout, the King was forced to fly for his life and, *for forty-three days and nights,* he was chased through the length and breath of England.

Mudstained and weary, his curls shorn off, disguised in tattered garments and a greasy old steeple hat, snatching a few hours' sleep under hedgerows, in trees and barns and priest-holes, posing as a groom and eating with the servants in the kitchens of wayside inns, or those of houses in which loyal friends sheltered him but dared not give away the secret of his identity—for six whole weeks he was hunted like a hare—through Worcester, Shropshire, Gloucestershire, down to Bristol, then back through Devon, Dorset, Wiltshire, Hampshire, Sussex, with a price upon his head, and Cromwell's Ironsides never more than an hour or so behind him.

I submit that this 'Flight of the King' is the greatest epic of escape in history and cannot be rivalled for human interest, excitement, adventure, or romance by

the wildest flights of fancy achieved by the greatest of fiction writers—and that as the main feature of a film it could be magnificently dramatised.

Here follows the passage from my own book, *Old Rowley,* which describes this almost incredible series of adventures.

The Fugitive King

Chapter II

The Scots had proclaimed him King at Edinburgh within a week of his father's death, but Argyll and the Covenanters still controlled the country. A premature attempt by the Scottish Cavaliers to regain Scotland for the King was defeated in the following year, and their great leader, the gallant Montrose, having sought shelter with the Macleod of Assynt, was sold by him and paraded through the streets of Edinburgh on May 21st, 1650, on his way to execution.

The Covenanters, however, were greatly disappointed in the English Parliament. The victorious Commons were beginning to dispute among themselves, and the old Industrialist party, now called 'Independents', whose ranks contained most of the Army Commanders, who had fought in the late war, were definitely gaining the upper hand. It occurred to the Covenanters that if they could gain possession of the person of Charles, they might yet be able to assist their allies the Zealots to overthrow the 'Independents', and force their stricter morality on the land.

A deputation of Scottish Commissioners therefore arrived at The Hague with an invitation for the King

to place himself in their hands, and were received with becoming gravity. The bottles of Rhenish and Schnapps were pushed in the cupboard, Lucy was told that she must get herself a dress with a higher neck, and the collection of scalliwags, opportunists, and serious loyalists who composed the Court, proceeded to listen to a number of sermons of unusual length.

The fact that the Covenanters had just killed his devoted servant Montrose, together with their previous conduct, naturally made Charles extremely sceptical of their new-found loyalty, and the conditions which they proposed were harsh in the extreme. He knew, too, that they only wished to use him for their own ends, but, after having listened to much conflicting advice from his council, he decided to take a chance on being able to use them for his.

It may well be that the words of his grandfather, Henry IV of France, recurred to him at that time, for was it not the wily Bernais who in a very similar situation decided to pacify his rebellious subjects once and for all by declaring, 'Ah, well—Paris is worth a mass.'

In June 1650, therefore, Charles arrived in Scotland, ostensibly, at all events, a meek and sober member of the Kirk. Knowing, as he must have done, the completely alien nature of this dour folk to the natural gaiety of his twenty years, the fact that he ever went on this adventure shows his determination to leave no chance untried which might regain his Crown.

Had he ever been brought to trial for the undoubted immorality of his later years, no fair-minded jury could have failed to make a recommendation to mercy, in consideration of that incredible time which he spent in Scotland. Indeed, had he actually served a sentence of imprisonment his situation could hardly have been worse, for his life was ordered as strictly as that of any Benedictine monk. The long-faced elders would not even

allow him to walk abroad on the Sabbath, spies were set about his person to report the least attempt at merriment or joke—cards and dancing were forbidden and fast-days observed with such rigour that the poor young man was compelled to listen to no less than six sermons in a single day. Yet such was his tact and patience, that apart from one outbreak, he bore it all with apparent equanimity, while preparing in secret his principal design.

While the Covenanters connived at Buckingham's dissolute course of life because he agreed to advise the King to rely wholly upon their guidance, and sent deputations to Charles, to reprove him, and request that he 'at least close the window,' when he was found in converse with a wench, the King was steadily gaining adherents among the Moderates by his personal charm, and succeeded in getting them to crown him at Scone in January 1651. He now felt himself strong enough to dispense with the treacherous Argyll, and proceeded to manœuvre the Scottish Army into some semblance of activity.

During the previous summer, the Covenanters had so feared Charles's popularity with the Army that they had refused to allow him to join it when Cromwell marched north against them. The Lord Protector had gained a sweeping victory at Dunbar in September, and the fact that the King had not been defeated in person was now all to the good.

Unfortunately for Charles, the Navy, which his father had been largely instrumental in bringing to such a high standard for the times, was now turned against him, and, holding the seas under the gallant Blake, prevented friends and assistance reaching him from abroad. His policy of peaceful penetration, however, proved equal to the task of reconciling the various factions among the Scots, and at the head of considerable forces, he invaded

England in the late summer of 1651.

This was the one attempt made by Charles to regain his throne by force of arms, and it might well have succeeded had he had with him the loyal Highlanders of Montrose. Instead, he was saddled with dour old Leslie, who, when the King inquired why he looked so gloomy at an inspection of the troops, replied that, gallant as the Army might appear, he knew it well, and was certain that it would not fight.

The King marched south to Worcester, and there gave battle to the Parliamentary troops. Charles showed great personal courage, leading the first charge of the Cavaliers with such impetuous gallantry that even Cromwell's veteran Ironsides were temporarily broken. He had two horses shot under him and was one of the last to leave the field, refusing to retire until, after four hours of strenuous engagement, he found his troops were being scattered in all directions.

He then fell back upon the city of Worcester and with calm courage endeavoured to rally his forces, but the Cromwellians entering the town in great numbers, it became obvious that any attempt to convert the rout into an orderly retreat must prove hopeless.

As usual, the counsels of his principal supporters were divided. The greater number were for joining Leslie, who, true to his own prophecy, had only played the part of looker-on, and therefore had been able to withdraw his 3,000 cavalry in good order. But at all times of real crisis Charles was very capable of making up his own mind, and he had had enough of the Covenanters to last him a lifetime. His principal embarrassment was the number of people he had with him, for, as he afterwards said, 'I began to think of the best way of saving myself, and though I could not get them to stand with me against the enemy, I could not get rid of them now I had a mind to it.' Eventually, however, having persuaded the

majority of his companions to seek their own safety and leave him to seek his as best he might, he took the road to Kidderminster, with Buckingham, Derby, Lauderdale, Wilmot, and others of his immediate following, numbering some sixty persons in all.

At nightfall they reached Kinver Heath, where they got hopelessly lost; then, in the dawn, when they were so utterly exhausted with their many hours in the saddle that rest became imperative, a Mr. Charles Giffard took charge of the party and led them to the ruined monastery of Whiteladies.

Here they learned that Leslie and his three thousand were close by at Tong Castle, and further attempts were made to persuade Charles to join him; but the King had very wisely decided never to place himself in the power of the Covenanters again. Buckingham and the rest, with the exception of Lord Wilmot, joined Leslie. How right Charles was in refusing to be of their company we see from his own words when he afterwards related his adventures: 'As I did before believe, they did not reach six miles after they had got to them, but they were all routed by a single troop of horse, which shows that my opinion was not wrong, in not sticking to men who had run away.'

At Whiteladies, the Penderels, a poor family of Catholic woodcutters who tenanted the house, appear upon the scene. There were five brothers, Richard, Humphrey —William, who lived at Boscobel close by, and two others —and it was largely owing to their loyalty that Charles eluded the Roundheads who were thick as flies about the countryside during the first days of his flight.

It was at once decided that the King must be disguised. So they dressed him in a pair of grey cloth breeches, a leather doublet, green jerkin, and a greasy old steeple hat. Lord Wilmot hacked off his dark curls with a carving knife, while Richard Penderel trimmed them with

a pair of shears, and Charles, laughing, blacked his own face with soot from the chimney. Then he was given a billhook to carry, and, as they considered it too dangerous for him to remain in the house, turned out to hide as best he could in a nearby wood called Spring Coppice.

The weather was cold and wet, the King utterly exhausted from lack of sleep, and it must have been a miserable day that he spent on the damp ground, the rain dripping through the trees and only a single blanket for cover. He started up from an uneasy doze when Elizabeth Yates, a relative of the Penderels, was sent to him with food, and fearful at finding a woman in the secret of his identity exclaimed, 'Good woman! can you be faithful to a distressed Cavalier?', to which she loyally replied, 'Yes, sir, I had rather die than discover you.'

The early hours of the night were passed at the house of old Mrs. Penderel, Hobbal Grange; the old lady giving thanks to God that he had blessed her with five stalwart sons, that they might succour the King in his extremity, and here it was decided that the King should take the name of William Jackson. Charles was in favour of trying to reach London, but the others dissuaded him from it, and to quote his own words, 'A new decision was taken, which was to get over the Severn into Wales, and so get to Swansea or some other seaport town that I knew had commerce with France.'

As a first step Richard and the King set out for a house called Maddeley, the property of a Mr. Wolfe. Upon the way they were nearly shot by a miller who mistook them for thieves, and had to run for their lives. This adventure nearly proved the end of the wretched Charles. It was forty hours since he had slept, he was in a high fever from exposure, and had been compelled to throw away his shoes because his feet were so terribly galled. It seemed impossible for him to stagger further, yet with the help and encouragement of the faithful

Richard he managed to reach his destination.

Richard was then sent ahead to sound Mr. Wolfe, who said at once that he would not incur the danger of harbouring a known Royalist "unless it were the King himself". Richard made a clean breast of the matter, upon which the old gentleman replied that he would be willing to venture all he had in the world to secure the King, an answer that caused Charles considerable uneasiness, but he decided to chance Wolfe's loyalty and had no reason to regret it.

The house being considered unsafe, the King was concealed under the hay in a nearby barn. There he spent the remainder of the night and the following day, then, being advised against the plan of crossing the Severn as too dangerous, he decided to return to Boscobel.

Fearing a fresh encounter with the shot-gun of the miller, they decided to recross the stream further along and now it was the sturdy Richard who broke down. Bursting into tears he declared that he could not swim, and urged the King to go on without him, but Charles, his courage renewed by rest and sleep, assured him that he would help him over somehow and boldly plunged into the stream.

Arrived at Boscobel once more, they breakfasted, and Charles learning that a Colonel Careless, who had led the last charge of the Cavaliers at Worcester, lay concealed close by, sent for him. It was decided that the two should spend the day together in the woods, and in the leafy branches of the Royal Oak Charles lay concealed while the Roundhead troopers searched the undergrowth below. The Cromwellians knew that he was somewhere in the immediate vicinity, so the King and Careless spent some anxious hours, hardly daring to shift their position when they were seized with cramp, or sore and aching from the knobbly nature of their perch.

When darkness fell, Careless killed a sheep and the King was helping to dismember it, when to his horror the owner appeared, catching them redhanded. But upon learning that the meat was for a fugitive Cavalier, and perhaps having more than a suspicion as to the Cavalier's identity, he smiled and refused all payment for the animal.

That night and the following day, Charles lay concealed at Boscobel. The next, Humphrey Penderel returned from paying his taxes at Shipnal and announced that a reward of £1,000 had been offered for the capture of the King, and it was in this notice that he was described so vividly as 'a tall black man, above two yards high'.

Learning that Wilmot was in hiding at Mosley, in the house of a Mr. Whitgreave, he decided on joining him there. His feet were still so badly galled that he was unable to walk, so the Penderels procured an old mill horse upon which he made the journey, all five brothers acting as an escort.

Father Huddlestone, a Roman Catholic priest, received Charles in a field near Mosley and led them to the house, where Whitgreave, not knowing which of the weary mud-stained party to salute, Wilmot made the King known with the words, 'This is my master, your master, and the master of us all.'

The King's blistered feet were bathed while he sat before a welcome fire, munching a biscuit and sipping a glass of wine. The difficulties of his situation were discussed and nothing daunted he declared, that if it would please God to send him an army of 10,000 good and loyal soldiers and subjects, he feared not to expel all these rogues forth out of his kingdom.

Two days were spent under Mr. Whitgreave's friendly roof, but on the second morning Father Huddlestone was forced to hide him in his own priest's-hole, since

the Roundheads paid a surprise visit to the house.

The project of heading for London was revived, and Wilmot went to Bentley, the house of Colonel Lane, to ask his advice and assistance. Lane considered it too dangerous, but helpfully suggested that since his sister was about to set out on a visit to her cousin at Bristol, the King might accompany her in the guise of a servant.

Accordingly the following night, with a bag of sweets in his pocket which Mr. Whitgreave's mother had pressed upon him because 'he was but a boy', he removed to Bentley, and in the morning set out with Miss Lane riding pillion behind him.

They had not been two hours upon the road when the horse cast a shoe, and at the village smithy, while the damage was being repaired, Charles asked for news. The smith replied that he had not yet heard if that rogue Charles Stuart were taken, upon which the King with subtle wit remarked, 'If he were, he deserved to be hanged more than all the rest for bringing in the Scots.'

A little further on their road they encountered a large body of Roundheads who had halted by the wayside to rest their horses, but the King, trusting only in his servant's clothes for disguise, rode boldly through them with the pretty Miss Lane perched on the back of his saddle.

They broke the journey that night at Long Marston, and Charles had to fend for himself in the servants' quarters. As he was seated by the kitchen fire, the cook asked him to wind up the jack, and he made such a mess of the business that the woman cried angrily, 'What countryman are you, that you know not how to wind a jack?' but he soothed her with the apt reply, 'I am but a poor tenant's son of Colonel Lane's in Gloucestershire, and 'tis seldom that we see roast meat.'

The following night they put up at the Crown Inn

at Cirencester and again Charles had to make the best of a hard bed and servants' fare, but the next evening they successfully completed their hazardous journey and reached Mrs. Norton's house at Abbots Leigh.

Here, once more, he was quartered with the servants, but Jane Lane told her relatives that the poor boy was suffering from an ague, sent him some soup from the dinner-table, and secured him a separate room. Yet her kindness was nearly his undoing, for a Dr. George, who had been Charles's chaplain, was present, and since he fancied himself as a doctor, insisted on visiting the invalid. Fortunately he failed to recognise the King, as was also the case with one of the servants who had been a trooper in his own guards at Worcester. ''Tis said that I resemble him,' declared Charles boldly upon discovering this. 'Nay,' declared the man, 'he is three inches taller at least, and I'll wager thee on it.' Needless to say the bet was not accepted.

The following morning as he removed his hat on Miss Lane's passing through the Hall, Pope, the butler, guessed his identity but proved a loyal and capable adherent. On his suggestion, Wilmot, who had been following at a distance, was sent to Colonel Francis Wyndham at Trent in the hope that he might be able to afford shelter for the King, and Pope himself went off to Bristol to try and secure a ship, and thus get him safely out of the country.

The week-end was spent at Abbots Leigh, and Pope returned, his efforts having met with no success, but Colonel Wyndham was willing to receive the King, and the trouble now was to get Charles out of the house. Mrs. Norton had miscarried of a still-born child and it was difficult for Jane Lane to leave her in such circumstances. This problem was solved by Pope, at whose suggestion Jane produced a forged letter, purporting to have come from her father with the news that he was danger-

ously ill. Having thus excused her hurried departure she set off again with Charles, spent the night at Castle Cary, where Lord Hertford's steward found them temporary accommodation, and the next evening delivered her fugitive King safely into the hands of Colonel Wyndham.

At Trent, a number of the servants were in the secret, so Charles was able to shelter there for several days in the first comfort he had known since before Worcester. Colonel Giles Strangeways, a relative of Colonel Wyndham's, was then approached to assist in securing a ship, but he was such a noted Royalist in those parts that he feared only to bring suspicion on his master by employing himself in such a matter. Instead, therefore, he sent Charles '300 broad pieces', which were a most welcome gift, and Wyndham took upon himself the business of finding a ship going to Lyme for the purpose.

His efforts were successful and it was arranged through a Mr. Ellersdon that the vessel should be off Charmouth on the night of 22 September. A room was booked at the Queen's Arms, and a little play staged to cover the activities of the party. The landlady was told that the room was taken for a gentleman who had stolen a young gentlewoman to marry her. Wilmot played the lover, Miss Juliana Coningsby, who had taken Jane Lane's place, the fair maid, and Charles the latter's servant. The three spent an anxious night, for the vessel failed to put in an appearance and they feared that they had been betrayed. At dawn, Wilmot set off to Bridport, where he learned the reason for the breakdown in their plans. Captain Limbry, the master of the craft, possessed a shrewish wife; her suspicions had been aroused by the news of his hurried departure to sea, and she had refused to allow him to leave the house on such dangerous business. On his protesting that he must, she had settled the matter by locking him in the cellar for the night.

Both Lyme and Bridport were swarming with Parliamentary troops, but Charles had promised to meet Wilmot in the latter, and nothing would deter him from keeping his appointment. When they rode into the town they found the yard of the best inn in the place filled with soldiers, but Charles, as usual, put a bold face on the matter and, dismounting from his horse, barged in amongst them. He was sworn at for his rudeness, but laughed the situation off, only to be accosted by the ostler, who cried, 'Sure, sir—I know your face,' and at that moment with the Roundheads crowding about him Charles was never in a more desperate situation. He kept his head, however, and entering into jovial conversation with the man, ascertained that he came from Exeter. 'Why, then,' laughed the King, 'I was in service with a gentleman at Exeter—so 'tis there we must have met.'

In these dangerous surroundings Charles passed the night, and the following morning narrowly escaped capture. Wilmot's horse cast a shoe, and the blacksmith's suspicions were aroused when he noticed the others to be of Midland make. He told his friend, a weaver, who in turn told the local minister. The Roundhead captain was informed, and finding Charles had left the town set out in hot pursuit.

The weaver, meanwhile, agog with curiosity, visited the inn and accosted the unsuspecting landlady. 'Why—how now—it seems you are a maid of honour.' 'What mean you by that?' replied the worthy woman. 'Why,' he retorted, 'Charles Stuart lay last night at your house and kissed you at his departure, so that you cannot be but a maid of honour.' Whereupon she became exceeding wroth and cried, 'If I thought it was the King, as you say it was, I would think the better of my lips all the days of my life, and so get you out of my house, or I'll get those who shall kick you out.' A truly gallant reply

which has lived through the mists of nearly three hundred years, a splendid example of the loyalty of the common people.

The Parliamentarians were galloping along the road to Dorchester, but they missed Charles by half a mile, for he had turned off towards Broadwindsor. Here he spent another restless night, since a further detachment of Cromwell's troops occupied the inn, and one of their doxies gave birth to an infant on the kitchen table. The following day he was fortunate enough to regain Colonel Wyndham's house and lay hidden at Trent for the best part of another week.

One night during his stay he heard the joy-bells ringing, and saw some bonfires blazing, with excited people dancing round them. On asking the reason for this jubilation he was informed that they were rejoicing at his own death, which had just been reported. 'Indeed,' he said with his deliciously sardonic smile. 'Alas—poor people!'

Another ship was secured at Southampton through the assistance of Colonel Phelipps, but once more the King's hopes were doomed to disappointment. After all had been arranged the vessel was impressed by the Parliamentarians to carry troops to Jersey.

Colonel Wyndham's was now no longer considered safe, since the Roundheads were hot upon the King's trail and searching many houses in the neighbourhood. Among the others, they visited that of Sir Hugh Wyndham, the Colonel's uncle, and there 'seized upon a lovely young lady, saying that she was the King disguised in woman's apparel, nor would they let her go, till by some rude experiments they had discovered her sex'.

In this extremity Charles said good-bye to Juliana and removed with Colonel Phelipps to the house of a Mrs. Hyde near Salisbury. By moving in this direction he was also gaining ground towards another ship which had

now been secured by a Colonel Gounter.

Mrs. Hyde's loyalty got the better of her discretion, for she received the King with such an open demonstration of respect that it was feared the servants would all become aware of his identity. In these circumstances it was thought best that he should appear to leave her house for good next morning, and taking a public farewell of her he spent the day with Phelipps on the slopes of the rolling plain, and among the monoliths at Stonehenge. By night they returned secretly and he spent a further five days under the hospitable roof of Mrs. Hyde.

Then he journeyed to Hambledon in Hampshire, where he lodged with Colonel Gounter's sister, a Mrs. Symons, and her husband returning very merry from a party, misled at first by Charles's appearance, declared that he thought him 'some Roundhead rogue's son'.

The following day the little party arrived at the small seaport of Brighthelmstone, now so well known as Brighton, and pulled up at the 'George'.

Gounter had employed a loyal merchant named Mansel in the matter of the ship, a coal brig, to carry two Royalists from Shoreham to France for £60 down, but without letting him know the identity of the fugitives, yet Mansel recognised the King immediately.

After dinner, Charles was left alone for a moment in the dining-room of the inn, and was standing before the fire when Mr. Smith, the landlord, entered. As he began to clear the table he started a casual conversation, but he was an ex-guardsman and knew the King's face well. Suddenly he seized the King's hand and kissed it, saying, 'May God bless your Majesty—wheresoever you may go.'

Captain Tattersall had also been ignorant as to who his passengers were to be, but he too recognised Charles's features, and falling on his knees, vowed to venture all

that he possessed to set the King and Wilmot safely on the shores of France.

Thus, after forty-three days and nights, many of which had been passed in cold and hunger, and the whole in imminent risk of capture, the King was safely conveyed out of the power of his enemies. That he escaped was very largely owing to his own wise decision in the first place not to join Leslie, together with his unfailing wit and bravery; but it was even more largely due to the loyalty and devotion of his subjects. If one includes the servants in the many houses where he rested, there must have been close on a hundred persons in the secret of his identity, and to the poorer of these the reward offered for his capture would have meant ease and plenty all their lives long. Yet there is not a single instance of any one of them endeavouring to betray their King.

The epic closes with a fair wind, and the rising sun gilding the sails of the tall ship as it stand out to sea—and we may be certain that when the news of Charles's safe arrival at Féconamp was spread abroad, many a dust-encrusted bottle was opened and many a cup of good ale drawn, that stout hearts in England might drink—'A Health unto His Majesty'.

Chapter III

Arrived in France his 'miraculous preservation' was a nine days' wonder. The Court came out before the gates of Paris to welcome him, and pressed for a recital of his adventures; but Charles would only shake his close-cropped head; nothing would induce him to compromise those friends who had proved so loyal in his hour of need.

The excitement died away and the King was faced with stark reality. He was an exile once more, the un-

welcome guest of a power upon whose hospitality he could hardly count from week to week, his pockets empty, and even his mother, at their first supper together on the night of his return, told him that he must pay for his board at her table, beginning with that evening.

Hyde rejoined him, and, as Chancellor of a hypothetical Exchequer, entered into a tireless correspondence with every party, state, and person likely to aid the broken fortunes of his master. Hyde's task was no easy one for he was faced with jealousies and difficulties on every side; Presbyterian oligarchs and Catholic fanatics alike tried to intrigue the King into dangerous understandings, but Charles's faith in his Minister was never shaken, and through the long years the Chancellor, English and Anglican to the backbone, stuck doggedly to the policy of his first declaration that 'It must be the resurrection of English courage and loyalty that alone should recover England for the King.'

Ormonde, that splendid loyalist, ever filled with generous common sense, and a man after Charles's own heart, was also with him, and Bristol, erratic, uncertain, but enthusiastic. Henry Bennet, later to become Earl of Arlington, and the King's best friend, was dispatched on an embassy to Spain, but Wilmot and Jermyn remained in Paris, the former bluff and downright, aching to draw his sword again, the latter sleek and pompous, the only prosperous member of the party, head of the Queen Mother Henrietta's household and, many said, her lover.

That winter the Court of France was faced with its own troubles. The young King Louis had to be smuggled out of a rebellious Paris to St. Germain, from whence he conducted a war upon his haughty nobles, the leaders of the Fronde. Charles was left destitute in Paris and forced to secure his meals on credit at a tavern, yet despite his privations he kept cheerful—heartening and

encouraging his down-at-heels retainers so that the gay Lord Taaffe said of him: 'May I never drink wine if I had not rather live at six sous a day with him, than have all the blessings of this world without him.'

Threadbare and penniless he might be, but nothing could rob him of his power to derive joy from simple things, a christening, a dog-fight, a good bottle of wine, and a perpetual delight in the conversation of every variety of human being. In addition there were plenty of fair ladies who were happy to have this handsome and amusing young man as their lover for his charm alone. Lady Byron is mentioned about this time as his seventeenth mistress, yet for policy's sake he entered upon more serious affairs, and at his mother's behest paid court to the greatest heiress in France, 'La Grande Mademoiselle'. This fiery and high-nosed princess would have none of him, however, and set her cap at higher game in the person of the young Louis, whereupon Charles, to his intense relief, became free to console himself more than somewhat with her lovely maid of honour, the Duchess de Chatillon.

In '53, the hopes of the Royalists rose with a sudden bound at the news of Cromwell's forcible ejection of the Rump, but nothing came of it. A jester chalked upon the ancient doors at Westminster, 'This House to Let Unfurnished', and the usurper, setting himself up in the place of Parliament, became more absolute master of Britain than before.

In '54, Charles escaped from his ever-mounting debts in Paris to the friendly city of Cologne, but while he danced to German fiddles or took his exercise upon the ramparts, the industrious Hyde ever kept him informed of all affairs in England.

Then, in '55, it seemed that the turn of the tide had really come. Cromwell had declared that all Christians were to be suffered except 'Papists, Prelatists, and teach-

ers of Lewdness', yet the last, like the charge of 'Conduct Unbecoming' against an officer in the Army, could be made to serve a very great variety of purposes. The churches were put up to let, the cathedrals ordered to be pulled down, and while the hammers of the Puritans smashed the lovely old stained glass, the sickles of the tax-gatherers cut to the financial roots of the country, ham-stringing commerce and argriculture alike to provide for the upkeep of the ferocious Army.

England was ripe for an attempt to throw off the yoke. Wilmot was sent secretly to London, Ormonde declared himself 'ready to try for hanging'. By night and day, swift couriers sped between the waiting exiles and their friends at home.

In February, Cromwell's spies reported Charles's sudden disappearance from Cologne, and only after weeks of anxious search found him again pacing the sand-dunes of Middleburg, straining his eyes across the sea and ready instantly to act upon the message that should bid him start on another attempt to regain his throne.

The message never came. Cromwell's agents, tireless and ubiquitous, enabled him to arrest the ringleaders and forestall the Royalist plans. Colonel Penruddock alone was able to raise his followers in Wiltshire, and he was speedily defeated. England was divided into ten Military Districts, each under a Major-General. Royalist suspects and sympathiseres were arrested by the score and transported for life to the slavery of the American plantations. Charles, downcast and penniless, retraced his steps to Cologne.

The English Government was now at war with Spain, and in the hope of deriving assistance from the grandees, Charles went to Brussels, where he placed the swords of himself and his followers at their disposal, early in '56. The gesture resulted in a bitter humiliation, since the proud Spaniards ignored his offer and, with courteous

insolence, refused him aid in his destitution.

Charles's next resting-place was the beautiful old town of Bruges, and there may still be seen the gold-mounted bow and arrows with which he used to while away the tedious hours, waiting—for ever waiting—good news out of England. Now again the exile's hopes were high. Cromwell was ruling with such fierce autocracy that even large sections of the Puritans were turning against him. The Levellers, once a powerful party among the Zealots, were now in favour of the King's return. Reams of paper were covered in a correspondence to arrange a rising, but they were moneyless and so was he, the months dragged on, and at last this hope also had to be abandoned.

Bristol now added astrology to his other whimsies, and so intrigued the superstitious Don John of Austria, the Spanish Governor of the Netherlands, that he managed to wring money from his pockets and an official alliance for the King. James, Duke of York, was recalled from his service with the French, where he had proved himself a capable lieutenant to the great Turenne, and sent with his troops to fight against his old commander. Yet this development only served to plunge Charles into greater difficulties than before. The French, quite naturally, stopped his miserable pension. The Spaniards could not bring themselves to offer a sum 'worthy of his acceptance', and the wretched Charles was called upon to support an out-of-elbows army which grew by leaps and bounds owing to the constant stream of fugitives from England.

By '57 the King was in a desperate state, meat, drink, firing, candles for the past winter, all entirely owed for, but permission was at last received from the Spaniards for him to join his army at Dunkirk, and there, with James for company, he busied himself with the war against the French. The year was enlivened by the

Levellers' unsuccessful attempt against Cromwell's life, and the retaliation by the Lord Protector's spies, who endeavoured to lure the Royal brothers to an English port, that they might be shot.

At home, things were going from bad to worse. Cromwell's victory had proved his Waterloo. He had made the Army but he could not shake it off, and the land groaned under its tyranny. No less than 12,000 persons were in prison for political offences but with every arrest there followed fresh outbursts of discontent. The exiles waited, starving but ever hopeful that next week—next month—would bring the joyful news that England had at last revolted from the thraldom of the fanatics.

Buckingham, weary of exile, had made friends with the mammon of unrighteousness. The Parliamentary General, Lord Fairfax, had secured the best part of the Duke's estates as his share of the plunder, so Buckingham went home and married the General's daughter to get his own back. Cromwell put him in the Tower for his pains, but it was another blow for Charles, who so greatly enjoyed this versatile rogue's company.

The King spent the summer in Brussels, moving to Hoogstraeten on the Dutch-Flemish frontier in August. During the following months he made frequent excursions into Holland, and there fell deeply in love with Henrietta, the charming daughter of the Dowager Princess of Orange. Henrietta was kind, but the Dowager had no use for 'Charles Lackland' as a son-in-law, and so once more the future King of England drank the cup of humiliation—made the more bitter by disappointment in a genuine love affair.

On his last visit to the lady of his love he narrowly escaped capture. An old gentleman surprised him at his inn, secured entrance to his room, and locked the door behind him. Then, flinging off his disguise, he fell upon his knees and begged the King to fly instantly. It

was Downing, Cromwell's ambassador to Holland, who had received orders to arrest him if he set foot on Dutch soil. But it was the arch-enemy's last throw. A month later the Great Protector lay dead, worn out from his long struggle with that hydra-headed monster that he had done so much to bring into being.

When the news reached Flanders every Royalist heart flamed with new hope. Now at last the great home-coming was a certainty—but it was not to be. Week followed week, no tidings came, the Puritan Army had England by the throat. Winter closed down once more upon the ragged exiles, as they slunk starving to their freezing lodgings in the back streets of the Continental towns.

In '59 Lambert endeavoured to play Cromwell's part. He had the brutality, but not the strength, and hopes for the King began to grow again. 'The Sealed Knot', that mysterious society which determined the secret policy of the Royalists, became exceedingly active. Risings were planned to take place in a dozen counties, and the exiles repolished their rusty weapons with grim delight in the work that was to come. Charles hastened to Calais, that he might be ready instantly to embark. Then came the terrible news from Samuel Moreland that Sir Richard Willis, who was high in the councils of The Sealed Knot, had betrayed them. It was too late to countermand the orders in the furthest counties, and before the Loyalists in the north, who had risen for the King, had time to concentrate, they were surrounded, outnumbered, and destroyed. Again a wave of persecution and arrest laid low the gentry of the English countryside.

Sadly and bitterly Charles turned his steps towards the Pyrenees. France and Spain had now agreed to a peace which was to be sealed by the young King Louis's marriage to the Infanta Maria. From that resplendent concourse at Fuenterrabia, where the wealth of two great

nations was gathered for the ceremony, the luckless, threadbare Prince hoped to beg a few hundred crowns to keep his needy followers from starvation. He even offered to marry the *nouveau riche* heiress Hortense Mancini in his dire necessity, but the wily Mazarin rejected this poor suitor for his niece's hand, declaring hypocritically that 'it was too great an honour', and kept a hold upon his moneybags.

One ray of sunshine lit the King's return. At Colombes he broke his journey to visit his mother, and there, when every hand in Europe was against him, he found fresh encouragement in the love and admiration of his little sister, Henrietta, or Minette, as he called her. She was then only fifteen, but wise beyond her years from a similar adversity to his own, and nothing would persuade her that he was not the greatest, bravest, truest Prince in all the world. Charles, with quick appreciation of her sympathy, opened to her secrets which he would never disclose to his most trusted councillors, his most passionate loves, or any other member of his family. Thus, in those few brief days, was born a spiritual affection between the two which lasted till her death, and which no other joy could ever replace in his existence.

Back in Brussels once more, he found Hyde and the rest, up to their eyes in debt, miserable and dejected, yet it seemed that the finding of Minette was a presage of better days to come.

In England, Lambert was quarrelling with the Army, and the Army with the 'Rump'. The tax-gatherers had sucked the last halfpenny from the people, and the troops were mutinous from lack of pay. An angry populace of every sect and party clamoured with ever-growing insistence for the election of a 'Free Parliament' and salvation from this state of anarchy. As the troubled weeks went by, the eyes of all men gradually centred upon one figure, the strong, taciturn commander of the

well-disciplined Scottish Army, General Monk.

With sudden decision Monk acted. He secured the strong places throughout Scotland, disarmed his Anabaptist officers, and on January 1, 1660, in the bitter cold of a northern winter, crossed the border into England.

Anxiously, all Europe watched and waited. What did he mean to do? The exiles' disappointments had been so many and so bitter throughout these long years of hope deferred, they feared that he would only prove another Cromwell. Then, with beating hearts, they learned that the veteran Fairfax had left his bed to join him, and all Yorkshire risen at his call.

Slowly, but steadily, Monk's columns wound their way over snow-covered hill and dale, and as they advanced all resistance melted away before them. Yet on the long march southward he would say no word as to his intentions, and when at last they came over Hampstead hills to London he was still ominously silent.

A decision by the Aldermen to pay no taxes until a 'Free Parliament' should be called gave the Rump an opportunity to test Monk's loyalty to themselves. They ordered him to occupy the City. Amidst a tense, watchful silence, he obeyed. Then he assembled his officers, spoke to them of their duty as he saw it, and declared a 'Free Parliament'. Instantly London and the country were seized with a delirium of joy—yet Monk continued stubbornly silent regarding the Royalists abroad.

On 16 March the 'Long' Parliament brought its existence to an end by the vote of its excluded members, and at last Monk signified his willingness to receive Sir John Grenville, the Royal emissary. On the 30th, Grenville reached Brussels and delivered Monk's message, urging the King to leave the territory of a state with whom England was still at war. Before the Spaniards had time to stop him, Charles galloped across the

Dutch frontier and entered Breda.

Here he signed the famous Declaration, agreeing to: A General Amnesty—Security of Tenure for property gained during the late troublous times—Liberty of Conscience—and Arrears of pay for the Army, all as a Free Parliament should determine. With it he sent letters for both Houses and a commission for Monk as Captain General of his Forces.

In April, Lambert escaped from the Tower, but was defeated at Daventry. On the 28th the new Parliament met, and three days later Grenville laid the King's letter before them. They listened to it bareheaded and in silence, then William Morrice moved that the Constitution of England had ever lain in King, Lords, and Commons. His motion was carried without a dissentient vote. Unanimously the Houses asked that the King should return at once to rule them; then the flood-gates of joy were opened, and the House broke up in a pandemonium of wild, tumultuous loyalty.

They knew, as England knew, that the King alone was capable of restoring the good old times, when men were free and money plentiful. They had suffered the tyranny of 'democracy' too long, and the whole nation was shaken with a great, glad happiness at the tidings of his return.

The exiles still hardly dared believe it true, until a deputation from the States General arrived, inviting the King to The Hague, and offering the almost unbelievable sum of £30,000 for his expenses. When they reached The Hague they were hardly left time to wonder. By every boat and every road, Loyalists came pouring into the town. From Antwerp, Brussels, Havre, Caen, Paris, Cologne, Rouen, crowding about the Royal lodgings, their faces lit with happiness. Old enemies arrived from England, protesting that they had ever been the King's best friends. The citizens of London who had howled

for the blood of the martyred King sent smiling representatives with £10,000 in gold. Charles had to take his brothers to handle it, because none of them had ever seen so much before.

On 15 May the Fleet arrived, under Sir Edward Montague. With him he brought a poor relation, young Samuel Pepys, who on the first day of that year had begun to keep the secret diary which has added so greatly to our knowledge of the period. Healths were drunk, cannon fired, and joy-bells rung, as on the 22nd Charles went aboard the flagship *Naseby,* now rechristened *Royal Charles.* Anchor was weighed with fifty thousand cheering people on the shore, and the 25th found him at Dover welcomed by the deafening huzzas of fifty thousand more.

The King kissed Monk, who was there to receive him on the beach, calling him 'father' and 'preserver of the crown', then, accepting a gilded Bible from the Mayor, declared it to be 'the thing he loved above all others in the world'. Wild with excitement, half the population of Kent ran cheering and shouting beside his coach to Canterbury, and so, amidst similar scenes of unparalleled enthusiasm, he made his way towards the capital.

On the 29th day of May he entered London, and never was there such a home-coming in the life of any man before or since. The people wept for very joy to see him, their own 'Black Boy'—tall, slim, bareheaded, smiling—bowing to either side as he rode through their midst, half-deadened by the unceasing plaudits of the multitude. The fountains ran wine, the church bells pealed, the cannon thundered, while thousands upon thousands stood packed in the narrow streets to see him pass, hoarse with cheering, drunk with joy, wildly elated by the thought that in his person Merrie England was come back once more.

Tired but still smiling, he reached the old Palace of

Whitehall, which the homely Mrs. Monk had made ready against his coming. Night drew on, and in every village throughout England the crowds danced round the blazing bonfires delirious with joy. In London the crowd surged hundreds deep about the Palace, yet still the King would not deny the crush that pressed to kiss his hand.

So on his thirtieth birthday he was restored to sovereignty, yet he was of a wisdom far beyond his years, for nearly half his life he had lived abroad in poverty. He knew Frenchmen, Spaniards, Germans, Dutch, the English, Scotch and Irish too—princes, peasants, merchants, soldiers, clergy, spies, for he had met and spoken with them all. He knew them for what they were worth and judged them in accordance, remembered their splendid loyalties but forgot not their betrayals. And thus too sweet-natured to bear rancour for past ills, but armed with the bitter knowledge gained during fourteen years in the hard school of adversity, at long last 'The King came into his own again'.

The Fugitive King

Draft Treatment for a Film Play

The actual historical record of the facts gives such an abundance of material for exciting episodes and sustained interest that it is more a question of exercising careful selection as to which to use and which to reject, than seeking to gild the lily with a fictitious plot, and the selection would, of course, be made in story conference. There are, however, two major problems which remain to be solved (1) Love interest, and (2) sustain-

ing the momentum of the picture after the tremendous pace of the King's flight and escape to France.

For the first I propose that reasonable liberties should be taken with history and Jane Lane made to play a far more important part than she did in actual fact, and for the second, by shooting the story in parallel sequences showing Jane in England and the King in exile—maintaining the interest until the two can be brought together again in Holland, after the failure of the Royalist plot at home.

The film version would therefore run something after the following :

The story opens with Charles receiving the news of his father's execution, on a warship, and the sad plight of the Royalist cause is disclosed.

We then pass immediately to The Hague where the pros and cons of the Covenanters' invitation to Scotland are briefly discussed between Charles and his counsellors—and the decision taken to return with them.

A couple of sequences should be quite enough to cover the King's stay in Scotland, and we proceed almost at once to the Battle of Worcester, where a few near-distance shots of Charles, with his staff, and troops of Cavaliers and Roundheads charging, should be sufficient to convey the fight without incurring the expense of vast crowds in costume.

We enter then the picture proper and the exciting episodes of the King's flight would be given in detail.

Jane Lane, who was in fact a very lovely young woman, enters the picture on the first morning of Charles's dash for liberty, discovering him in Boscobel Woods *instead* of Elizabeth Yates, and bringing him food. The story then continues in accordance with the facts, until they reach Colonel Wyndham's house at Trent, and here, *instead* of Juliana Coningsby taking

Jane's place, as actually happened, Jane should continue with the King right up to his escape from Brighton in the coal barge.

The film has now to be shot in parallel sequences showing events in England, and their effect upon the plans and fortunes of the Royalists abroad.

The actual period of the second exile was a matter of eight years, but this should not appear, and only certain lapses of time indicated by alternating summer exteriors with winter sets as the sequences progress, and the ever-increasing poverty of Charles's little band of loyalists demonstrated by meaner surroundings and plainer clothes, until at last they become utterly ragged and destitute.

In England, the growing misery under Cromwell's rule is shown. The notice chalked on the doors at Westminster, 'This House to Let Unfurnished'. The Puritans smashing the lovely old stained glass in the village Church, despite Jane's protests and prayers. Young people thrown into prison for dancing on the village green, and here Jane would have a narrow escape from being among them. A small shop-keeper putting up the shutters of his shop for the last time—gone bankrupt through the terrible taxation. The Roundhead soldiers seizing Colonel Lane's corn. Cromwell threatening the French Ambassador that if Charles is not expelled from France he will make war upon them. Then Cromwell's death which brings such false elation to the exiles abroad.

In the meantime, we have seen Charles humiliated by the French, the Dutch, the Spaniards, and now the picture is linked up again by the activities of the Secret Royalist Society, 'The Sealed Knot'.

Ormonde and Wilmot are sent to London to arrange a rising. Colonel Lane and Jane are among the conspirators who meet them there.

All is in readiness for the Royalist coup d'état which

is to restore the King when Sir Samuel Moreland, one of the Parliamentary Secretaries for Foreign Affairs, but secretly a Royalist sympathiser, learns that Sir Richard Willis has betrayed their plans.

Moreland hastens to warn Ormonde, Wilmot, Jane and the other conspirators of their danger. Then he returns to his lodging where he finds certain papers which have been brought for his signature. Among them is an urgent order from Parliament to their Ambassador in Holland, instructing him to arrest the King now that he has ventured back into Dutch territory, in order to sail at once for England the moment his friends declare war on the Parliament. Moreland dares not suppress the order, but immediately the courier has departed with it he dashes back to the headquarters of The Sealed Knot.

Jane is there, but alone. All the men have ridden off post haste for various counties in the north and west, to try to countermand the orders for the Royalist rising before it is too late. It is vital that someone should warn the King of his danger, as the sloop which carries the courier to Holland is leaving immediately. Moreland dare not leave his post, so Jane returns with him to his lodging, dresses in man's clothes, and armed with a pass, which Moreland as Secretary of State is in a position to give her, sails for Holland on the same sloop as the Government courier. She arrives at the King's inn just in time to save him from Downing's men, who are on their way to arrest him, and together they gallop over the frontier into Flanders.

Safe again for the moment, Charles pleads with her to stay with him, but she is terribly anxious as to what awful effects the betrayal of their plans may have had on her family and friends in England, and so leaves him, to return.

We now see Lambert quarelling with the other Par-

liamentary leaders, a number of whom he arrests because they demand a General Election and the summoning of a 'Free Parliament'. Then the Parliamentary Generals quarrelling among themselves.

The scene now moves to Jane's village. The Puritan soldiers have come to arrest Colonel Lane and other gentlemen who were concerned in the abortive rising. The angry villagers stone the troops, but are driven off. Lane is arrested and as he is being marched away Jane arrives, so they seize her too, and both are flung into prison.

We then see Charles's meeting with his little sister Minette, whom he so adored, at Colombes, and he tells her of the brighter happier England he would build if only he could regain his throne, but at the end of the sequence a messenger arrives with news of Jane's arrest so, worried and anxious, he sets out for The Hague in the hope that he may learn further news from his little Court which is stationed there.

General Monk is then shown with the well-disciplined Scottish Army. His chaplain is urging upon him that it is his duty to march down into England and save the country from the terrible state of anarchy into which it has fallen. Monk disarms his Anabaptist officers and sets out on his march to London.

On his return to The Hague, Charles finds his little Court reduced to direst poverty. The canals are frozen over and there is deep snow, but they sit shivering in a fireless room, without candles and with very little food.

He learns that Monk's army has occupied London, and Lambert been flung into the Tower, but the news does not lighten their despondency for they have no reason to suppose that Monk will prove anything but another Cromwell, and now that another strong man has seized power all hope of a Restoration seems further off than ever. Hyde grimly repeats his old dictum that

'The resurrection of English courage and loyalty shall alone recover England for the King'—and all his staunchest friends at home have now been flung into prison. They call for supper, but the landlord refuses them further food on credit. None of them has a penny piece, so they decide to set out for Brussels in the hope that the Spanish Government may provide them with food and shelter for a few weeks. While the horses are being saddled, the final blow descends. A courier arrives with a list of the Royalists at home who have been sentenced to transportation to the slavery of the plantations, and Jane's name is among them.

Jane is seen in prison with her uncle and other Royalists. They speak of the hopelessness of their position. The Puritan soldiers then enter and, hustling them out, bind their hands behind their backs, then herd them like cattle into large open springless wagons for their terrible journey down to Bristol where they will be shipped overseas into virtual slavery.

We then see Charles in bed in a miserable garret. It is early morning and the street outside deserted, but a Cavalier comes galloping up. He flings himself off his horse, dashes up the stairs of the house, and bursts in on the sleeping King. It is Sir John Grenville who brings the staggering news that at Monk's order a 'Free Parliament' has assembled, and that their first action was to carry a motion that the Constitution of England ever consisted of 'King, Lords, and Commons'. They then resolved unanimously that the King should be asked to return at once to rule them. With astounding suddenness the wheel of fortune has turned and Hyde's famous dictum come true. Ormonde, Wilmot, Taaffe, and the rest are called in and, wild with excitement, they dash downstairs to saddle the horses.

The scene shifts now to the bedroom of the Spanish Governor Don John of Austria. He, too, is awakened

by an almost exhausted messenger, who tells him of events in England. England is still officially at war with Spain, and now that the English people want their King to resume his throne Charles's person will prove a hostage of incalculable value. They must seize him before he has time to leave Spanish territory, and imprison him in the fortress. From his window, Don John bellows orders to a troop of Spanish Cavalry in the courtyard below, and drawing their swords they gallop out through the gateway.

The King and his friends are just mounting their horses as the Spaniards come clattering down the street. A sharp fight ensues. Charles and Hyde charge through the Spaniards and gallop off into the open country, while Ormonde and the rest protect the King's retreat.

At Breda, Charles and his friends are seen in fine new clothes. He signs the famous Declaration, and deputations arrive from all quarters, bringing chests of money and presents of all kinds. Sir Edward Montague and Pepys arrive with the fleet to bring him home, and we see him again aboard a ship about to set sail once more for England.

His triumphant progress through the cheering multitude in a London street, while the joy-bells ring and the cannons thunder, leads to the final scene in the banqueting hall on the night of his Restoration at Whitehall.

Jane, who was actually present, is seated on Charles's right, and Barbara Villiers, afterwards Countess of Castlemaine, on his left. He rises from the table and goes to the window where he bows to the cheering throng in the street below. The two women are just behind him, and as he withdraws from the window he turns to Castlemaine with the words—'I am utterly weary after this wonderful day, but not too tired to wish for ten minutes

of your company now that I am about to leave my guests.'

Jane, overhearing this, draws him aside and asks him reproachfully what she has done to be thus passed over, and he replies with all his natural charm and tenderness, 'Now that I am a King indeed duty demands that I should wed some Royal Princess. For I mean to be a good King, though I doubt not that when I am dead they will count me a bad man from my love of pleasure—yet I am not so bad that I would repay your fidelity and love by making you as these others. Let us show these people that we can resist temptation, Jane, for I swear to you that your honour is dearer to me than my own.'

The picture closes on the old Cavalier tune 'Here's a Health unto His Majesty', as the King moves slowly towards the door, and turns once more to bow at the entrance, while his courtiers and ladies raise their glasses to the new era of happiness and prosperity which has opened that night for England.

NOTE

This suggested ending has the advantage that in addition to being artistically sound, there are strong reasons for believing it to be historically correct. From the age of seventeen onwards, Charles undoubtedly seduced every good-looking woman with whom he came into contact, yet it is a remarkable and interesting fact that although Jane Lane was a very lovely lady, that they were thrown together for many days and nights during his flight after Worcester, that she corresponded freely with him during the whole of his exile, visited him in Paris after his escape, and was a notable figure at his Court after the Restoration, no breath of scandal has ever been attached

to her name. The explanation of Charles's restraint in her case is, however, perfectly apparent and absolutely in keeping with his character.

This matter of historical correctness is an important factor as far as the educated public are concerned, and if the present suggested treatment is adopted, the picture will remain, in all except a few minor details—such as Jane warning Charles to escape from Holland instead of Downing, the ambassador, and her imprisonment—absolutely in accordance with the known facts.

STORY VIII

This story is based on memories of my early days as a Mayfair wine-merchant. In 1886 my grandfather—Dennis Wheatley I—secured a building lease from the Westminster Estate and had erected the block of shops and flats on the east side of South Audley Street, between the Grosvenor Chapel and Mount Street. He then merged the wine, spirit and mineral-water connection he had built up in three provision shops that he owned in the district and housed it in the corner shop of the block, opposite the Chapel.

By a combination of shrewdness and intensely hard work he was able to retire at the age of forty, having installed his four sons as managers of the four businesses. To my father's lot fell the wine-merchants, and under him it greatly prospered. As an only son I should have been half-witted had I then considered any other career than that of following my father in this interesting and lucrative business. To fit me for that, it was decided that from the age of sixteen I should spend a year in Germany, a year in France and a year in Spain and Portugal, learning about how wines were made.

In 1913 I spent a very happy year in Germany. I returned in December and it was arranged that I should go out to Rheims in August 1914. But we all know what happened then. In September of that year I received

my first commission in the 2nd/1st City of London R.F.A.(T) and, later, I had my year in France, but it was on the Western Front.

Immediately the war was over, I returned to the business and on my father's death in 1926 became its sole owner. During the five years that followed I bought and dispensed wines from many famous cellars, including the Royal Saxon Cellars and those of the Empress Eugenie, and among my customers I could count three Kings, twenty-one Imperial, Royal and Serene Highnesses, twelve British Ducal Houses, the Archbishop of Canterbury and a score of millionaires.

It was a full and delightful life, but the impressions for this story date mainly from my first months in the business—from January to September, 1914.

Nearly every morning I was sent out to see customers in the neighbourhood. In those days, there were no blocks of offices or flats in Grosvenor Square and Park Lane or the streets adjacent to them. The only shop in Berkeley Square was Gunter's—renowned for its strawberry ices—and no couturier had then invaded Bruton Street. Instead, there were several hundred fine private houses with narrow fronts, but of great depth, the London homes of the titled and the wealthy. Sometimes in winter there were dense pea-soup fogs. On such days one could glance through the ground-floor windows, admire the beautiful furniture the rooms contained and let one's imagination play on the luxurious life led by their owners.

In the Fog

The fog came down quite suddenly; otherwise I would not have been out in it. I mean I would not have been

walking in it, but would have had the porter get me a taxi to take me to my luncheon appointment. For a long time now I've had a horror of fog, as it was in one that I squared accounts with Eric Martin.

When I left my office on the far side of Regent Street there was no more than the grey mist that so often blurs the outlines of London's buildings on a November morning, and I had felt that the walk across to the lower end of Piccadilly would do me good; but by the time I crossed Hanover Square the mist had thickened and taken on a yellowish tinge. When I reached Bond Street the drivers of motor vehicles were having to switch on their headlights.

There was a time when I enjoyed walking in a fog in the West End of London. In those days nearly all the mansions in Mayfair were still occupied as private houses. The servants rarely troubled to draw the heavy brocaded curtains and often the lights were on, so one could see into the downstairs rooms. It was fun to glance in passing at the gracious interiors with their Adams mantelpieces and Chippendale furniture. Sometimes a footman would be laying a table and one could speculate with a shade of envy on the well-dressed men and lovely women who would soon be sitting there enjoying an epicurean lunch.

But now that glamorous Mayfair depicted by Michael Arlen was no more. The mansions had been converted into offices or shops; and as I turned into Grosvenor Street I had no inclination to look into them. The fog was now billowing down in thick, sluggish waves from the direction of the Park, and it aroused in me again those awful memories of my last walk with Eric.

It was while I was at the Ministry of Economic Warfare that I met him. He was about thirty then; a tall, broad-shouldered man with rather a pleasant face but eyes that were hard as agates; and as soon as one got to

know him well, one realised that those hard, unsmiling eyes were the key to his personality. He was the most cynical and ruthless man I have ever met.

No doubt it was those qualities which made him so successful at his job, for he was a saboteur. Not the ordinary kind, who starts fires in ships and leaves sticks of gelignite in factories, but on a much higher level. He was a scholar of considerable attainments, and spoke several Near-Eastern languages fluently. His job was the bringing to grief, by fair means or foul, of politicians and big industrialists in the Mohammedan world who were helping the Nazis.

My memories of him were so vivid that, by the time I was approaching Berkeley Square, I could almost feel his presence. It was a horribly unnerving sensation and I tried to rid myself of it; but my brain rejected every train of thought except that which had led up to my impulse to kill him.

He had returned to London only to report, but a series of minor operations on his nose kept him here for nearly four months. Quite early in his stay I invited him home and introduced him to my family circle. I little thought then of the price we should have to pay for his amusing conversation; and until it was too late I had not even an idea that there was anything between him and Mary.

She was a cousin of mine, a lovely young thing of eighteen who had just gone into the W.R.N.S., and was doing her initial training at Golden Square. Her boy-friends up till then had been jolly youngsters little older than herself and I suppose it was Eric's polished man-of-the-world manner that carried her off her feet. Anyhow, he was fit again and shortly about to return to Palestine when she came to see me one evening and confided in a flood of tears that she was going to have a baby by him.

At first I was more surprised than angry, because having known Mary from her childhood I still thought of her as too young even to think of going to bed with a man. But as the full realisation of what had happened came home to me, that very fact made Eric's seduction of her more unforgivable.

The next night I went to see him, told him what I thought of him and asked what he meant to do about it.

'Nothing,' he replied cynically. 'She should have taken the trouble to look after herself. Any girl old enough to go into one of the Services is perfectly fair game; and if it hadn't been me, it would soon have been someone else.'

I lost my temper then, but he only laughed and began to poke fun at me. He said that had it been any other girl I wouldn't have given it a second thought; that my indignation was due simply to jealousy and my belated realisation that I had been too slow-witted or hidebound by convention to seduce her myself. That was untrue, but it shook me, because he was right about my being in love with her. Positively choking with fury, I slammed the door and rushed out of the house.

Next morning the two of us had to interview an Arab potentate who was staying at the Dorchester. It was a foggy November morning, and after we left the office we followed the same route out of Berkeley Square as that which I was taking now. As we walked up Hill Street I tackled him again. But he was adamant and quoted some Arab proverb to the effect that God had made women for the recreation of man.

It must have been the fog that caused us to turn along South Audley Street instead of crossing it, and take the slightly longer way up Stanhope Street to Park Lane. As we reached the corner it was so thick that we could barely make out the kerb of the pavement, let alone see across the road. For a moment we paused there, still

wrangling. Perhaps it was old-fashioned of me, but I insisted that if he would not make any attempt to help her get out of her trouble, it was up to him to save her from disgrace by marrying her.

Stepping off the pavement we began to cross the open space towards the Dorchester. The murk was faintly broken by the dull yellow headlights of a bus as it rumbled towards us from the direction of Oxford Street. Suddenly, Eric exclaimed :

'Oh, go to hell! If you're so anxious to protect her good name, marry her yourself.'

In that unnatural night we seemed as utterly cut off from the world as if we had been at the bottom of a coal mine. At his words something seemed to snap inside my brain.

'All right!' I cried. 'If she'll have me, I will. But it's you who are going to hell!' Then I gave him a violent push and sent him reeling under the oncoming bus.

Swerving away, I bolted into the fog. Some minutes later, I managed to get my bearings and found that I was in Grosvenor Square. With pounding heart I realised that unless I kept my head I stood a good chance of being hanged for murder; so I made my way back to the Dorchester, interviewed the Arab, then returned to the Ministry and reported that soon after leaving it with me, Eric had said that he felt ill, and decided to go home.

Next morning, I scanned the papers frantically. There was nothing about Eric. But the following day there was a short paragraph reporting that the body of a man who had died from fatal injuries had been picked up in Park Lane and later identified as his. I could breathe again without fear of arrest, but it did nothing to lessen my horror at the awful thing I had done.

For months I was oppressed by a terrible sense of guilt; then for quite long periods I began to forget my

crime. But the sight of fog always brings it back to me and now, as I turned up Hill Street, I was filled with a grim foreboding that I should yet be called on to pay for it in some way.

Perhaps that was caused by the unnerving knowledge that I was being followed. Fog deadens all sound and gives even passing traffic a ghostly appearance. The busy streets seemed to have become almost empty and strangely silent; but I could distinctly hear footsteps behind me and the awful thing was that I thought I knew whose they were.

I attempted to increase my pace, but found I couldn't. When I reached the corner of Queen Street, the footsteps were right on my heels. To get to the Club where I was lunching I ought to have turned left there and gone through Shepherds Market, but some influence that it was beyond my power to combat forced me to go straight on—just as I had done with Eric.

A moment later, a tall figure loomed up beside me. I knew for certain then that there was good reason for my terror. It *was* Eric. Yet it could not be Eric in the flesh. It was his ghost that had returned to claim me.

Falling into step with me, it said—or I thought it said: 'Hello, Reeves. I could have identified you fifty yards away by that old smoker's cough of yours. How's the world using you?'

I was sweating with fear, yet felt impelled to reply: 'All right, thanks. Since the war, I've done very well for myself.'

'So I gather,' said my sinister companion. 'I hear, too, that you married Mary. How has that turned out?'

I knew that it could only be my guilty conscience causing me to imagine things, so I closed my eyes for a moment and made a desperate attempt to force my mind back into normal channels. But when I opened them again, he was still there and I heard myself mutter:

'We've been very happy. She has two sons now.'

The cynical voice came again. 'You're a lucky fellow, Reeves, to have made money, married the girl you loved and got away with murder.'

The way he said it sent cold shivers down my spine. It was so obvious that he had waited all this time, till I had little left to wish for, before returning to destroy me.

With the fog swirling about us, we had turned along South Audley Street and up Stanhope Street. I was half fainting with terror at the awful thought of what was about to happen. I felt certain that the sands of my life were running out. When we reached Park Lane he meant to force me—just as he had forced me to walk past Queen Street—to throw myself under a bus.

I made an effort to turn and run, but could not. I tried to shout for help, but no sound came from my throat. We arrived side by side on the fatal corner. The yellow headlamps of an approaching bus were visible only twenty feet away. It was bearing down on us inexorably. As though thrust by invisible hands, I lurched forward.

Suddenly my arm was grasped and I was jerked back. In a daze I heard Eric say : 'What the hell are you playing at? D'you want to kill yourself? You might not have the luck that I had of falling flat between the wheels. And I don't bear you any malice for that push, you know. It gave me the idea of having myself reported dead by our Ministry. As several people were after my blood, a change of identity suited me very well, just then. I've been in Turkistan most of the time since. Come to the Club for a drink and I'll tell you what I've been up to all these years.'

STORY IX

In the following story the 'City of Gold' is Johannesburg, that splendid metropolis of steel, glass, and concrete; poverty, riches, and greed. The city is surrounded by miles of lovely country houses, gardens, and swimming-pools. It is backed by pyramids of yellow soil, refuse of the gold-mines. It has arisen during a bare half-century from the desolate veldt below which lay the yellow metal which causes man to scheme, slave, and kill.

When we visited South Africa in the winter of 1934, our friends there, and many others made during our stay, spared neither time nor trouble to show us the most interesting sights and magnificent scenery from Table Mountain to the Crocodile River, and from the vineyards of Constantia to the Valley of a Thousand Hills. One of them, however, took me on an expedition which was very different from all the rest. It was into the slum districts of Johannesburg, to show me the places where the most desperate fighting had occurred when the Communists tried to seize control of the city in 1922. In doing so he told me the whole story of this formidable and bloody revolt.

When we got back to England I sat down to write a thriller with a South African background. It was published some six months later as *The Fabulous Valley*.

Parts of it were, I think, quite exciting, but I never thought it was up to the standard of most of my other books. Generally speaking, it was better received than it deserved, but one reviewer put in his criticism a line which I felt was profoundly true. He said: 'Mr. Wheatley should have made up his mind if he meant to write a thriller or a guide-book.'

He had hit the nail on the head and taught me a most valuable lesson. I had been too near my local colour, and, in consequence, given way to the temptation to drag in everything of interest or beauty I had seen on my trip irrespective of the fact that dissertations on diamond mining or native war dances were hanging up the story and had little bearing on the smooth development of the plot.

I did, however, refrain from dragging in an account of Johannesburg's week of terror. Instead I used it for the background of a separate short story; but here again I fear that a critic would be fully justified in saying: 'Mr. Wheatley should have made up his mind if he meant to write a magazine story or a short history of the '22 insurrection.'

I can only hope that most of my readers do not suffer from a positive dislike for history.

When the Reds Seized the City of Gold

'But how did you get through, John? I thought there were pickets round the mines?'

John Campbell looked down on Sari Vermeer's sleek head resting against the top button of his waistcoat. 'Not only round the mines, but round the whole of

Johannesburg, too,' he said laconically, shifting his arm to a closer position round her shoulders.

For a moment Sari was quiet, then she pulled herself away abruptly. 'I don't understand,' she said, and through the gathering dusk John could see a little crease between the curving wings of her dark eyebrows. 'How can you get through two rings of pickets?'

John turned her face towards his own and bent his head. 'Just luck, darling,' he said lightly, 'and a very strong incentive.'

Sari pulled him down on to a log under the blue-gum trees which spread dancing shadows on the lawn at the back of her father's house when the hot African sun shone in the daytime. Now, when dusk was falling, their long thin leaves hung as sadly as mourning flags.

'You know,' she said gravely, 'if Father caught you here he would blow up with rage. He's naturally in sympathy with the strikers because they've been clever enough to make it appear that it is the down-trodden Boer who is oppressed by the grasping British. He looks on you as an enemy of his race while this lasts, and you can't blame him, really, for he's only heard one side of the story. If he knew—or would believe the truth—he'd be all for the Chamber of Mines.'

'Can't you make him realise that this strike has been largely engineered by Moscow and that miners who got such fabulous wages during the war naturally resent the mineowners getting in cheaper labour now? What those blokes don't seem to understand is that if they continued to get such high wages the mines would have to close down.'

Sari shook his arm impatiently. 'It's no good going all over that again, John,' she said. 'I've talked to him until I'm sick of it. He still thinks I'm a little girl in short frocks. Can't *we* do something, John? Can't we get hold

of the President—he'd be here now if he knew the true situation?'

'I'm afraid a letter from me would not have much effect on Jan Smuts,' John smiled ruefully at Sari, 'though the only hope of saving the situation is for him to call out the commandos. The British miners and engineers can't hold the dumps much longer, and once they go the machinery will be wrecked and the lower levels flooded.'

Sari Vermeer's pretty mouth tightened. She came from an English family on her mother's side whose men had been soldiers for generations. Her father was of old Dutch stock; those wonderful pioneers of the Great Trek, when the Boer farmers left their lands in Cape Province before the incoming tide of British settlers who brought progress in their train, and trekked over that thirsty desert, the Great Karroo; over swollen rivers and precipitous mountains to the territory north of the Vaal River, driving the Zulus in front of them, those earlier conquerors of the country.

That they were still bitter against the British is to be understood, for no sooner had they settled down with their flocks and herds around them and started to cultivate the soil than gold was discovered and the Witwatersrand . . . the Ridge of the White Waters . . . the Reef of Gold . . . beckoned to fortune-hunters all the world over.

Now, in 1922, after the war was over, the mine-owners were protesting against continuing the exorbitant wages demanded by white labour during the lean years and wanted to help out their pay-roll with native workers. For many weeks the strike had threatened; now it had come and in a malignant form, for Red Rebellion was in the air.

Sari rubbed her cheek thoughtfully against the rough tweed of her lover's sleeve. 'There must be some means,'

she muttered. 'I wonder if I . . .'

'Sari!' John swung round on her and in the half-light she could see that his eyes were stern. 'Promise me that you won't go out of this place—it's not safe for you to roam about on your own.'

Sari laughed. 'What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander,' she answered pertly, but the words had hardly left her lips when there was the sound of a soft thud and she saw the big felt hat on John's head lift itself off; the next moment the report of a rifle cracked across the lawn.

For a minute they were as still as wild animals startled in the forest. Sari noticed mechanically that she could dimly see a puff of smoke rising over the bushes. John stared at the hat which lay at his feet. That minute was like a sudden movement in slow motion in the middle of a quickly moving film. Before she could turn her head Sari felt herself picked up in John's long arms and being carried over towards the house. He was swearing softly under his breath, and once again Sari felt that there were things about this tall Scot that she did not understand. Who could want to shoot at John? Why should he have enemies . . . out here?

'Go in and bolt all the shutters,' he told her as he put her down by the door. 'I must go at once. I'll send you news if I can, but if you don't hear anything for several days you're not to worry; I'll be all right. Only *don't try and find me*—promise?'

Sari stood on tiptoe and lifted her face. 'I never make rash promises, John,' she said, 'but I will try and be brave.'

For a brief second she felt his lips on hers before he vanished as quietly as a cat round the side of the stoep.

All the next day she wandered restlessly round the house and garden, wondering if he had got back to the mine safely, longing for news and racking her brains for

the hidden meaning in his last remark. *'Don't try and find me,'* he had said. Was it to prevent her leaving the farm, or—was it because he was not going back to the mine? What had been in his mind? Sari drew down her dark brows in a thoughtful frown. Many little things had puzzled her in the last few weeks. John had been more silent than usual during those stolen meetings when her father was away on business. Had he feared some lurking danger more than the threatened strike at the mine?

That night her father came back. Piet Vermeer looked worried and depressed as they sat drinking tea on the stoep after dinner. His long moustaches drooped and the little tuft of white hair under his lower lip seemed to stick out less arrogantly than before.

'It's hard to know what to do,' he told his wife and Sari. 'There's fighting round the mines and it's a bad look-out for the British if the rebels get them, but they've no right to take the bread out of honest Dutchmen's mouths.'

Sari was silent. She knew that it was useless to argue with her father in this mood. He was fair enough as a rule, but the old hatred had flared up between Britisher and Boer and the flame had been skilfully fanned.

She broke the silence that had fallen between them. 'You still write to the President, don't you, Father?' she asked quietly.

'The President?' Old Piet echoed. 'Sometimes I do. You remember that I went to stay with him last year at Groote Schuur when I was down at the Cape.'

'Yes,' agreed Sari. 'You've always been friends, haven't you?'

'Since the days of Botha and Rhodes and the birth-pangs of this great city of Johannesburg,' the old man told her proudly.

Sari nodded. She had not mentioned the shot in the

garden the night before. He must not know that John Campbell had been there with her and she had no wish to have her liberty curtailed. She kept him talking of the old days and then led the conversation to the news he had gleaned in Pretoria that day. It was all very vague, for the telegraph wires were cut, but a few messengers had come through and rumours were rife. The rebels had apparently entrenched themselves in the slum of Vredesdorp. There had been general sabotage out on the East Rand, for half the blackguards in Africa had joined the strikers. There was a persistent rumour that a Committee of Action had been set up which was nothing but a Communist cell.

Old Piet's eyes grew troubled as he retailed these items of news. He was, Sari thought, beginning to feel the first pricks of suspicion that all was not straightforward in this quarrel, but he would take time to convince, and time was short—John was somewhere among the rabble and Sari was an ardent lover of her own country. She had a shrewd and well-balanced brain. She had studied the questions which were so vital to the welfare of the Union and formed her own conclusions.

That night she went up to bed early, but it was nearly dawn before she had completed her plan and was satisfied with the words she had written so painstakingly over and over again.

She stretched herself and washed her face; then she changed into riding breeches and a silk shirt, long boots, and a soft hat, which shaded her honey-coloured hair and dimmed the lustre of her strange, changing eyes.

When her father and mother came down to breakfast Sari was not there, and questions to the servants only elicited the fact that her horse was missing from the stable.

'She will have gone over to see Betty van der Byl at

Pretoria,' Old Piet told his wife. 'She'll be back for dinner.'

But dinner-time came and still Sari was absent. Evening brought long shadows on the veldt and the boys were going about their duties in the garden with the soft swish of falling water for the parched plants. Old Piet paced up and down the stoep trying to look as if he were not worried. Uneasy and perturbed by unacknowledged fears he tried to put a brave face on the matter for his wife's benefit, but he did little to reassure either himself or her. When ten o'clock came Mrs. Vermeer put down her knitting, which had made little progress, and stopped his restless pacing.

'Let's face it, my dear,' she said. 'We don't either of us think that Sari is at Pretoria and we're too old to play a game of bluff with each other. Sari is probably in Johannesburg and she may not be able to get back.'

Piet grunted. 'I'll murder anyone who touches . . .'

'Of course you will, Piet,' Mrs. Vermeer said quietly, 'but Sari has her head screwed on fairly firmly. She may have tried to see John.'

'She knows I've forbidden her to see that Campbell puppy . . .'

'You liked him until this strike happened,' she said.

'We all make mistakes sometimes,' he said gruffly, and fell silent, pondering on the possibility that he had also been mistaken in his attitude towards the dispute. He had not liked the sound of the words 'Red' and 'Revolution' which Sari had used, and he had a well-concealed respect for his daughter's judgement. His wife's gentle voice broke in on these meditations.

'Don't you think that you might go into the town tomorrow and see if you can hear anything of her?'

'I'd go tonight if I thought it would be any good,' he said quickly, 'but I can't get through the pickets until daybreak.'

He shouted to the boy and told him to have the car ready at six. Mrs. Vermeer folded up her work. She would not worry him by sharing her ever-growing anxiety for Sari.

Old Piet drove like the wind for the first five miles of the ten which separated his farm from the city; then he found a barrier piled across the road and guarded by a ragged rabble of men with red brassards round their left arms. They let him through without question, for their leader was a man Piet Vermeer had met in business and who knew that his sympathies were with the strikers. As he drove on he realised that the city was invested. Only the centre, round the Rand Club, was still held by the British and the forces of law and order. No trams were running; all the shops were shuttered and armed police were concentrated in the principal streets. As he drove slowly along he heard the sound of trotting horses coming from a cross-street in front of him. A policeman stepped out into the road and stopped the little traffic there was.

As Old Piet watched, the Imperial Light Horse swept round the corner at a sharp trot. They rode their horses easily, these long-limbed tanned boys. Old Piet felt the tears damp in his eyes as the jingle of their bridles made music in his ears. On a sudden impulse he jumped to his feet and cheered as the tail of the column passed him.

A young man leaped on to the running board as he started his car again. 'Give me a quick lift, sir, will you?' he said, and Piet saw that he was hatless and in the oily overalls of a mechanic. A long smudge of dried blood was congealed down the side of his face.

'I'm trying to get news through from Benoni,' the lad told him in quick, gasping breaths. 'I was on a motor-bike, but they plugged that and a stone got me so I ran for it.'

Piet frowned. 'What is happening out there?' he asked.

'Eighteen of us were holding the offices, but the manager was forced to surrender to those devils, and they clubbed all of them to death with their rifles, except me. I hid in the chimney until they had gone.'

Piet Vermeer felt his heart grow cold. The nagging doubts which had besieged him the night before were rising again in full force. He set his jaw grimly. He'd find out the truth at the Rand Club and then he'd go and get Sari out of the mouth of hell if those devils had taken her. . . .

'If Smuts knew half the truth he'd have called out the commandos before this,' he heard a man saying as he entered the famous horse-shoe bar of the Rand Club. The speaker was one of Old Piet's best friends—a staunch supporter of the strikers in the early days. He joined the group round the door and heard rumours winging from mouth to mouth. Each man had some story to tell and the evidence was overwhelming. 'The post-office is in their hands,' said one; 'I've just come from there.'

'They've blown up the railway line between Krugersdorp and Luipaardsvlei,' another cut in. 'Smuts is coming—he knows what's happening now.' 'They're holding the hills outside the town . . . the Transvaal Scottish have been cut to pieces by a mob many thousands stronger than they were . . . arms have been pouring into their hands . . . Moscow . . . Reds . . . rape . . . rapine . . . murder. . . .'

Old Piet shuffled away from the excited group. They were talking now of fortifying the Club and making a last stand there. His job was to find Sari. He slipped out without anyone noticing that he had gone.

On foot he made his way towards the danger-spot of the city—Vredesdorp, where the strikers' headquarters

were rumoured to be. He felt stunned now by all that he had heard in the last few hours and the stress of his anxiety for his daughter. His feet dragged him to the foot of the slope and there he leaned against a low wall to rest a moment before breasting the rise.

Some men were talking and laughing round the corner. 'They had a girl there . . . a green-eyed blonde . . . they've shut her up until they can deal . . .' he heard. He glanced up to the top of the hill. The schoolhouse stood, gaunt and sinister, on top.

Old Piet straightened himself and walked briskly round the corner of the wall. Six men were lounging there and he saw that they, too, wore the red brassard of the rebels. The man nearest him stepped out and held a rifle across the path. 'Not so fast,' he said. 'Where are you off to, old man?'

'*Die skool bo op die hoogte,*' said Old Piet mechanically. It was the best passport he could have used. There were many Dutchmen climbing the hill that morning.

At the door he was stopped again and asked his business. The place was busy with the constant coming and going of rebel troops with rifles slung on their backs. Piet racked his brains and remembered the name of one of the leaders. He had seen him at several meetings—even been introduced to him as 'one of our firmest supporters'. *Spendiff*—that was the name.

The 'General' was busy, he was told. He could have an appointment at midday for five minutes. Piet controlled his temper and sat down to wait with that same dogged determination which had inspired his forefather to leave Cape Province.

One of the men on duty at the door was a chatty little chap, half Irish and half some queer coloured mixture that Piet noticed with lip-curling disapproval. He kept up an incessant stream of conversation with his opposite number. He seemed to know everyone by sight

and most of their secrets. That one . . . he had two wives in Brakpan. The other . . . he liked a bottle of whisky a day . . . on and on until Piet found it difficult not to tell him curtly to shut his dirty mouth. He tried to shut that nasal voice out, but it droned on like the buzzing of a blow-fly.

Midday dragged itself nearer and Piet looked up as he heard the door of the General's room open. A man stood in the doorway—and Old Piet stiffened like a pointer in his chair. John Campbell it was—standing there with a red brassard on his arm—John Campbell, the Britisher—the man who had poisoned Sari's mind against the rebels and here he was right in the heart of them. A spy! The words echoed in Old Piet's head until he wondered if he had not said them aloud. His brain was still unsteady from the shocks of the morning and now all that he could realise was that this man—this traitor—had got Sari in his power. Sari and the Union . . . both betrayed by the Reds . . . Johannesburg given over to rioting and violence . . . horror to be heaped upon horror. . . .

He got slowly to his feet, still keeping his eyes fixed on John's. He was a big man and heavy, but John was still the taller by a couple of inches.

'Where's Sari?' he muttered, and his eyes were red-rimmed like those of a wild buffalo about to charge.

'Quite safe,' John said quietly; 'the General is waiting for you.'

He turned and led the way into the room and Piet followed mechanically.

Spendiff was sitting behind a big table covered with papers. He looked up as the two came in and Old Piet held out his hand. He thought that he must try and keep on good terms with them until he had got Sari out of their clutches.

Spendiff did not seem to notice the hand. He pulled a

paper out of the pile on the desk and tossed it over to Piet.

The old man looked down at it and saw that it was covered with his own handwriting—or was it his?—it was like it, and yet . . . ?

The letter was addressed to Jan Smuts and it was written in Afrikaans. It explained the situation in Johannesburg briefly but clearly, and then went on to say that the writer was sending his daughter with it to ride through the lines. 'They will not search a girl,' it ran. She would get on the train outside Johannesburg and take the letter in person straight to the President. In spite of his anxiety Old Piet could not help admiring the clear exposition of what he now knew to be the true position. He wished he had written it himself.

He tossed it back to Spendiff. 'Yes,' he said, 'That's my letter, and I should like to know by what right you hold my daughter? She was only a messenger.'

'It was you we wanted,' Spendiff jerked out grimly. 'We thought the bee would follow the honey-pot soon enough. We'll let her go when we're less busy, but you're for the high jump, old man. We've a short way with traitors here. Campbell!'

'Sir?'

'This man will be shot at dawn tomorrow—you're responsible for him!'

Old Piet could not struggle against the six men John called in to escort him. He was taken to a room at the top of the building and left there with his hands tied behind his back.

There was no furniture and only two small windows, one giving on the grassy slope down towards the city in front and the other on the back with a view of the kopjes outside the town. Both windows were heavily barred.

Old Piet stood for a while with his head sunk on his chest. He was cursing himself for the blind fool he had

been. Cursing Spendiff and John Campbell with a malevolence which left him cold and shaking.

As the hours wore on and the sun left the front window he grew quieter from sheer mental exhaustion as well as hunger. He sat down with his back to the wall. Escape was, he knew, hopeless; but Sari might still be safe. With all the fundamental religion so deeply imbedded in him since early childhood he prayed that when the hour came he might die as he had lived—with a stiff neck. He prayed that retribution might fall on those enemies of the country he loved.

Old Piet's religion had been learned in a hard school, and the flames of hell were no allegory to his mind. He consigned John Campbell and Spendiff to them with all the trusting fervour of a fanatic.

A sudden burst of firing broke the silence, and he got up and looked out of the window. Up the grassy slope towards the school the Imperial Light Horse were advancing—dismounted and in open order. For a few minutes they came on unopposed and then a hail of rifle bullets and the chatter of machine-guns burst out. Behind every kopje were massed the rebels—safely in cover. No soldiers could have done it without the support of artillery. Old Piet groaned as he saw the useless waste of brave lives and watched the survivors of that gallant charge limp back to the cover at the bottom of the hill.

Dusk came and with it a few lights began to twinkle down below. A sound of distant shouting brought Piet to his feet again at the window which looked on the back. At first he could not see anything new, and then he noticed that the tops of the distant surrounding hills were topped by pin-pricks of light—moving beacons on the kopjes nearer in. On the other side there seemed to be a good deal of activity, too, and suddenly he heard the drone of an aeroplane overhead. He paced back-

wards and forwards between his two vantage-points and as he watched his excitement grew. Memories of his campaigns on the veldt in the old days came flooding back and a wild hope began to grow in his heart, flickering like one of those points of light on the hills circling the town. He strained his eyes through the gathering darkness—it was—it must be—the commandos! Jan Smuts had arrived and called them out. Those tall, wiry Dutch burghers who would ride without question to the defence of their lands and their country once they understood the danger that threatened their very existence. . . . And the revolution would be pinched between two fires. . . .

The tramping of feet sounded from the stairs and the door opened. John Campbell, followed by a posse of men, came into the room. They marched Old Piet down to the hall and then he spoke over his shoulder to John. 'Where are you taking me?'

'You're to be shot at once—we can't wait until dawn. I've too much to see to to have prisoners on my hands. We're evacuating the school.'

Old Piet chuckled. 'I thought you were the masters of Johannesburg,' he sneered, 'and now you're running away like whipped dogs. I hope they take a sjambok to you before they hang you.'

John's face was pale and set. He took no apparent notice of the taunt, and having ordered his men into line walked Old Piet over to a deep trench which lay in the shadows at the side of the building. He pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket and his men saw Old Piet nod his head as if in obedience to some command. John gave the order to fire in a steady voice.

* * * *

'He must have hit his head on a stone in the trench as

he fell,' John told Mrs. Vermeer. 'I did not have time to explain that I had got Sari away earlier, only that I had joined the Red Organisation months ago as a spy for the Chamber of Mines. . . .' He stopped and took a long drink. 'I knew that someone else would have him shot if I didn't arrange it first. . . .'

'How did you get him down, darling?' Sari asked.

'I carried him,' he replied briefly. 'I thought we should get a shot in the back at any moment, but they were too busy evacuating the school to notice that I was not there. When we got down to the cavalry lines they lent me a horse.'

'Supposing the firing-party had shot him before he dropped?' Sari asked breathlessly.

'I loaded their rifles with blanks myself,' John smiled. 'The only thing that made me funky was that he might not drop when I gave the signal. If he hadn't, we should have both been for it.'

A sudden bellow from the next room made them jump. 'Sari!' came Old Piet's voice. 'Tell that puppy he can have you by right of capture!'

STORY X

This, I think, is the best in the Ghost Hunter series. It's background is based on fact to the extent that there was at one time a South Kensington flat—in either Barkston or Bramham Gardens, I forget which—that remained tenantless for several years because such a succession of suicides occurred there that at last no one could be induced to take it even at an absurdly low rental. Moreover, it was said that all the suicides had taken their lives in the same way, namely, by throwing themselves out of the window.

This similarity in the manner of death intrigued me and I felt that there must be some natural or psychic explanation for it. No such explanation was ever forthcoming to my knowledge, so I proceeded to invent one for the purpose of adding another Neils Orsen case to my collection.

The Red-Headed Women and Neils's explanation of the mystery was, of course, my own contribution to the story, but it might give my readers quite a lot of fun, if they feel they have a gift for story-telling, to take the same set of circumstances and try their hand at inventing an entirely different explanation to account for this strange series of suicides by the tenants of an ill-omened flat.

The Case of the Red-headed Women

Neils Orsen waited, his long, tapering fingers beating a tattoo upon the mantelpiece, his large, curiously pale blue eyes thoughtful. There was no reason for his waiting, he had made no appointment, yet the moment the door opened and he saw the tall American lawyer from the Chambers below he knew that his instinct had not failed him—his friend was very worried.

'What's the trouble, Hemmingway?' he asked at once. 'Mix yourself a drink, then sit down and tell me all about it.'

The dark-haired solicitor gave the little man a shrewd smile as he helped himself to a whisky-and-soda. 'I suppose by now I should be used to this trick of yours of always knowing what's in my mind the moment I come into the room—or perhaps before—but it still seems queer. And of course you're right—I am worried—very worried.' He leant forward suddenly. 'Orsen, this is not an ordinary case—but I think it's right down your street.'

'Well?' his host smiled.

'The situation is this,' Hemmingway began. 'A young friend of mine has just got married. He has taken an apparently charming little flat and the lease was handled by my firm, but unfortunately I was away when the deal was drafted.'

'Unfortunately?' Orsen queried.

'Yes. It just happens that I know the history of the place and I wouldn't willingly have drafted a lease of it for my worst enemy. Of course outwardly it's an amazing bargain. Owing to the fact that it has been empty for so long the rental has been reduced out of all proportion to the value of the property.'

'Why?' Orsen interrupted encouragingly.

'Well, there have been three suicides and the other tenants have always left after a week or so, complaining of an unpleasantly cold atmosphere and all telling the same curious story that on certain nights the bathroom window used to open of its own accord.'

'Was there anything unusual about these suicides?'

'On the face of it, no,' Hemmingway continued slowly, drawing at his cigarette. 'The first was a French woman of about thirty; the second, which occurred some three months later, a man of sixty; and the third an older woman—who, incidentally, was the last occupant—she died just a year ago. Of course it may only be coincidence, but it seems very odd that all three should have chosen the bathroom window out of which to throw themselves.'

'Yes, most peculiar,' Orsen agreed, 'but there may be a perfectly reasonable explanation. As you know, four-fifths of the so-called psychic phenomena that I have to investigate turn out to be hoaxes, even though sometimes they are of a very violent and unpleasant nature. However, this may be one of the odd fifth, a genuine Saati manifestation; but what would you like me to do?'

'Just this. The flat is being re-decorated while the young couple are on their honeymoon and they will be returning in about a month's time. I've got a set of keys, so I thought that if you could go down there and see it maybe you'd know if anything really is wrong. I, personally, am quite convinced that there is something uncanny going on, and knowing your peculiar power to sense psychic manifestations I came to you. Anyway, the police would just laugh at me.'

Neils Orsen turned his head. 'Pāst! Pāst!' he called. As if from nowhere a beautiful Siamese cat leapt down on to his shoulder. 'Pāst, old man, we've been asked to go ghost-hunting again. What do you think?'

The cat purred lazily and blinked its large, pale blue eyes at Hemmingway.

Orsen held out his hand. 'Very well. Let me have the keys and I'll see what I can do. Come back in a few days' time and I'll give you the results.'

'Thanks awfully; that's a great load off my mind,' Hemmingway said, finishing his drink. 'The flat is in Collingburn Court, South Kensington; No. 35, and it's on the fifth floor.'

A week later the two men met for dinner. Not until coffee had been served would Orsen satisfy Hemmingway's curiosity.

'In a way you were right,' he began. 'That place has a most unpleasant atmosphere. I have been several times and even spent the night there in the bathroom, but I found no evidence of anything supernatural. The bad atmosphere is easily explained. Many people who like myself are of Nordic extraction are what you call *fey*, and as the seventh child of a seventh child I am so ultra-sensitive that I can pick up the unhappy vibrations of humans who have been miserable at some time or another, in at least one out of every six rooms I go into. Pāst didn't like it either. As you know, I always take him with me on cases like this because of his hyper-sensitiveness to evil manifestations.

'Being stymied in that direction I went to the police and made inquiries about the suicides. The first was a very beautiful French woman, Pictorine Daubert, who lived alone with her maid. The maid was away when her suicide occurred. The second, curiously enough, was an inmate of the same block; a shipowner named Arnold Robertson. His flat was just above but he took over Madame Daubert's on her death owing to its greater accommodation. The last, Mrs. Matheson, killed herself after a tenancy of only one week!

'Three points that did strike me as curious emerged

from my inquiry; they are : one, that none of these people apparently had any motive for taking their lives; two, that all three suicides occurred between midnight and one in the morning; and three, the curious coincidence that both the women had very fine heads of red hair. But if there is an evil entity in that flat it does not respond to any of the usual tests for haunting; so there it is. I'm afraid there is nothing more I can do—for the present, anyway.'

'I see.' A worried frown creased Hemmingway's forehead. 'But what do you mean, "for the present"?'

'Just this. I checked up the dates upon which the tragedies took place—not the ordinary calendar dates but by the lunar months—and found that both the women committed suicide on the second day after the new moon. Of course this may mean nothing, because Mr. Robertson threw himself out of the window on the fifteenth day, so there is no question of a series. But all the same, I think it would be worth my while to pay another visit two days after the next new moon. That is in about a fortnight's time and if there is any genuine Saati manifestation it should certainly take place that night. If not—well then, my dear Hemmingway, your young friends will have nothing to worry about. Oh, by the way, when do they return?'

'In about three weeks, I think.'

'Well, then, I suggest that we should both go down there a fortnight from today. What do you say?'

'That's grand by me. What time shall I meet you?' Hemmingway asked.

'It is no use our going there before midnight, so how about having a late dinner first? I will make all my arrangements that morning.'

'What do you mean, "arrangements"?'

'Oh, I shall place my special cameras in focus with the fatal window and connect up the flashlight with

invisible wires. If the window is thrown open the flash-lights will go off and should any psychic phenomenon appear the plates will be quite certain to register it upon their delicate surfaces.'

At eleven-thirty upon the prearranged evening Hemmingway and Orsen arrived at the block of flats.

As Orsen got out of the car he glanced up and gripping his companion by the arm whispered urgently: 'Look at those lights! Look! The bathroom is in darkness, but someone is in the bedroom.'

Hemmingway cursed. 'Burglars, I suppose.'

'We'll see,' Orsen replied grimly. Silently they climbed the stairs, then taking out his key he inserted it in the lock, but before he could turn it the door opened.

'Peter!' Hemmingway gasped. 'What on earth are you doing here? I thought...'

'I know. We weren't due back till next week and I was livid at having my honeymoon cut short but I was re-called on urgent business by my firm. As the flat was all ready we decided to come straight here from the station when the train got in tonight.'

The young man's tone was abrupt and he was obviously very tired, which perhaps accounted for the lack of surprise and pleasure he had shown upon seeing his friend.

It was an awkward situation. The last thing they wished to do was to ruin his first night in his new home by telling him of the true reason for their visit; so, having introduced Orsen, Hemmingway said quickly:

'I just thought I'd come round and see if everything was all right and as we were having dinner together I brought Orsen with me.'

Peter Wembley hesitated a moment: then his good manners overcame his reluctance to receiving visitors at such an hour after a long day of tiring travel. 'Well, it's grand to see you—come in, do. Pauline is getting ready

for bed, but I was just going to have a night-cap, so you must join me.'

Hemmingway and Orsen filed past him, feeling acutely embarrassed. Their young host was obviously not very pleased to see them. Only by appearing boorish and insensitive could they keep him up for long and it was still a good twenty minutes before midnight.

'What will you have?' Peter went over to the sideboard. 'Whisky-and-soda—brandy or . . .'

'Whisky for me, old man,' Hemmingway said with a brightness he did not feel.

'And for you, sir?' Peter glanced at Orsen.

'May I have a glass of water? I find that it suits me best.'

The two guests sat down, but Peter stood in front of the fire rocking gently on his heels. He evidently had no intention of allowing them to prolong their visit into a midnight session.

Hemmingway glanced uneasily at Orsen, but the little man was saying with a guileless smile : 'I hear you've just returned from your honeymoon—do tell me, where did you go?'

'Italy—the South—little place called Amalfi—perhaps you know it?'

'Yes, I drove over to it once from Naples—an enchanting spot.'

Peter nodded, but he made no further contribution to the conversation.

'Of course you had good weather?' Orsen went on a little lamely.

'Um . . . too cold for bathing, but the blue skies were a pleasant change.'

For lack of something to say Orsen pulled out his cigarette-case. 'Will you have one of these? They are Turks, I have them specially imported for me.'

'No thanks.' Peter shook his head.

Hemmingway felt it was time that he entered the uneven contest. They'd only been there for just over ten minutes and somehow Peter had to be kept talking until well after midnight. 'By the way, old man,' he began jovially, 'I suppose you'll be doing some hunting now you're back.'

'Rather,' the young man showed more interest now that his favourite subject had been broached. 'I hope to get down to Leicestershire next week-end.'

'Have you still got that grand little mare you had last season?'

'Yes. She's stabled with some friends of mine; you must try her out one day.'

'Pauline's keen, too, isn't she?'

The mention of Peter's wife was unfortunate; he glanced pointedly towards the bedroom door. 'Yes. She'll be so sorry to have missed you, but I expect she's in bed by this time.'

The situation was becoming desperate. Suddenly the clock began to strike. The tiny chimes seemed to resound through the still room. Hemmingway looked up sharply, but Orsen shook his head, 'Fast,' his lips mouthed the word silently.

'I say, Peter.' Hemmingway leant forward quickly to attract his host's wandering attention, 'I had the most amusing case the other day. A young man came to me almost biting his nails with rage.'

'Really.' Peter tried to show some interest.

'Yes, it seems that his old man had done the dirty on him—left all his money to his mistress.'

'But surely he must have known what kind of man his father was and expected something like that to happen?' Orsen interrupted helpfully.

'No, no, that's the funny part, the old boy fooled him into thinking that he led a respectable and even puritanical life—pretending to disapprove heartily of mod-

ern young things—and his only ostensible form of fun was stamp collecting.'

'What was the girl like?'

'As tough as they make 'em. An innocent little thing you'd say, till she started to talk—you know the type, great big blue eyes and a mass of fluffy yellow hair. I think she was a chorus girl until old Standish picked her up,' Hemmingway trailed off lamely.

'Sickening for the boy.' Peter smothered a yawn.

Orsen began to tap his long tapering fingers on the table beside him. How much longer would they have to endure this wretched pretence of a casual visit; it was well past twelve now but nothing might happen for half an hour or more.

Hemmingway nerved himself to cross the room and refill his glass under Peter's openly disapproving stare. His thoughts were chaotic. Even while they sat there some terrible thing might be mounting unseen from the bottomless pit to claim another victim beyond the sitting-room walls.

'I believe stamp collecting is a very interesting pastime—have you ever gone in for it? A friend of mine . . .' Orsen began trying desperately to keep things going.

'No, I haven't.' Peter's voice was sharp and almost rude, and shrugging irritably he began to pace the room.

The two intruders sat on—miserably racking their brains for another subject. But Orsen found it impossible to concentrate. What was the girl doing; she should be in bed by now; she would be quite safe there—but was she in bed? Or had she still to go into the bathroom to wash? He listened intently. Only the ticking of the clock on the mantelpiece disturbed the eerie silence. They seemed to have been sitting there for hours.

Even Peter was affected by the strange tension that crept into the atmosphere. He slumped into a chair and stared at the floor, apparently no longer caring whether

his guests went or not. Hemmingway smoked incessantly. The uncanny stillness enveloped them all like a mantle of fog. Only the clock ticked on the mantelpiece in mechanical defiance.

Orsen stirred uneasily; his sixth sense warned him that the moment of crisis was fast approaching. Suddenly he leapt to his feet and dashed towards the further door.

Peter came to earth with a jerk. 'Hi—where are you going? That's my wife's room!' he shouted angrily.

A piercing scream made them gasp as Orsen and Peter met and struggled in the doorway. Hemmingway grabbed Peter by the shoulder and hauled him back. Orsen dashed through the bedroom and was the first to reach the bathroom. It was in darkness; the window was flung wide open and a girl lay stretched on the floor beneath it. Peter, having flung Hemmingway off, leapt to the light switch but Orsen stopped him while Hemmingway picked the girl up and carried her into the bedroom.

While Peter was getting some brandy Orsen set about retrieving the cameras he had placed in the bathroom that morning. One that he had set at an angle on the top of the linen-cupboard was safe; but the other, which he had fixed up on a bracket just outside the window, was gone.

When he went in to Pauline's room she was recovering. Her large grey eyes were open and terrified and her bright auburn hair glittered under the sharp bedside light.

'What happened, darling? What happened?' Peter cried, his face pale and distraught.

She passed a hand over her forehead. 'I—I can't remember anything except that when I—before I got into bed I had the most appalling thirst. I went in to

the bathroom to fetch a glass of water. It seemed frightfully hot in there so I opened the window, then'—she hesitated and shuddered—'a cold wind of incredible force seemed to sweep me up from behind and for a second I thought it was going to throw me bodily out of the window. A brilliant light flashed in my face—I remember screaming—then, I suppose, I fainted.'

Directly he could catch Hemmingway's eye, Orsen said gently : 'Well, I think we had better be going. You'll be all right now, I promise you. We'll find our own way out—don't you bother, Mr. Wembley.'

As he had visited the flats in the daytime Orsen knew that the one below had a balcony and fortunately the flat was temporarily unoccupied. Having dug out the porter of the block with his pass keys, they found Orsen's camera which by great good luck was not smashed to pieces, but had got lodged in the branches of a small bay tree.

Immediately they got back to Orsen's chambers in the Temple they set about developing the plates.

'Here's the first!' the frail little man announced excitedly. 'This is the one from the camera that was on the linen-cupboard.'

Hemmingway peered over his shoulder, but it was disappointing. It showed an outflung arm with fingers crooked clutching wildly at the empty air and a shadow just behind it that might have been almost anything.

'No, no good; but the second should be ready now, we'll see if that is any better,' Orsen said, hopefully. He turned after a moment. 'Yes—just look at this!'

Hemmingway stared at the plate. He saw Pauline Wembley's face, ghastly and terrified, her eyes black and fixed, her body foreshortened as though she was being hurled through the air; but over her shoulder there was another face, only imperfectly materialised, as through it could be seen the open door of the linen-cupboard.

'That's what I wanted,' Orsen breathed, and bent down to stroke Pāst, his Siamese cat, who was gently rubbing himself against his legs. Abruptly he straightened up. 'You must get your young friends out of that flat some time tomorrow on one pretext or other—anything will do—then we can go down there and deal with this horrible business thoroughly.'

'All right; I think I can manage that. Have you found an explanation?'

'Yes—I believe so.' Orsen suddenly seemed very tired and Hemmingway knew that the crisis in each of his investigations always told heavily on his frail physique, so he was not surprised when the little man added: 'But I'm too tired and done up to talk now. Call for me here tomorrow at whatever time is convenient and I'll tell you my conclusions.'

The next morning on their way down to South Kensington, Orsen explained. 'Evil entities of this kind,' he began, 'must have something to fasten on in order to aid their materialisation and make them physically dangerous. I guessed, the moment I saw Pauline Wembley's lovely red hair. All red-headed people give out a definite and curious emanation. In civilised countries this is rendered unnoticeable by extreme cleanliness—but it still remains apparent to astral sensitives. Now, as you know, apart from the suicides, three other women lived in the flat—uneasily, I grant you, but they came to no harm, as also the two men; but both the women who were supposed to have committed suicide—and Pauline Wembley who was attacked—had this peculiarity.'

'That's all very well, but how do you account for Robertson—his hair was black?' Hemmingway asked a trifle impatiently.

'If my theory is correct I shall be able to account for that when we arrive.'

On entering the flat they went straight into the bath-

room. 'Look at the door of this linen-cupboard,' Orsen said. 'It is firmly shut and I am prepared to swear that it was shut last night when we rushed in here; yet in the photograph it is standing wide open. I'm convinced that this cupboard holds the key to the mystery,' and opening the door he began to remove the shelves.

'I rather think this cupboard has a false back,' he murmured a moment later. 'Yes, I was right. Look!'

Hemmingway peered inside as Orsen pulled forwards a hinged sheet of three-ply that formed a second door. Behind it, a small dark stairway led up towards the flat above.

'This is the way the Thing comes,' Orsen continued softly, 'and in this case we have to deal not with an Abhuman, but with an earth-bound. Now that we've found the root of the evil we can exorcise it. I will perform a ritual purification and the poor soul will be released from the chains that still bind it to the physical. Its time is up or the Great Ones who adjust the balances in the lives of us all would never have sent me here. Afterwards, your young friends will have nothing more to fear.'

'But—' Hemmingway broke in—'I still don't see how everything ties up. I understand what you said about only the emanations from red hair giving the Thing power to materialise physically and that being the reason why the other women were not attacked, but that does not explain the death of old Robertson.'

Orsen smiled. 'My friend, haven't you realised that the first woman, Victorine Daubert, didn't commit suicide at all? This stairway between the two flats is the key to the whole business. She was Robertson's mistress. He was jealous perhaps—in any case, he came down these stairs one night, caught her in the bathroom and murdered her by throwing her out of the window. Then, her personality preying on his mind, he took over the flat himself, lived there in misery for three months and

eventually committed suicide by the same means as those by which he had killed her.

'Two such occurrences are quite sufficient to explain his haunting the scenes of these terrible moments at certain phases of the moon. He has become a blind, seeking force which no longer recognises persons in this life and is compelled to repeat his murderous act whenever he has an opportunity.

'Each time he suffers all the agony of remorse he felt after the murder of Victorine Daubert until he can find a new victim; yet only the emanations of red hair give him the power to do so, then the wheel of his terrible penance starts to turn again.'

'It sounds extremely plausible, but how can you be certain?' Hemmingway asked with all a legal man's reluctance to admit anything but cold hard facts.

'Compare these two photographs,' Orsen held them out. 'The first which I got from Scotland Yard is of Robertson after he committed suicide. The second is the one of Pauline being thrown towards the window last night. Behind her you will see the outlines of a face which is quite sufficiently materialised to be recognised as Robertson's.'

'By Jove, you're right! But what prevented her from being hurled to her death?'

'The flashlight of my camera going off as the window opened and operated the leads I had fixed. The Powers of Darkness can always be driven back by the Powers of Light.'

STORY XI

Here is another five-minute story of the Second World War which appeared in the *Evening Standard.*

As it brings in our ill-fated expedition to Norway in April 1940, it must be the last that I wrote in that period. In early May of that year Churchill succeeded Chamberlain and, while the fate of France was still in the balance, the nation was roused to a new consciousness of its peril. All kinds of emergency measures were taken and red tape was cut, right, left, and centre; as a result many thousands of people were absorbed into our war effort with—or even without—the barest formality. I had the good fortune to be one amongst those thousands and from then on I was working double shifts, writing papers on various aspects of the war for the Joint Planning Staff, and, between whiles, plugging away at my novels up to the early hours of the morning. There was no time left to write short stories.

The Born Actor

'Isn't the life of a dance hostess pretty dreary sometimes?'

Rather awkwardly Charlie Carson, an ensign of the Irish Guards, opened the conversation with a shy glance in the direction of his companion.

She did not answer at once. Her attention was ap-

parently held by the couples jigging up and down in time to a black band on the dance-floor of the Colney Hatch Night Club. She turned her head, her lips smiling but her eyes expressionless. 'Sometimes.'

Valiantly Charlie persisted. 'Of course, it's all right with chaps like—well, I was going to say myself, but that sounds conceited—I meant young men. The old sugar-daddies—they're a bit trying, aren't they?'

'Yes.' The girl grimaced. 'They're terrible.'

'Why d'you stick it, then?'

'I've got to earn my living.'

'Couldn't you do something else?'

Venetia shrugged her shoulders ironically. 'What? I can't type, sew or act, and I'm not tall enough to be a mannequin.'

Charlie stared at the lovely clear-cut profile and dark, shining hair. 'A pretty girl like you could always marry.'

'I'm married already.'

'You are? Well, I'm hanged if I'd let my wife do this sort of thing. Is your husband out of work?'

'I haven't seen him for nearly two years.'

Charlie was shocked. 'Why don't you divorce him?'

'Because I love him,' Venetia replied quietly.

'After two years' separation?'

'Yes. Silly, isn't it? But I still think he'll return. I keep my eye on the entrance-door over there—every man that comes in is just another thing in trousers once I've realised it isn't Jimmy.'

'I am sorry. Why did he leave you—or would you rather not talk about it?'

'No; I don't mind—we've got to talk about something.'

'D'you tell everyone, then?'

'No. Most men would just say "poor little girl" and offer to look after me—in a brotherly fashion, of course.' Her tone was bitter.

Charlie reassured her on that point, and when he had lit a cigarette for her, she began: 'He had dark red hair, was terribly attractive and the most charming person in the world; but just like mercury. He was a born actor and could have been a great success on the stage, yet every time he got into a decent show he'd get drunk, break his contract or do some other fool thing. He adored me, and the year we lived together was something between heaven and hell. Gentleness and consideration could not have been more faithfully portrayed when we were together, but I never knew if he was coming home at night or if I'd have to fish him out of Vine Street with the "drunks" in the morning. I had a little money of my own in those days, but it soon went, and then, I suppose, life in a one-room flat began to lose its glamour for him. He still loved me the night he walked out—he told me so, and insisted that I should be better off without him in a note he left. He said he was a useless fool—no good to anyone—I'm sure he thought he was doing the right thing. It broke my heart. I don't know where he went or where he is now, but I'm certain that one day he'll come back, having done something to make me proud of him.'

Charlie was silent; at a loss for the words of sympathy he should pronounce. Realising this, Venetia broke the tension.

'Just look at all those medals. I wonder how he got them?'

Charlie looked up at the bald-headed little man easing his way past their table. He was in khaki and his broad chest was gay with three broad rows of ribbons. 'Perhaps he didn't get them,' was the sceptical reply.

'What d'you mean?'

'Oh, there are plenty of people in this war putting medal-ribbons up illegally. Plenty in officers' uniforms, too, who are not officers at all. An A.P.M. that I know

was telling me yesterday that last week they arrested seventeen civilians in officers' kit. I came upon an extraordinary case myself.'

Venetia leant forward. 'Tell me about it.'

'It was when we first landed in Norway. As soon as daylight broke the Germans began bombing us. Our men took shelter in the cellars of the few houses that that little town boasted. I was doing runner to my colonel. We went to the Town Hall. There, among others, was an English captain with a D.S.O., and M.C. and lots of other ribbons up. He didn't belong to any of the units that had made the landing, so my colonel questioned him. He said that he'd come ashore with an advance party, because he spoke Norwegian, but he didn't know where the rest of his men had got to. We knew nothing of any troops having arrived ahead of ourselves, but as we had lost several officers in the landing my colonel instructed him to take an advance party up the valley directly the bombing ceased, in order to contact any Norwegian troops, or police.'

Charlie paused and lit himself a cigarette, then he continued : 'We had him with us for five days. He was extremely efficient, and acting in the capacity of interpreter he saw to all the billeting in the villages we passed through. Then we came up against the Germans. This chap was still with the advance party and he got caught with a handful of men in a farmhouse. He managed to hold it for four hours against tremendous odds. It was a magnificent show; but by the time we reached him he was dying from a dozen bullet wounds. Then we learned from his own lips that he was just a small-time actor, named James Brandon, who'd been touring Norway in some show where he'd played the part of an English Captain. Anyhow . . .' Charlie stopped abruptly as Venetia Brandon fell in a faint across the table.

STORY XII

This is another of my early stories dating back to 1932. It's somewhat facetious ending was based on the idea that it might intrigue an editor who had a sense of humour. But either the editor or the story must have been lacking in something so the story came back to me.

When I wrote it I had not yet discovered that the story medium for me is the adventure yarn. I still had a vague but erroneous belief that, as I was incapable of writing good enough English to produce a serious novel, the only alternative was to write of crime and crooks. Hence the mention of 'The Limper' in the present story. This character does not actually appear but it was my intention to build him up as an officer of the 1914–18 war who had been wounded, bankrupted and embittered by it and so turned to crime to be avenged on society while at the same time making an easy if hazardous living.

However, in the past thirty years moral standards have changed greatly, both in real life and light fiction. Time was when no one thought the worse of Sherlock Holmes for stuffing himself full of cocaine, or of A. J. Raffles for abusing the hospitality of his acquaintances during cricket weeks in the country by burgling their houses. But juvenile crime has since increased to such an alarming degree that the encouragement of it by

making heroes of dope addicts and thieves is now rightly frowned upon by all responsible people.

As I count myself one, this embryo character will remain still-born. Anyhow, it would tax even my imagination to interest my female readers in him, as by now he's probably riddled with arthritis and must be getting on for seventy!

The Deserving Poor

I have always been fond of the Savoy. What can be nicer if you're lunching in London on a summer day, than a window table in the Restaurant? There is the sun on the plane trees in the gardens, the shipping in the river, and just the suggestion of a gentle breeze.

Most people I know prefer the Grill. Of course our most caustic theatrical critic is always there—Press barons, famous financiers, and movie stars, but these people's business is to see and to be seen—they scorn the Restaurant with its casual crowd. All the same, I prefer to eat my salmon and strawberries among the birthday parties, if I can get a table in the window.

It's extraordinary if you come to think of it—as you sit there, you are just half-way between two worlds. A hundred yards away through the walls of the Restaurant is that famous Grill Parisienne with its multi-millionaire patrons and Indian Princes. A hundred yards in the other direction is the sweep of the Embankment, where the starving dregs of London take their fitful sleep at night.

It was through that strange proximity that I nearly lost my life.

The idea was Fiona's—though of course the darling hadn't a notion what would come of it. We'd got en-

gaged the night before. You've seen Fiona, so you don't need much imagination to guess what I was feeling. I never, never thought that I'd pull it off, and when I did I was just delirious with joy. You know, too, how when you're absolutely gaga with happiness you want to rush round and buy up every single thing you see and give it to the girl—well, I was feeling just like that.

I kept my head though, because I thought I'd got a better plan. I sent her flowers, of course, lots of 'em, and the ring she could choose later, but I didn't buy her anything—I drew a hundred quid out of my bank and met her at the Savoy for lunch.

Old Busotti led us to a table in the window—I can see him now smiling all over his fat face and calling out, 'This way, Captan—this way.' He always calls me 'Captan', though Lord knows why; and there was Fiona, all cool and summery in a muslin frock and a big floppy hat—you know how glorious they look when they're dressed like that—and there was I, bringing up the rear as proud as any peacock, just longing to kiss the little tendrils of hair on her neck.

I ordered everything I could think of, but I hardly touched it when it came—love does take one like that. There seemed so many things to talk about, and I couldn't take my eyes off her lovely face. Anyhow, when coffee came I produced my little surprise—of course, it was the hundred quid.

All my life I've wanted to walk down Bond Street and just waste a hundred pounds. Spend it on any old thing that took my fancy for the moment, silly useless knick-knacks—kid myself for an hour or two that I was really rich. I'd thought of it so often and I was sure it would appeal to Fiona too. We'd stroll down Bond Street that afternoon and she should blow that hundred on any sort of foolishness she liked.

At first she was enchanted, told me she'd often

dreamed of doing that, and then—she started to have doubts.

She got all grave and worried about it—she's Scottish, you know, which doesn't mean *mean,* but *careful,* and she said that even if I could afford it there was something wrong and sinful about chucking money away like that.

'We're so terribly happy, Dick,' she said. 'Don't you think we ought to try and make other people happy too?'

I suppose that's been said dozens of times before by dozens of nice girls in similar circumstances, but somehow, with Fiona's lovely face all earnest and serious in front of me, I felt there was lots in what she said.

'The money's yours, dearest,' I agreed at once. 'You shall just spend it any way you like.'

She considered for a bit. 'Of course, there are thousands of charities that need money awfully badly, and the hospitals too, but it seems so tame to pass it on to them.' She gave me that lovely smile of hers. 'I suppose I'm very wrong, but I should like to have some fun out of it—see people surprised and happy, who really need it badly. D'you know what I mean?—not just a silly note from the secretary of some organisation, and then to be pestered for futher donations ever afterwards.'

I nodded, of course I understood, and then she had her brain-wave.

'I know, Dick,' she cried, 'let's dine here tonight and then walk along the Embankment afterwards. We'll give it away ten shillings at a time to those poor wretches who sit huddled on the benches—they really are the deserving poor.'

I didn't particularly relish the expedition. I always feel embarrassed about giving people money anyhow, though I suppose it's absurd, and I knew that I should feel rottenly uncomfortable wandering about in evening

dress, but Fiona was so obviously delighted with her plan that I agreed without a murmur.

We spent the afternoon sitting in the Park covertly holding hands under Fiona's sunshade. If I hadn't been completely potty I should have taken her for a run in the country in the car and kissed her properly, but as it was we just sat there looking at each other—looking hopelessly idiotic, as people do.

Anyhow, we tore ourselves apart to change for dinner and met again a little after eight at the Savoy. I don't remember much about the meal except that we did in two bottles of champagne between us, and that's another funny thing about love—I don't know if you've ever noticed it, but you simply can't get tight—not that one wants to in the least, but you just *can't*, however much you drink. Fiona couldn't have accounted for more than half a bottle, and when we left the table I was as sober as a judge.

We danced for a bit, and just after midnight Fiona got her coat. Still holding hands like a couple of children we went downstairs and out the back way on to the Embankment.

I had handed the money to her and when we came to the first bench she started to give it away. I don't think she enjoyed it as much as she thought she would when it came to handing the cash to those poor miserable pieces of humanity, with newspapers and bits of sacking tucked round their legs.

It was silly of me to be self-conscious, I know, because those ten-shilling notes must have been a godsend to them, but I was certain that she was feeling a bit bashful about it too.

They were a pretty ghastly lot, those outcasts—slatternly pinched-faced girls, toothless old harridans and little under-sized rats of men with sharp greedy eyes.

After we had done two benches some of them began to

follow us and whine for more, gabbling out all sorts of hard-luck stories. I had to threaten them with a policeman to drive them off. Others were pathetically grateful, calling down all sorts of embarrassing blessings on us. One woman became hysterical—in a high cracked voice she began to pray, asking God to strike her if she ever touched the drink again. Most of them fairly grabbed the money and hurried off with a scared sort of look as though they thought we might take it back again. The local coffee-stall began to do a roaring trade.

We had been at it for about twenty minutes, I suppose, but Fiona still had about fifteen pounds left. There were a few bedraggled figures on the benches, but they had had their ration—it was their own funeral if they chose to remain. Fiona looked round for futher derelicts to receive her charity. A couple were hunched together at the top of some steps leading down to the river.

'Gawd bless yer, Lidy,' exclaimed the man, as Fiona touched him on the shoulder and offered him a note. His companion, a scarecrow of a woman in a man's cloth cap, only snuffled loudly and snatched the money with a baleful look; they shuffled off in opposite directions.

'There are some more on the steps below,' I said, but Fiona had seen those shapeless bundles of rags already, and I followed her down the steps. Three more of them received their gift and hurried away with furtive looks.

To reach the last one we had to descend to the lowest stair, left slippery and uncovered by the tide. The night was still and fine, the water lapped gently at our feet, the sky signs came and went on the further shore. Seen from so low a level the river had an air of mystery which it lacks when looked on from above.

In the warm darkness of a summer's night the outlines of the cranes and barges took on curious shapes. Fiona's hand stole into mine, we lingered for a little

listening to the gurgle of the water and drinking in the peace and stillness of it all.

The launch came up to the steps so silently that we hardly noticed its approach. We stood there quite casually as the man in the bow hitched his boathook into a ring on the wall and drew her in. A small man jumped lightly from the stern—I saw him give Fiona a queer look as he landed on the steps, and I did not wonder—she was hardly the sort of figure one would expect to find on the river-side. He peered at me as though uncertain for a moment. We were standing in the shadow of the wall where the light from the lamp on the Embankment did not penetrate. Then he stepped quickly up to me.

'It's orl right, guv'nor,' he said in a husky whisper, 'the Limper's coshed the watchman an' they're gettin' art the bales—the safe shouldn't take much bustin'.'

I suppose I stood there looking foolish for a moment—then it dawned on me—this was a matter for the police—they were breaking in somewhere and the man had mistaken me for his boss.

He must have tumbled to it from my face that he had made a bloomer. Next second he had jammed an automatic against my waistcoat and his angry eyes were glaring into mine. I caught an unpleasant whiff of his whisky-laden breath as he thrust his face within a few inches of my own.

'If you 'ollers you're a dead'un,' he said thickly. 'I wonders if it could be you as soon as I sees the skirt, but there's no knowin' abart the 'abits of them West-End crooks.'

'Look here,' I said sharply. 'You've made a mistake—and if the gun goes off you'll swing for it.'

'*I* knows I've made a mistake orl right,' he grunted, cocking one eye up at the Embankment; 'but I'll blow

yer guts art if yer makes a sound—step in the boat and quick abart it—'op it, nah.'

What was there to do? The man was very obviously in earnest; a little extra pressure of his trigger-finger and there would be a searing pain—I should pitch into the river to be picked up somewhere below the bridges with a neat round hole drilled in my stomach, and what might these ruffians do to Fiona?

I heard her speaking. 'Go on, Dick—do as he says, please.' She was marvellously cool considering all things, but there was a little thrill of fear in her voice, and her last word was almost a prayer.

Any man loathes to be made to look a fool or a coward in front of a woman he's fond of, and I'd have tackled the brute like a shot if he hadn't had that gun. As it was, I was only too jolly grateful for her plea—that let me out of trying any idiotic heroics. I stepped down into the boat.

'Come on you,' said the man roughly to Fiona. I held out my hand and helped her in beside me. The chap gave a low whistle and the man in the bow pushed off.

In a few moments we were out in the middle of the Thames; the sounds of music came softly to us over the water. There were the brilliant lights of the Savoy Restaurant. People were sitting there in safety and comfort—we ourselves had been sitting there only an hour before surrounded by that gay and careless crowd; now we were out on the black waters of the Thames, bound for Lord knows where. The lights were receding even as I watched them.

A burly man came up out of the tiny cabin—he glanced at me and snarled: 'Ide that ruddy weskit, yer blinkin' fool. Yer'll 'ave us orl in chokey one night—workin' in them torf's clothes of yours.'

The smaller man cut in hurriedly: 'I bin an' made a gaff, Puggie. It ain't 'im.'

'Ain't 'im—strewth! You won't arf cop it when the Limper 'ears.'

' 'Ow could I 'elp it?' broke in the little man savagely. 'You ses a bloke in evenin' dress—'e was stannin' there—'ow was I ter know? It's you oo'll be for it—you've seed 'im before, I ain't.'

Puggie peered into my face; he shook his head. 'No—it ain't 'im.' He looked away puzzled and glanced at Fiona. 'An' a skirt too! Crikey, this ain't 'arf a mess. I ses as 'ow we was early; we've gone and mucked it proper this time, Nosey.'

The chug-chug-chug of a motor-launch came to us from ahead. 'Sit dahn, you,' whispered Nosey, producing an ugly-looking knife from somewhere about his person. He flashed it in front of me. 'An' if yer squeals yer gets this in yer ribs—savvy? It ain't so noisy, but just as 'andy as a gun.'

Fiona and I sat side by side on the narrow deck—the launch passed within twenty feet of us, but with Nosey only a yard away we didn't dare to shout for help.

'What the 'ell are we goin' to do wiv 'em?' asked Nosey, when the other boat was well astern.

'Run 'em dahn the river a bit an' land 'em on the Surrey side,' suggested Puggie. 'In them alleys it'll be 'alf an 'our afore they finds a cop.'

'An' not tell the Limper nought abart it?' added Nosey. 'Yuss, that's the ticket—'e'll be busy in the ware-'ouse. T'other bloke'll be on them steps time we've done—we'll pick 'im up on the way back—see?' Puggie disappeared below.

Nosey did see, and so did I. It seemed that we were in for nothing worse than a short trip on the Thames and the unpleasantness of being stranded in those unsavoury streets which lie on the south side of the water. I breathed again—but not for long.

As the launch began to slip down river Puggie thrust

his large head out of the cabin again. 'I reckon we'd better put 'em both to sleep, chum. They might come lucky and stumble on a cop right away—the Limper 'ud raise 'ell if 'e was rousted on the job—an' yer never knows.'

Nosey laughed, a short unpleasant laugh. 'Trus' me, Puggie; I'll cosh 'em orl right. I ain't takin' no ruddy chances.'

So we were to be hit over the head before we were landed—that was a jolly idea. The water came hot in my mouth as I thought of Fiona. One thing was certain. I was not going to see her knocked on her lovely head while I had a kick left in me—knives or no knives. With sudden pleasure I fondled the iron marlinspike with which my hand had come in contact a few minutes earlier when we had been made to sit down on the deck.

It was Nosey who brought the business to a head; he had a sudden bright idea. 'Wonder if the skirt's got any sparklers?' he said in his husky voice.

Puggie laughed. 'You've got yer 'ead screwed on orl right, an' that's the trufe. Let's see what the lidy's got ter pay 'er passige wiv on this 'ere river trip.' He started towards Fiona with an outstretched hand. I could feel her press against me as she shrank back.

I wasted no time in argument, but sprang to my feet. Nosey, I knew, had got a gun, so I let him have it first. As his knife dashed, I brought the iron spike down with all my force. It missed his head but got him on the wrist. His knife tumbled on the deck and he gave a yelp of pain. Puggie was on me before I had another chance. I lashed out with my left, hoping to get him in the face, but he closed with me and we swayed there, wrestling on the deck . . .

'Yell—Fiona—yell!' I gasped. 'Yell for all you're worth,' and she started to shout for help. Next instant

my foot slipped and, clasped in each others arms, Puggie and I went over the side.

Lord, how cold the water was—cold as ice—and we went down—down—down. I thought we should never stop. I struggled like mad, but I couldn't get free of Puggie; he hung on to me like death. The awful thought came to me that when we did come up we might have been swept under some barges, and that would be the end of us both. Somehow I managed to kick myself free. My lungs were bursting, and I thought my head was going to split, but at last I hit the surface and gulped in the air.

There was a terrible to-do going on, Fiona was marvellous—you could have heard her shrieks down at Tower Bridge. She had the marks for weeks where that little brute Nosey tried to choke her with his left hand, but she simply wouldn't stop.

Three police launches had come on the scene—I could see Fiona struggling in the beam of their searchlights, and I struck out like mad to get to her, but the river police were first.

It seems they were out to get the Limper's gang that night; they had been pretty puzzled when they saw Fiona and I taken off the steps, but they pinched the chap I had been mistaken for, when he turned up five minutes later, and followed us downstream.

Puggie was unlucky—he came to the sticky end that I'd been so frightened of—got trapped under a barge. They pinched the other fellows on the launch and in the warehouse too—all except the Limper; he got safely away.

I often think of that night when I look out over the Embankment from my favourite table in the window of the Restaurant at the Savoy—that is, when I have the money to go there.

'Kind Editor—Please Remit.'

STORY XIII

Very occasionally when I am asked to review a book, if I am not at the time writing a book myself and the subject interests me, I agree to do so. The following is a review of Dr. Alfred Métraux's book, *Voodoo in Haiti,* translated by Hugo Charteris and published by André Deutch. It was written for *John O'London's* and I feel that no excuse is needed for reprinting it here because about half the contents of this volume concerns the occult and I feel that it may interest many readers.

Voodoo

Voodoo! What mental pictures this word conjures up; a hot, sultry night in a palm-fringed Caribbean island, the insistent muffled beat of drums, the stamping of scores of naked black feet in wild dances, the chanting invocations in the ancient tongues of darkest Africa, negroes and negresses rolling on the floor and frothing at the mouth while possessed by their familiar spirits, cures, curses and love charms being dispensed by witch-doctors and mystic rites culminating in blood scarifices.

All this and much more is given us by Doctor Mét-

raux in his book (400 pages of close print), for this is a serious study of the subject.

His achievement is the more remarkable in that, unlike most other religions, Voodoo has no established doctrine or formal liturgy; it is a fantastic hotchpotch of rituals and superstitions from which each *hungan,* as the master of his congregation, is free to choose. Even the personalities and attributes of the gods and goddesses that make up the Voodoo pantheon are inextricably confused, and their number is legion.

On visiting a *humfo,* the uninformed traveller would be surprised to see, among the strange collection of junk that reposes on Voodoo altars, gaudy pictures of the Christian Saints. But the mystery becomes clear when it is realised that, for example, St. Patrick owes his popularity to the fact that he is said to have been granted special power over snakes.

Illogically, too, as it would appear, great numbers of devotees to Voodoo are also practising Catholics. This was for long condoned by many priests of the Roman Church, no doubt in the belief that they could gradually wean the Haitians from their superstitions; but the great majority have never paid more than lip-service to Christianity and in recent years the Christian churches have combined in an endeavour to stamp out Voodoo.

How difficult that task will prove can be judged from the hold that the *hungans* have on the still almost totally illiterate population and particularly on the *hunsi,* as their initiated disciples are termed. On the altars among the offerings of fruit, bottles of rum and tawdry kickshaws, can always be seen a number of china pots. Each contains the pubic and armpit hair and nail-parings of a *hunsi.* They represent his soul, which he has surrendered to the *hungan* in order that his head may be empty for the reception of whichever *loa* chooses to utter pronouncements through him during fits of pos-

session. And people who believe that they have pawned their souls in return for material benefits do not lightly rebel against their priests.

Many devotees of Voodoo marry *loa,* although also married to a human being. This entails giving one or more nights a week to the familiar spirit and the Voodoo gods are jealous gods. Woe betide the man who does not drive his wife out into the street with abuse on the nights when her place is to be taken in his bed by what students of the occult would term a succubus. The special protection he had gained by his spirit marriage is withdrawn, he falls ill, suffers losses and may even die. In this connection it is to be regretted that Doctor Métraux tells us little about the widespread cult of the goddess Erzulie-Freda—the insatiable Venus of Voodoo—for which I would refer readers to Zora Huston's less scholarly but most interesting book, *Voodoo Gods.*

The rise and development of Voodoo is easily explained by the history of Haiti. In the eighteenth century, as Saint Domingue, it was by far the richest of the French colonies and at the time of the Revolution populated by 30,000 whites, 40,000 mulattos and half a million blacks. The negroes had been imported as slaves mainly from Dahomey and Guinea. They were underfed and worked unmercifully, so that the average life of a slave in the plantations was no more than ten years. With them they had brought the barbarous cults they had practised in the African jungle. In endeavouring to appease their gods lay their only possible hope of a better future, and in gathering to dance, sing and satisfy their sexual urges at the midnight Voodoo ceremonies, lay their only form of relaxation.

In their latter aspect it would not be inapt to compare them to the Witches' Sabbats, which for many centuries filled the role of weekly 'night clubs' for the oppressed peasantry of Europe; although, in some of the grimmer

particulars, such as tearing off the heads of live chickens and drinking the blood of sacrificed pigs, they more nearly resembled the secret abominations practised by the Mau Mau.

As was the case in the southern United States, and much of Africa itself, these heathen rites and beliefs would in time normally have been abandoned through the work of Christian missionaries; but in Haiti the French Revolution led to the white population and Catholic priests being either massacred or driven out. Thus for many decades Voodoo became the sole religion of the island and developed unchecked.

That the vast majority of Haitians, both in towns and in the countryside, still put their faith in Voodoo there can be little doubt, and probably the reason for this is that their standard of living is still appallingly low. There are 250 people to the square mile—the densest population in the Western Hemisphere—and the worn-out soil of their small-holdings is incapable of supporting them much above starvation level. In consequence, their only escape from their crushing anxieties remain the *humfos* in which they can partake in physical and spiritual excitements.

Yet it would be rash to suggest that these depraved practices are nothing but mumbo-jumbo, for the more primitive people are, the easier it is for them to contact occult forces. In any case, Doctor Métraux has given us a classic on this fascinating subject and Mr. Charteris' excellent translation makes it most enjoyable reading.

STORY XIV

Here is a freak. It was born of going to a cocktail party to which I was not invited.

In the early months of the war Ursula Bloom, that gifted novelist and indefatigable doer of good works, inveigled me on several occasions to assist her at charity shows, etc.; to sell war savings certificates.

We had spent the afternoon at Harrods, easing money out of people for aircraft and guns, after which Ursula took me back to her flat for a throat-saving drink. Half an hour later it transpired that she and her husband were due at a cocktail party at the Ritz. I had an hour to fill and they suggested that I should go with them. Gate-crashing is not a favourite pastime of mine but Ursula told me that the party was being given by a firm which dealt in beauty preparations (the name of which I am ashamed to say I have forgotten) and that as it was being given for advertising purposes they would be pleased to see anyone who was even remotely connected with the Press. And so, indeed, it proved to be.

At the party Ursula introduced me to Miss Jennifer Mattingly, Editor of *Woman's Own*. It seemed that she had read some of my books and now she asked me to do a short story for her paper. I protested that love stories for a woman's magazine were not really my line of country but she was so enthusiastic about the idea and

so insistent that I could provide her with what she wanted that I had not the heart to refuse.

Personally, I think it was extremely sporting of Miss Mattingly to have published this effort because, when it was completed, I was more than ever convinced that straight love stories should be left to such as Ursula Bloom, who have a real genius for them. I suggest that my male readers skip this story and hope that those women who read it will not feel that I let Miss Mattingly down too badly.

Love Trap

'Grayley, I want an explanation.' Red-faced, grey-haired Colonel Jackson drummed his fingers irritably on his desk and stared coldly at the tall, lean-jawed young man in front of him. 'What the devil d'you mean by bringing an A.T.S. private or volunteer—I forget what they call these girls—into the Mess last night?'

A bewildered expression came into the newly joined subaltern's brown eyes. 'But, sir, she's an old friend; we come from the same part of the country.'

'I can't help that. After the concert Major Walters brought in two of her own officers and they both complained about her being there. Naturally, I couldn't say anything about it at the time, but it was most embarrassing. It's against the regulations for privates of either sex to receive hospitality in an officer's mess. If this young woman is a friend of yours you must confine your meetings to places outside the camp.'

'How can we, sir? We're miles from anywhere.'

'Your petrol ration should be enough for you to drive her into Crowton or Blatwich once or twice a week.'

'Unfortunately, sir, I smashed the front anxle of my car on Thursday so it will be in dock for some time.'

'In that case you'll have to wait for your respective leaves. It's against the interests of discipline that you should be seen about with an A.T.S. private by your own men; what's more, it's bad for the girl's reputation with the people of her own unit.'

Peter Grayley hesitated. He was very young and much more frightened of his irascible Colonel, who seemed to him to combine the powers of his ex-headmaster and a Victorian father out of a book, than he would have been of a German. But, on the other hand, he was very much in love and he intensely resented the implied slur on his adored Sheila's reputation. Resolving to risk the consequences he took his courage in both hands and blurted out:

'Thank you, sir. Her reputation is perfectly safe, as we—we mean to get married.'

The Colonel rose slowly to his feet and his face went an even deeper shade of red. 'Marry? Why, you must be out of your senses! How old are you? Twenty, twenty-one? Anyway, far too young to think of such a thing. If this were peace-time you would have to ask my consent and I should have no hesitation in refusing it. As the country is at war my authority is temporarily curtailed; but if you persist in this ridiculous idea I shall show my strongest disapproval. For the present I forbid you to see this young woman in the camp or its neighbourhood. That's all, Grayley—and don't let me have to send for you on this matter again.'

Very pale and white-lipped, Peter saluted and left the room.

It was a few minutes before seven when Peter arrived at the thick coppice of firs where, on the previous night, he had arranged to meet Sheila. The trees were a landmark on the crest of the rolling down and stood, a little

off the road, about half-way between the hutments that housed his battalion and the A.T.S. camp. On the road, groups of men and girls, all khaki-clad, were passing. He fidgeted uneasily as he waited. There was an hour or more yet to go before sunset and when Sheila turned up they might be seen together. What would happen then?

And what was he going to tell her? How could they get married in the face of his Colonel's determined opposition? That would mean a black mark against him right at the beginning of his career; and it was not even as though he had just joined up for the duration. He was a Regular and his commanding officer could make things very difficult for him, if he chose. Besides, it wouldn't be fair to Sheila to begin their married life under a cloud of ill will.

He sighed, thinking of those halcyon days before the war when he had gone with Sheila and her mother to the South of France for a holiday. How wonderful it had all been! The hot sun glancing off the translucent blue sea with a background of silver sand and olive-green hills. The golden moon at night crowning a star-flecked sky—dancing, bathing, laughing—all with Sheila.

He had loved her for a long time but he had had to wait until he was twenty-one before he could ask her to marry him. His parents were very fond of Sheila and had been friends with her mother for years; but they had felt that he was too young to be thinking of matrimony. When he reached his coming-of-age he had come into his own money and so had been free to do what he liked. Never would he forget the day that Sheila had accepted him. They had raced out to a rocky headland and, being a powerful swimmer, he had reached it first. He had caught hold of her hand to help her through the seaweed that swayed like a mermaid's hair below

the water. Then she had looked up at him, her great blue eyes laughing. He had pulled her suddenly into his arms and buried his face in her wet, curling hair.

'Oh, my darling, I love you so much!' He remembered the very words that had stumbled from his tongue. 'I want us to be together always. Will you—will you . . . ?'

She had not said a word but had put her mouth up to be kissed.

Sheila's mother was very kind but she had insisted on a long engagement owing to their youth, and they were content to wait, sure of their love for each other. Then war had come. No one seemed to know what was going to happen next. People were rushing off to get married everywhere. Caught in the whirlpool, they saw no reason to delay their own marriage any longer.

Their families put no further obstacles in their way—in fact, everything had been marvellous till this morning. He had meant to choose his time carefully before telling his Colonel, so as to catch him in a good mood. Instead, he had just blurted it out like a fool, and now the damage was done. Peter cursed as a wave of melancholia swept over him. Then he saw Sheila.

Sheila Beaufort was really beautiful. Just nineteen, the first bloom of youth lay fresh upon her cheeks and when her mobile lips parted in a smile the lights in her wide, deep blue eyes would seem to dance with merriment. Bright chestnut curls peeped demurely from under her cap and the unbecoming khaki uniform sat easily upon her slender figure.

'Hullo, darling,' she laughed up at him as he imprisoned both her hands in his. 'You look very glum! Anything wrong?'

'Everything. Look here, darling, I've got to talk to you; it's serious.'

'Well, it looks as though it's going to rain, so let's walk down to the village.'

'I daren't; we might be seen.'

Sheila raised one delicately curved eyebrow. 'What on earth does that matter?'

'But it does—*now*,' Peter cried desperately, and grabbing her arm he drew her deeper in among the trees before he told her everything that had passed between himself and his colonel that morning.

'The old beast!' she exclaimed indignantly as he finished. 'But don't worry; I'll show him!'

'How do you propose to do *that*, darling?' Peter inquired in a dubious tone.

'I'll resign from the A.T.S.'

'They might not let you.'

'Oh, I'll think of a way; I'm sure I could find some other war work which wouldn't necessitate wearing uniform.'

'Maybe. But that won't make any difference about our getting married.'

For an instant the girl's mouth trembled, then throwing back her head she said resolutely: 'I know; but at any rate we'd be able to see each other.'

Peter put his arms round her and kissed her tenderly. For a few moments they clung together forgetful of the harsh decree which menaced their happiness, but a heavy drop of rain splashing on Sheila's upturned face made her draw away with an exclamation of annoyance.

It was only ten days since Peter had been posted to his battalion. For the first few evenings they had had his car, but, five nights before, he had crashed it in the black-out. Since, they had met each evening before and after Mess for walks over the empty rolling downs and on the one occasion that it had rained they had sat in the crowded parlour of the local inn; the only non-military place in which they could be together for miles around.

Now, they were barred from being seen together in the area of the camp and on a wet night it was certain

that the inn parlour would be packed with officers. Yet, until Peter's arrival at the camp, they had hardly seen each other for months, because only twice since the war had their leaves coincided. At any time he might be sent overseas, so every hour was precious. It was damnable, intolerable, that they should be robbed of even a single evening in each other's company.

The rain was sheeting down now and a bitter wind had begun to blow. Great drops were pattering on to them through the scant cover of the fir trees. Cold and wet, they huddled together preoccupied with their worries, the cruel injustice of a hard world being uppermost in their minds. Sheila's teeth had begun to chatter as she said: 'We must go, darling; we'll get soaked to the skin if we stay here.'

'But tonight?' he protested. 'I must see you again after Mess. We've got night ops. for the next three days and the only time we *can* meet now is after dark.'

'I know. But where can we go? The pub's out of bounds for us now, and there's nowhere else.'

'I've got it,' Peter said with sudden resolution. 'Toby Fanshaw, my stable companion, is on leave, so I've got my room to myself. You haven't got to be in till ten. I'll be waiting for you there at half past eight, directly I get out of Mess. Do come, angel. We'll snatch an hour together. Please say you will. *Please!*'

Sheila's blue eyes widened. 'I can't, darling! There'd be the most frightful row if we were caught. You might even be court-martialled, and I should be summarily dismissed with ignominy.'

'No one will see you in the black-out,' Peter insisted optimistically, 'and you won't have to pass the guard if you come through the back of our lines. Listen: I'll tell you what to do.'

He paused to fumble in his pocket and, pulling out a long, buff official envelope with his name typed on it,

pressed it into her hand. 'My room is the second from this end in the third block of huts behind the officers' Mess. The only place where you might run into anybody and be questioned is in the passage between the door of the block and the door of my room, but that's not likely as the officers will be in the Mess. Still, just in case you do, show them this envelope and ask them which is my room. They'll think you're on late duty and have been sent to leave an official message for me. I'll be inside waiting for you.'

Sheila lifted her head and grinned mischievously into his serious brown eyes. 'I can see both of us ending up in the Tower. But I'm game—on one condition. If we're found out I shall say I walked into the wrong room by mistake and was asking you for directions.'

'We won't be found out,' Peter replied, returning her grin. 'Now don't forget what I've told you. At half past eight we'll shut the door on this filthy world for an hour, anyway, darling.'

Again they clung together, while the drips from the branches drummed upon them and the wind tore through the trees like a stampede of wild horses. The storm had brought nightfall early and it was dark when they parted to hurry the short distance back to their respective camps.

Over her evening meal Sheila was unusually silent and the noisy chatter of her messmates provided only a background for her anxious thoughts. With half her mind she was longing for her hour with Peter—but the other half told her that she had been a weak little fool to agree to his suggestion. There would be such a frightful rumpus if anything went wrong. Not that she cared about her own reputation, but she would never forgive herself if he got into trouble on her account.

As soon as she could get away, she left the dining-room, and collected her macintosh from the hut which

she shared with half a dozen other girls. As she opened the door she walked right into the arms of her Section Leader—tall, parchment-faced Miss Wentworth.

The Section Leader had been one of the two A.T.S. officers who had seen Sheila in Peter's Mess the previous night. 'Hello, Beaufort!' she exclaimed suspiciously. 'Where are you off to?'

Sheila muttered something about a walk.

'What, in this downpour?' Miss Wentworth's tone was acid, but she had no authority to stop the girls going out in the rain if they wished to, so she said no more, and Sheila hurried away into the darkness.

The driving rain stung her face and trickled down the back of her neck as she stumbled blindly forward up the muddy road, clinging to her cap for dear life. Presently the huts of Peter's camp loomed up in front of her. Leaving the road, she struck across the wet grass in a half circle to come round behind them. Protecting her eyes with her hand, she first counted them, then walked up to the third behind the Mess. The door was blown open the moment she pressed the latch and she found herself in the dimly lit corridor. No one was in sight.

With a sigh of relief she went quickly forward till she reached the second door from the end, and stepped cautiously inside. The room was in semi-darkness, lit only by the chinks of light from a glowing iron stove. Peter was not there; he must still be in the Mess. Taking off her macintosh, she folded it neatly and laid it over the back of a chair, then put her sodden cap on top of it. She noticed that there was only one camp bed in the room, but took it that Toby Fanshaw's had been packed up while he was on leave. Kneeling down in front of the stove, she ran her fingers through her bright chestnut curls.

The clock ticked irritably on a wooden shelf and she

began to fidget restlessly. Peter should have arrived by now. How stupid she had been to follow the foolish impulse that had made her agree to his crazy idea. She realised that no one could stop him from coming to his own room, but through these thin partitions someone might hear them talking and learn from her voice that he had a girl with him; or perhaps she would be seen leaving. . . .

Why didn't he come? Perhaps he had slipped on the wet road and hurt himself—twisted an ankle. Supposing he was lying out there helpless in the darkness, unable to move out of the way of any oncoming car. . . . She shook herself for allowing her thoughts to run on in such a fashion, but as the minutes went slowly by and Peter still failed to arrive she became really anxious.

What was she to do? She couldn't go back to her own quarters without knowing whether he was safe. Suddenly she heard the sound of two men talking outside the door. Startled out of her anxiety, she grabbed her hat and mac, and looked frantically round for a place in which to hide in case either of the strangers should decide to come in. In the far corner of the room hung a long curtain, almost reaching the ground. Underneath it Sheila could see several pairs of shoes, and she guessed that it must be a makeshift cupboard. She had just concealed herself behind it when the door opened.

'I'm going to have a wash and brush-up,' she heard a gruff voice say, 'Hello! that damn servant of mine has left the light on again. Well, see you in the Mess, Major.'

'Right you are, sir,' the other man replied. The door slammed and the echo of his footsteps retreated down the passage.

Sheila bit her lip and clenched her hands together. She had obviously made an awful mistake and got into the wrong room. Her heart began to beat against her ribs, so loudly that she felt certain that the man whose

hut she had invaded would hear it. Pressing herself back against the hanging coats, she hardly dared to breathe. Her thoughts were tumultuous. What if he should want to change his shoes? He would not be able to help seeing her feet—he might, anyway; the curtain didn't quite reach the floor. Perhaps he would smell the scent of her powder and get suspicious. Oh, how she wished she had never come! If she were found, the most awful things might happen to Peter. He came from a family whose sons had been soldiers for generations; his parents would never forgive either of them if he were disgraced. She could hear the splash of water poured into the wash-basin and the squelching of soapy hands rubbing together; then the chair scraped against the wooden boards, and the man began to mutter irritably to himself, 'Why can't Hopkins dry things properly instead of letting them drip and make such a confounded mess all over the floor?'

Sheila closed her eyes. What if he should guess that someone else's things had been the cause of the little puddle of water at which he was grumbling? She felt sorry for Hopkins and hoped that he would not suffer too much because of her carelessness. Her feet seemed to be growing larger and larger, so that they stuck out right in front of all the other shoes and her macintosh was beginning to weigh heavily on her arm. She realised she couldn't bear the strain much longer. She wanted to laugh—to cry—to do anything, rather than stifle behind the curtain. Her nose began to tickle. She pressed her finger against it as hard as she could, but it was no use. Her violent sneeze vibrated through the room.

A wet hand wrenched the curtain aside and Sheila found herself facing an elderly, grey-haired man. He was in his shirt-sleeves and even in her panic she noticed that his braces dangled down behind him like an absurd tail. But his face terrified her. For a second rage seemed

to choke him, then, apparently recovering his voice, he rapped out:

'Well, young woman, who the devil are you? What d'you think *you're* doing here? Come on, speak up!'

Sheila stared dumbly at him in horrified dismay as, without waiting for an answer, he peered into her face and went on: 'Why, I remember you; you're the girl young Grayley brought into the Mess last night.' His voice became harsh as his indignation grew. 'I had him on the mat about it this morning. And *now* I know what you're doing here. You thought this was his room, didn't you? *Didn't* you?'

'No,' Sheila whispered, almost tongue-tied with distress at the sudden realisation that, of all people, she was face to face with Peter's colonel.

'Well, you're right—it isn't; but you didn't go far wrong. I'll have him court-martialled for this.'

'Oh, no, no, please don't do that. He doesn't know I'm here,' Sheila cried desperately. 'Look—look, this is what I was told to give him.' She took the envelope out of her pocket and showed it to the Colonel, praying that he would not ask her to open it; but her prayer went unanswered.

Ripping open the flap, which had scarcely any gum left on it, he pulled out the flimsy. It was a twelve-day-old order for Peter to report at the camp. With a snort of disgust he screwed it up into a ball and threw it into the wastepaper basket. 'Very clever,' he said bitingly. 'Quite a nice little plan you worked up together, didn't you?'

'No,' Sheila insisted. 'I've told you—Peter doesn't know anything about it. You can report me and have me dismissed with ignominy—anything—anything—only please don't blame P-Peter.' She began to sob, but her nerve had gone and her sobs changed to titters, then semi-hysterical laughter.

'Now, now, stop that.' Her inquisitor coughed with embarrassment and, pulling her forward, gave her a not unfriendly slap on the back.

At that moment there came a loud knock on the door.

The slap choked Sheila's laughter, but, still blinded by tears, she stumbled and fell into the Colonel's arms.

'Come, now, come,' he pleaded. 'Do please pull yourself together.' As he spoke, the knocking came again and he threw an apprehensive glance over his shoulder. Sheila was still weeping on his chest when an instant later the door was flung open, disclosing two A.T.S. officers in its entrance.

Sheila's sobs had ceased. Her face was turned away and, if she had planned it, her pose, locked in the Colonel's embrace, could not have been more suggestive. In the silence that followed, a pin falling would have sounded like a tin can. She felt as if she was paralysed, unable to remove herself from the Colonel's embrace, while he stared dumbfounded at the two intruders as though he could not believe his eyes. The plump, elder woman spoke. Her tone was quiet and she sounded distressed rather than angry.

'Beaufort, I must have an explanation of your—er—extraordinary conduct.'

As the A.T.S. Commandant hesitated, the Colonel saw Miss Wentworth glance first at himself and then significantly at her companion. A sarcastic accusation could not have made her meaning clearer to him. He went almost purple. Grabbing up his tunic, he wriggled hurriedly into it and, as an afterthought, thrust the ends of his braces into his trousers pocket.

'Now, look here, madam,' he spluttered, 'the whole matter is quite easily explained. This young woman . . .' He shot a swift glance at Sheila. She had brushed away her tears while her back was still turned to the door.

In that second a new emotion surged up in the

Colonel's breast. She was, he realised, very young and a devilish pretty little thing, while the other two women were elderly and plain. All his male instincts rallied to her support. Yet how the hell could he get himself out of this mess and get her out as well?

'Well, Colonel?' the A.T.S. Commandant said.

'This young woman . . .' he began again, uncertainly; but Sheila had caught the sudden gleam of pity in his eye and she leapt into the breach.

'Colonel Jackson is an old friend of my father, General Beaufort,' she lied, without the faintest idea of what she was going to say next.

Like a drowning man the Colonel clutched at the proffered straw. 'That's right,' he cried, 'and . . .'

'And I had to get the Colonel's consent to my marriage with Peter Grayley,' she hurried on. 'I know it was very wrong, but as he's an old friend, and I didn't like to go into the Mess, I decided to beard him in his hut.'

The Colonel suppressed an exclamation, but, realising how neatly she had trapped him, forced a smile. 'Yes. And as I've been out all day she caught me having a wash and brush-up. That's the whole thing in a nutshell.'

The fat A.T.S. Commandant was smiling with relief, but the cadaverous Miss Wentworth said acidly: 'That hardly explains why we found Beaufort in your arms.'

'I—I was crying on his shoulder—crying with relief,' Sheila murmured.

'Colonel Jackson gave his consent to your marriage, then?'

The Colonel grunted and began to go red again, but suddenly he caught sight of a figure in the corridor which had moved up behind the two women, and, recognising Peter, called out: 'What are you doing hanging about out there, Grayley?'

If Peter had spoken the truth he would have said

that, having become anxious when Sheila had failed to arrive in his room by a quarter to nine, he had guessed that in the darkness she must have entered the wrong block of huts, and that after a frantic hunt he had arrived outside the Colonel's door just behind the A.T.S. officers.

Having heard the whole conversation, he felt that it was now—or never. He was very pale, but nerving himself for the audacious effort, he stepped smartly into the room and said : 'I knew Sheila would win you over, sir, so I've just ordered some champagne to be put on the ice. Shall I tell the orderly to bring it here?'

The Colonel cocked an eye at the A.T.S. Commandant. That motherly lady was smiling now and her smile broadened as he said : 'Well, I like young officers to show initiative and they say regulations are made to be broken—sometimes. I think we'd better ask *all* the ladies into the Mess.'

STORY XV

But for one casual mention of the Maginot Line any of my older readers might easily take it for granted that this story has as its scene the area behind the battle-front in France during the First World War. Later in the war it became fascinating and horrifying to look back three years and attempt to recapture the memory of the smug self-confidence with which so many of our national leaders addressed us in the winter of 1939–40.

Norway, Dunkirk, the treachery of France, the Blitz, Greece, Pearl Harbour, Singapore and Tobruk all lay in a mercifully veiled future. Finland had just taken up arms against Russia and quite a number of our more irresponsible politicians were urging us to go to war with Russia too. One did not need to be a very advanced student of international affairs to realise that Stalin was taking a God-sent opportunity, while Germany had her hands full elsewhere, to bolt the North-Western door to his country against future German aggression; yet the clamour was such that we very nearly added two hundred million Russians and one-fifth of the world's natural resources to Hitler's assets in this, his desperate attempt to break and destroy for ever the Anglo-Saxon conception of a free civilisation.

On second thoughts, is one being a little unfair to those bellicose misleaders of public opinion when one remembers that in a democracy such men are rarely

educated for the job which they attempt to do? *Their* irresponsibility pales beside that of some of the professionals—old hands at the game—to whom we had entrusted the actual waging of any future war—when one recalls that at this time the British Army had not in its possession one single sub-machine gun, or one parachute troop and that Lord Gort's original Expeditionary Force did not even include an armoured division.

Small wonder then that, although we had been at war with Germany for some six months, the back areas in France in early 1940 could be reasonably portrayed as differing little from what one had known in 1917–1918. But this is not a war story. Neils Orsen went to France to lay a Ghost.

The Case of the Haunted Château

'France!' Bruce Hemmingway raised his eyebrows and looked inquiringly across the table at his curious little host. 'Would I like to go on a visit to the front? I'll say I would; but as an American and a neutral, I'd never get a pass.'

Neils Orsen smiled and scrutinised one of his long slender hands. 'I'm a neutral, too, but I've been invited to go over there to investigate a little matter. It won't actually be the Maginot Line, but it's in the *Zone des Armeés* and I have permission to take an assistant, so I'm sure a pass for you could be arranged.'

'My dear Neils, I'd love to go,' the young international lawyer declared with rising excitement. 'Tell me all about it.'

'Two days ago General Hayes, who is an old friend of mine, came to see me,' Orsen began, his cool voice only slightly tinged with a Swedish accent. 'He has al-

ways been interested in psychical research and is now on leave from France. It seems that an old château which had been taken over by the British had to be abandoned as a billet because it is so badly haunted that even the officers refuse to stay in it.'

The big American lit a cigarette. 'Then it must be the grandfather of all hauntings. What form does it take?'

'As usual, it does not affect everyone, but at least one or two out of each group of men that has been stationed there have felt its influence, and the manifestations always occur at night. The wretched victim is apparently always taken by surprise, lets out a piercing yell, and throws some sort of fit. Afterwards they state that they heard nothing, saw nothing, but were stabbed through the hands or feet and paralysed, rooted to the spot, transfixed by an agonising pain which racked their whole bodies. The curious thing is that these attacks have taken place in nearly every room in the house. However, the worst cases have occurred in the one and only bathroom and it was there, about ten days ago, that one victim died—presumably as the result of a heart attack. It was that which finally decided the authorities to evacuate the château.'

'How long has the haunting been going on?'

The Swede blinked his large pale-blue eyes, so curiously like those of his Siamese cat, Pāst. 'I'm not sure. You see, the château was empty and in a very dilapidated condition when the Army took over. I gather that it was untenanted for some considerable time before war started.'

'Was your friend able to find out the history of the place from the villagers?'

'Yes, and a most unpleasant story it is. But they seemed vague as to when the haunting began.'

'What was the story?'

'Before the French Revolution the château was owned by a really bad example of the French aristocracy of that time. Cruel, avaricious, and inordinately proud, the Vicomte de Cheterau treated his serfs worse than animals, beating, imprisoning, and torturing them at his pleasure. One day he devised the sadistic idea of adding yet another thong to his whip by placing a local tax on nails. As you know, it's practically impossible to build anything without them, so the poorest peasants had to revert to the ancient, laborious practice of carving their own from the odd pieces of wood they could gather from the hedge-rows.'

'He must have been a swine.'

'Perhaps,' Neils agreed. 'But no man, however cruel, deserved such a frightful death.'

'How did he die?'

Orsen stared at his reflection in the polished table. 'One dark night, soon after the Revolution broke loose, his serfs crept into the château and pulled him out of bed. They dragged him to his business room and there they crucified him with their wooden nails. It took him three days to die; and they came each night to mock him in his agony with tantalising jars of water and bowls of food.'

Bruce shuddered. 'Horrible—did anyone ever live in the château again?'

'I believe so; but no tenant has ever stayed for long in recent years. Of course, the villagers won't go near it. They are convinced that it's haunted, as the story of the Vicomte de Cheterau has been handed down from father to son for generations.'

Hemmingway leaned forward. 'Do you think these stabs the victims feel in their hands and feet are some sort of psychic repetition of the pains the Vicomte felt when the mob drove their wooden nails through his palms and insteps?'

'Quite possibly,' replied Orsen slowly. 'There are many well-authenticated cases of monks and nuns who have developed stigmata from too intensive a contemplation of the agony suffered by Jesus Christ at His crucifixion.'

'It sounds a pretty tough proposition, then. When do we leave?'

'The day after tomorrow.' Neils gently stroked the back of his Siamese cat and his big pale eyes were glowing. 'I may be able to show you a real Saati manifestation this time, Bruce; but we must take nothing for granted. You can leave all arrangements to me.'

. . . . .

A watery sun was shining through the avenue of lime trees, throwing chequered patterns on the wet gravel below, as the two friends were driven towards the château by a cheerful young captain into whose charge they had been given at the local H.Q.

'General Hayes told me about you, Mr. Orsen,' he was saying. 'I find it difficult to believe in spooks myself, but there's certainly something devilish going on in the old place, and we shall be jolly grateful if you can find it for us. Those cottages in the village are damned uncomfortable.'

Neils leaned forwards to peer through the window at the rearing pile of grey stone just ahead of them, and the captain added : 'Gloomy sort of place, isn't it?'

As Bruce stepped out of the car he thoroughly agreed. The silence was eerie, broken only by a monotonous sound of water dripping from the rain-sodden trees that surrounded the château and almost shut out the sky. A dank, musty smell greeted them as they entered; a rat scurried away into the dark shadows of the hall.

'Well, Neils, old man,' he said with a wry grin. 'This place certainly seems to have the right atmosphere.'

The little Swede did not appear to hear him. He was

standing quite still, his large head thrown back and his eyes closed as if he were listening. Their guide gave an embarrassed cough. Unlike Bruce, he was not accustomed to Orsen's peculiarities, and he felt that ghost-hunting was at the best an unhealthy form of amusement.

'Shall we get a move on?' he asked abruptly. 'I mean, if you want me to show you round; it's quite a big place, and the light will be gone in less than an hour.'

Neils blinked, then fluttered one slender hand apologetically. 'Forgive me; please lead the way.'

They mounted the twisting stairs and as they passed the windows the evening light threw their shadows, elongated and grotesque, against the damp-sodden walls; no one spoke and the emptiness seemed to close in on them like a fog. As they wandered from room to room Neils followed behind the other two men humming a quiet old-fashioned tune to himself.

After an hour they made their way back to the hall and as they walked out towards the car their guide turned towards Orsen. 'Well, now you've seen it. Are you really going to spend the night here?'

The little man smiled. 'Certainly we are.'

Mentally shrugging his shoulders the captain helped Bruce to carry the luggage upstairs, then ironically wished them good night. When the sound of the car was lost in the distance Bruce returned to the ballroom and found Neils standing by one of the long bow-windows.

'Can you hear the sh-sh-sh of panniered dresses, the brittle laughter of powdered ladies with their gallants, and the tapping of their heels as they dance a minuet to the tinkle of the harpsichord?' he said softly. His eyes stared blindly, and their pupils contracted. 'Or do you hear the hoarse cries of those ragged, half-starved creatures as they stumble through these rooms smash-

ing everything in sight, their mouths slobbering with frantic desire for revenge? Can you hear the shrieks, hardly human in their terror, of the wretched Vicomte as he is dragged to his death by those who were once his slaves?'

'No,' said Bruce uneasily, 'but I'll believe you that these walls would have a tale to tell if they could only talk.'

'My friend, they have no need when the seventh child of a seventh child is listening.'

Bruce shivered, as an icy chill seemed to rise up from the bare floor. 'I'm hungry,' he said as brightly as he could. 'What about unpacking and having a little light on the scene?'

Neils smiled. 'Yes, we will eat and sleep here. We shall have to shade the candles though, as there aren't any blackout precautions. I suppose the Army thought this room too big to bother about. I see they've done the bedrooms and everywhere else downstairs.'

'What made you choose the ballroom?'

'Because Hayes told that it is one of the few rooms in which no one has yet been attacked; so we shall be able to see if the Force possesses harmful powers against humans anywhere in the house, or whether it can only become an evil manifestation in certain spots.'

While Bruce set out an appetising array of food from the hamper on the floor, Neils unpacked his cameras. The American had seen them keep him company on more than one thrilling adventure, but their process, Orsen's invention, was a mystery to him. Neils explained them only by saying that their plates were abnormally sensitive. He said the same thing of his sound-recorder, an instrument like a miniature dictaphone.

Having finished their dinner with some excellent coffee, cooked on a primus stove, they went along to the big, old-fashioned bathroom to fix Orsen's first

camera and his sound machine. As they entered the room Bruce wrinkled his nose. 'What a filthy smell! The drainage must be terrible.'

Neils agreed as he placed one instrument on the window-sill and one on the broad mahogany ledge that surrounded the old-fashioned bath. He sealed the winows with fine silken threads and did the same to the door. Then, with their footsteps echoing behind them, they made a tour of the silent château, leaving the Swede's cameras in carefully selected places, till they came to the front hall, where Orsen left his last camera, and sealed the door leading to the back stairs with the remains of the reel of silk. Their job done they returned to the ballroom, and having made themselves as comfortable as possible with the rugs and cushions, settled down for the night.

Bruce could not sleep. They had lit a fire with some dry logs found in the kitchen and its dying flames sent a cavalcade of writhing shapes racing across the walls and ceiling.

Presently a moon shone through the uncurtained windows; propping himself on his elbow Bruce started at the unfamiliar lines it etched on Neil's face as he lay on his back, breathing gently. Orsen's enormous domed forehead shone like some beautiful Chinese ivory as the cold white light glanced across it, and his heavy blue-veined lids and sensitive mouth were curiously like those of a woman. He was sound asleep, yet Bruce knew that if there were the slightest sound or if an evil presence approached, he would be alert and fully in command of all his faculties in a fraction of a second.

Bruce lay back reassured. He could hear the muffled scuffling of rats behind the wainscoting. At length he dozed off.

Suddenly a shrill scream rent the silence, tearing it apart with devastating hands of terror. Bruce sprang to

his feet and rushed to the window. The driveway was brilliantly illuminated by the glare of the moon, but he could see nothing. Orsen sat up slowly. 'It's all right,' he murmured; 'only an owl.'

Nodding dumbly, Bruce returned to his couch, his heart thudding against his ribs.

Morning came at last, and after breakfast Orsen went off to examine his cameras. He found their plates negative and his seals all undisturbed, whilst the sound-machine recorded only the scrambling noise of rats. Re-setting his apparatus, he returned to the ballroom. Bruce was staring gloomily out of the window at the steady downpour of rain now falling from a leaden sky. He wheeled round as Neils came in. 'Well?'

'Nothing. I think we'll go down to the village now. We might get a hot bath and you can have a drink. You look pretty done in.'

'Yes,' Bruce agreed laconically.

After lunch in the officers' Mass, Neils arranged with his friend to bring their provisions up to the château before dark and left him in the genial company of the officers. As the rain had ceased he had decided to go for a walk and wandered off, a queer little figure in the misty yellow light of the afternoon.

The woods that almost covered the estate were full of a quiet beauty as the dusty sunlight filtered through their branches on to the sharply scented earth below and their calm, ageless indifference to the travails of men filled Orsen with a delightful sense of being in another world.

The evening passed slowly. Bruce played patience, whilst Orsen paced up and down like a small caged animal. He would never have admitted it, but his nerves were badly on edge, for, although they had lit a fire, the cold was intense, a thing that always made him feel ill. After dinner, having made a final inspection of his cameras, he boiled some water on the primus for a hot-

water-bottle, and settled down in his improvised bed. Bruce followed suit.

The black moonless night dragged by on crippled feet, its silence disturbed only by the rats and the faint boom of gunfire in the distance. Morning found the two men pale and haggard. They fried themselves eggs and bacon, then went along to the bathroom, where the stench was now so appalling that they had to hold their noses.

Once again the camera plates proved negative and the seals were untouched; but on the record of the sound-machine there was a new noise. It came at intervals above the scuffling of the rats and was like that of someone beating with his fingernails irregularly against a pane of glass.

'What do you think it is?' Bruce asked excitedly.

Neils went over to the window and peered out. 'It's possible that it was caused by this branch of creeper,' he said, opening the window and breaking off the branch. 'If it was, the noise won't recur tonight.'

The day passed uneventfully and both men were curiously relieved when darkness fell once more.

Close on midnight Orsen slid out of bed noislessly and crept along to the bathroom. On reaching it he stood motionless for a second. In the queer half-green light of his torch he resembled a ghost himself.

Not a sound disturbed the silence; even the rats seemed to have disappeared. Putting his ear to the keyhole he listened, but could hear nothing. He hesitated, then, grasping the door-handle, he twisted it sharply and with a vicious kick sent the door flying open, at the same instant flattening himself back against the wall.

Breathlessly, he waited, the unearthly quiet singing in his head. Still nothing happened. Making the sign of the Cross he muttered four words of power and, easing himself forward, peered into the bathroom. Only the horrible

stench of decaying life and the heavy tomb-like atmosphere greeted him. He flashed his torch across the ceiling and sent its beam piercing into every corner, but his cameras were all unviolated. With a sigh of disappointment he closed the door swiftly behind him and retraced his steps.

After breakfast the next morning they developed the plates from those in the bathroom last, having found all the others blank. Those of the one on the window-sill showed the door open and Neils's head and shoulders. On the other was only the flash of his torch. They tried the sound-machine and a puzzled frown crossed Orsen's brow as once again they heard the faint noise like fingernails beating against the window.

'This is most peculiar,' he murmured, as the record ceased. 'I tore off that branch and I'll swear there was no sound perceptible to human ears when I was in the room ten hours ago.'

'Perhaps it had started before—or afterwards,' Bruce hazarded.

'No; the sound-machine does not start recording until the cameras operate. On our first night I set them to function automatically at midnight; but last night I fixed them so that they should not operate at all unless someone or something broke the threads across the window or the door. I set them off myself by entering the room, so that noise must have been going on.' He paused. 'I shall spend the coming night there myself.'

'Not on your own!' Bruce declared quickly. 'Remember, a man died in that room from—well, from unknown causes little more than a fortnight ago.'

A gentle smile illuminated Neils's face. 'I was hoping you would offer to keep me company; but I wouldn't agree to you doing so unless I felt confident I could protect you. I intend to make a pentacle; one of the oldest forms of protection against evil manifestations,

and, fortunately, I brought all the things necessary for it in my luggage. But we must get a change of clothes in the village.'

That afternoon they began their preparations with handkerchiefs soaked in eau-de-Cologne tied over the lower part of their faces to counteract the appalling smell. First, they spring-cleaned the whole room with infinite care, Bruce scrubbing the floor and bath with carbolic soap, whilst Orsen went over the walls and ceiling with a mop which he dipped constantly in a pail of disinfected water.

'There must not be a speck of dust anywhere, particularly on the floor,' the Swede explained, 'since evil entities can fasten on any form of dirt to assist their materialisation. That is why I asked the captain to lend us blankets, battle-dresses, and issue underclothes straight from new stocks in the quartermaster's stores. And now,' he went on, 'I want two glasses and a jug of water, also fruit and biscuits. We must have no material needs to tempt us from our astral stronghold should any dark force try to corrupt our will-power through our sub-conscious minds.'

When Bruce returned, Neils had opened a suit-case and taken from it a piece of chalk, a length of string, and a footrule. Marking a spot approximately in the centre of the room, he asked Bruce to hold the end of the string to it and, using him as a pivot, drew a large circle in chalk.

Next the string was lengthened and an outer circle drawn. Then the most difficult part of the operation began. A five-rayed star had to be made with its points touching the outer circle and its valleys resting upon the inner. But, as Neils pointed out, while such a defence could be highly potent if constructed with geometrical accuracy, should any of the angles vary to any marked degree or the distance of the apexes from the central

point differ more than a fraction, the pentacle would prove not only useless, but even dangerous. 'This may all be completely unnecessary,' he added. We have no actual proof yet that an evil power is active here, but I have always thought that it was better not to spill the milk than to have to cry when it was done.'

Bruce smiled at the Swede's slightly muddled version of the old English proverb, but at the same time he heartily concurred with his friend's sentiments.

For an hour they measured and checked till eventually the broad white lines were drawn to Neils's satisfaction, forming the magical star in which it was his intention they should remain while darkness lasted. He then drew certain ancient symbols in its valleys and mounts, and when he had finished Bruce laid the blankets, glasses, water jug, and food in its centre. Meanwhile, Orsen was producing further impedimenta from his case. With lengths of asafœtida grass and blue wax he sealed the windows and bath-waste, making the Sign of the Cross over each seal as he completed it.

'That'll do for now. I must leave the door till we're settled in,' he said. 'I think we might as well go out and get some fresh air while we can.'

It was then nearly six o'clock. An hour later they returned to the château for an early supper. Almost before they had finished eating, dusk began to fall and Orsen glanced anxiously at the lengthening shadows. 'We'd better go now,' he said, gulping down the remains of his coffee.

Shivering with cold they undressed and reclothed themselves outside the bathroom. Once inside, the Swede sealed the door; then turning to Bruce gave him a long wreath of garlic flowers and a gold crucifix on a chain which he told him to hang round his neck. Unquestioningly the American obeyed and watched the little man follow suit. As they stepped into the pentacle, Neils

gripped his friend by the hand, and said urgently:

'Now, whatever happens and whatever ideas you get about all this being nonsense, you must on no account leave the circle. The evil force, if there is one, is almost certain to try to undermine our defences through you, owing to your spiritual inexperience. *Please* remember what I've said.' Having huddled into their blankets and tied the handkerchiefs newly soaked in eau-de-Cologne over their faces, they settled down to wait.

Time plodded wearily by and as they had left their watches outside with their clothes they had no means of checking it. Conversation soon flagged owing to the difficulty of speaking through the wet masks, so the two men crouched in silence, each longing desperately for the coming of dawn. Outside, the trees sighed quietly and darkness held the château in its thrall.

'It's very odd, I can't sense any evil presence here; and if there were one I should have by now,' Orsen whispered after a long silence.

Bruce stiffened and peered through the darkness at the white blob that was Neils's face. 'Now, don't *you* start talking like that. Remember what you told *me*. It looks as though those things you mentioned a while ago are having a dig at you.'

'No,' Orsen muttered after a moment, 'no, it's not that. Will you give me some water, please, it's over on your side.'

Bruce put out his hand to feel for the jug. Without the least warning his strangled yell shattered the deep quiet of the night and he collapsed in a limp tangle over the Swede's legs.

Orsen stumbled to his feet, his mind reeling—the Thing was in the pentacle. *Inside it!* There, *with* them; at their elbows, instead of beyond the barrier which should have kept it out. Why had he felt no warning—no indication of evil?

Shouting aloud a Latin exorcism which would keep the evil at bay for a space of eleven human heart-beats, he stopped, grabbed Bruce under the armpits, and dragged him from the circle.

Once outside it he allowed himself a pause to get back his breath; knowing that since the Thing was *in* the pentacle the magic barrier would act like the bars of a cage and keep it from getting *out*. But would it? Even Neils was scared by such an unusual and extraordinary potent phenomenon.

Wrenching the door open he seized Bruce's unconscious form again and, exerting all his frail physical strength, hauled it along the passage. When at last he reached the ballroom sweat was pouring down his face and he was gasping as though his lungs would burst. Feverishly he searched for his torch and finding it threw its beam on Bruce's face. It was deathly pale, but with a sob of relief Neils felt the faintly beating heart beneath his hand.

A few minutes later Bruce came out of his faint, but he could remember nothing, save that when he had put out his hand for the water-jug it seemed as though a thousand knives had pierced his body; then everything had gone black.

Neils nodded as his friend finished. 'It's a good thing we left our blankets here. We'll try and get some sleep!' But he himself did not attempt to sleep. Puzzled and anxious, he remained on watch all night, and as the first rays of dawn crept through the windows he returned to the bathroom.

Two hours later he told Bruce: 'I think I've found the root of the evil, and I'm going down the village to borrow the largest electric battery I can find.'

'Whatever for?'

'Electric force can be used for many purposes,' was all Neils would say.

It was not until they had completed their evening meal that Neils undid a parcel and produced four bottles of champagne.

'Hullo ! What's this?' Bruce exclaimed.

'I got them from the local *estaminet* this morning as I thought it was time we returned hospitality to some of the officers in the Mess. They're coming in about ten o'clock.'

'That's fine,' Bruce grinned. 'I reckon I deserve a party after last night.'

Soon after ten their friend the captain, a colonel, and three other officers arrived and they immediately began to make half-humorous inquiries about the ghost.

'Gentlemen,' replied Neils, 'I asked you up here because I hope to lay the ghost tonight; but we can't start work for an hour or two, and in the meantime, as I am a teetotaller, I hope you'll join Bruce Hemmingway in a glass of wine.'

For two hours Neils kept them enthralled with stories of Saati manifestations he had encountered, so that even the most sceptical was secretly glad that the party numbered seven resolute men; but he would say nothing of his discoveries in the château until, glancing at his watch, he saw that it was half-past twelve. Then he began to recount the experiences of Bruce and himself since their arrival.

Turning to Bruce, he went on : 'My suspicions were aroused last night when you were attacked in the pentacle. Mentally you were unharmed, but your hand was red and inflamed, as though it had been burnt. Early this morning I returned to the bathroom and pulled up the boards upon which the water-jug was resting, taking care not to touch the floor anywhere near it. Underneath there were the decaying bodies of two rats and three electric wires, the naked leads of which were inserted in the plank to look from above like nails. You remem-

ber that curious sound of tapping fingers on the recording machine, which is so much more sensitive than our ears. When I saw those wires I suddenly realised what it meant. Somewhere in the château a person was working a morse transmitter.'

'By Jove!' The Colonel jumped to his feet. 'A spy!'

Neils nodded. 'Yes. Long before the war, no doubt, the Germans laid a secret cable from their own lines to the château, reckoning that their agent here would be able to work undisturbed because no one would come to the place on account of its sinister reputation. But to make quite certain of being able to scare away any intruders they ran electric wires to a dozen different points in the building, mainly to door-knobs; but the lavatory seats and bathroom also particularly lent themselves to such a purpose.'

'But we've searched every room in the place,' Bruce exclaimed, 'so where does the spy conceal himself?'

The officers were now all on their feet. 'Grand work, Mr. Orsen!' cried the Colonel. 'He may even be sending a message now. Let's go and get him.'

It was after one o'clock when Orsen led the way out of the château. They stumbled through tangled undergrowth, barking their shins on unseen obstacles for nearly twenty minutes until Neils halted in a clearing among the trees which was almost filled by a large grassy mound.

'What's this?' the captain asked, flashing his torch.

'It's an ice-house,' the little man replied as he pulled open a thick, slanting wooden trap almost hidden by moss and ivy. 'In the old days, before refrigerators were invented, people used to cut blocks of ice out of their lakes when they were frozen in the winter and store them in these places. The temperature remained constant owing to the fact that they were underground and invariably in woods, which always retain moisture, so the ice was preserved right through the summer.'

A dank musty smell filled their nostrils as, almost bent double, they followed Neils inside. Ahead of them in the far corner of the cellar loomed a dark cavity. 'This is the way the ghost comes,' Orsen murmured. 'Mind how you go; there'll be one or two holes, I expect.'

The silence seemed to bear down on them as they crept forward through a dark tunnel and the deathly chill penetrated their thick overcoats. No one spoke. On and on they went. The passage seemed to wind interminably before them; occasionally a rat scurried across their path. Suddenly, as they rounded a bend, a bright shaft of light struck their eyes. For a second they stood practically blinded and two of the officers produced revolvers.

Neils let them precede him into the secret cellar, but they did not need their weapons. At its far end, sprawled over the table which held a big telegraphic transmitting-set, was the body of a man.

'There, gentlemen, is your ghost,' Orsen announced quietly. 'No, don't touch him, you fool!' he snapped, as the captain stretched out a hand towards the corpse. 'He's been electrocuted and the current isn't switched off yet.'

'Electrocuted?' the captain gasped. 'But how did that happen?'

'The powerful battery you borrowed for me this morning from the Air Force people,' Neils said. 'I attached it to the leads in the bathroom, then came down here and fixed the other end of the wires to the side of the transmitter key.'

'Good God!' exclaimed the colonel. 'But this is most irregular.'

'Quite,' Neils agreed, 'and, of course, I'm neutral in this war, but I'm not neutral in the greater war that is always going on between good and evil. This man murdered that poor fellow who died in the bathroom. So I decided to save you a shooting party.'

STORY XVI

Perhaps I should apologise for including the 2,000 words which follow this note. In any case, I would like to make it clear that this volume would be well over full length without them, so there is no question of my having used them as padding to bring the book up to minimum requirement.

When I started to write someone told me that the royal road to fame and fortune through the pen lay in humorous stories. That is true to the extent that, whereas best-sellers amongst serious novelists and thriller writers always run to a dozen or more at any one time, it is rare for more than one humorist to achieve nation-wide success in a generation. Therefore, if you can pull it off, you acquire a vast public devoted to you alone and waiting with beating hearts and an anticipatory grin for your new book.

Nothing venture, nothing gain. Following this apparently sage but, in my case, totally irrelevant advice and quite oblivious to my lack of aptitude for such a job, I went home and wrote a 'humorous' story in what I optimistically believed to be the 'Wodehouse' manner.

My only excuse for printing this strange freak is that my maternal grandfather possessed just such another monstrosity of a sideboard and, when I was a youngster, its contents were to me an unfailing joy.

The Sideboard

'Lot 204,' said the auctioneer.

'Lot 204 showin' 'ere,' sang out the foreman-porter as he gave the piece a resounding slap with his grimy hand.

It was a sideboard, but what a sideboard—vast, enormous, gargantuan. It completely filled the corner of the room into which it had been pushed. Venerable and archaic it stood there, awaiting a new owner. Grandfather and begetter of all the sideboards that had ever been.

I knew it well. Every gleam that shone from its peculiarly ugly dark mahogany surface—every knob and twist and twirl by which, through some aberration of the times, a Victorian craftsman had striven to make it more hideous to our modern eyes.

Was it not a portion of my grandfather's estate?—grandfather Toothkins as was? But let me hasten to reassure you, I have not been afflicted with that name—my mother swapped it, and got me!

'Lot 204 showin' 'ere,' came the beery voice of the foreman-porter once more. The man had the appearance of an owl with his thick glasses.

'How ghastly,' murmured Archie.

I took up the challenge, I felt I must. 'Old top,' I said, 'you know not what you say. Think of the history that lies hidden in that ancient piece. It listened to my ancestors when they talked of Sevastopol and the Crimea. They retold the story of the Light Brigade with rows of salted almonds for the Russian guns upon its top. Old chappies with gold alberts sat before it—fellows who really believed the humbug of the Grand Old Man. It heard about the siege of Paris and the Zulu War, even when you were a mewing babe puking at your mother's breast . . .'

'I never puked,' said Archie angrily.

'You did,' I said, 'it's in Shakespeare' (I knew I had him there), and I went on: 'Think of those prosperous Victorian days—the barons of beef, the golden ducks, the venison, that noble piece has carried in its time. Asparagus and peaches, great dishes of sweet peas—no, sweet dishes of great peas, I mean—the noble salmon, the turkeys and the pies.'

'Don't forget the rice puddings and the salted cod, and I'll bet they had blancmange—ugh, how I hate blancmange!' Archie shuddered.

I thought that was a little unkind but I am a mild forbearing man, so I drew his attention to the cupboards underneath.

'Think,' I cried, my mouth watering at the thought, 'what has passed into those mighty doors. The one on the left—fruit cake with more almonds than I could ever count, raisins and candied fruits, angelica and rings of peel, *marrons glacés*, chocolates, sugar biscuits, ginger-nuts. That cupboard was an Aladdin's cave for any boy.'

Archie grinned. 'Greedy little brute you must have been.' But that was just sour grapes because his own grandfather is such a mean old screw.

'Come now, will no one make me an offer?' the auctioneer was saying. 'Start it at what you like.'

'Then the cupboard on the right,' I whispered with sudden memory; 'the cellarette—whisky, my boy. No, no, I don't mean that—whisky was only for the servants' hall—but brandy, mellow golden stuff; Sherry, Madeira, untold pipes of Port; liqueurs, too, enough to float a battleship!'

'Shall we say twenty pounds?' coaxed the auctioneer—but silence brooded over the baize tables. 'Ten now,' he said persuasively.

'It's monstrous,' I hissed to Archie. 'It must have

cost a hundred guineas at least,' but he was not listening; he was making faces at the girl in green. Poor Archie, I've told him heaps of times that no girl could be interested in a chappie with a face like his, but he simply will not understand.

'Five guineas then?' the auctioneer suggested. 'It's worth that for the wood alone.'

I nodded vigorously. Of course it was; I prodded Archie. 'Stop pestering that delightful child,' I said severely. 'I know she looked this way, but it's my new shirting which intrigues her. The sideboard's being knocked down for a fiver—think of it, one could make ten thousand mahogany penholders from the wood!'

'Well, you'll be able to,' he grinned, just like the idiot he is; 'it's been knocked down to you!'

And so it had. I was furious, but what could I do with the beastly thing? I looked towards the auctioneer.

'That's 'im,' said the foreman-porter; 'gentleman wiv' the 'are-lip—wot said jest now that 'e wasn't bidden' fer the commode.'

The auctioneer was a born fool; that was the second mistake he had made. What could I have wanted with a commode? I couldn't even give it to Aunt Agatha for Christmas. He might have known, but I didn't like to make a scene about the sideboard.

Archie tittered at my side. Really he has the silliest laugh of any man I know. 'Hare-lip,' he gurgled; 'that's a good one. I must remember that—it's your moustache, old man!'

'I see no humour,' I said stiffly, 'in ridiculing the errors of the blind. However, as you are supposed to be my friend I will let you have my purchase for two-ten. The balance of the money I shall consider as having been spent on your birthday present in advance.'

He shook his head. 'No thanks, I'd rather you let me have the ties Aunt Aggie sends you at Christmas,

like last year. I pass 'em on to Judd—he's got just that kind of face.'

Of course I always knew that Archie was tactless, but really—Judd is Archie's man.

The girl in green had moved towards us. Archie grinned all over his stupid face as he took off his hat. I caught him by the arm and jerked him back. 'This,' I said with that little air of authority which I sometimes use, 'is my affair.'

He looked an awful fool. I could see the girl thought that too, she smiled divinely. You should have seen her, as she said: 'I think you bought Lot 204.'

'Yes,' I said blissfully, 'any lot you like.'

'The sideboard, I mean.'

'Ha, ha! the sideboard.' I felt a little tremor run down my spine; the darling wanted a sideboard. Of course she should have a sideboard—a dozen if she liked. She was just the sort of girl I'd been longing to buy sideboards for all my life. 'Maples,' I said, 'is fine.' It occurred to me that we might spend the day there.

She gave a little puzzled frown. 'I'm talking about the sideboard you've just bought,' she said. 'I want to know if you'll take a profit on it—it was knocked down so quickly I didn't get a chance to bid.'

'That's different,' I assured her. She was an angelic girl, but all the business ability with which my family refuse to credit me bubbled to my chest. 'It's a valuable piece,' I said.

'Nonsense,' she laughed, 'it's a horrid old thing, but it just happens that I'd like to have it.'

She had just the faintest trace of an American accent, not much you know, but enough. Americans have money. I jabbed Archie in the ribs—I thought it would be good training for him to see how a big business deal was carried through. The fool spluttered as though he was going to choke. I ignored him and

put on what I know to be my cunning look.

'Madam,' I said, 'you cannot be aware of the interesting historic associations that . . .'

'Now, please,' she checked me at the very beginning of my peroration, 'how much will you take?'

'It's genuine pre-Woolworth,' I assured her with an air of knowledge, although unfortunately I don't know much about antiques.

She laughed deliciously.

I tried again. 'But that is not all—the thing is dear to me—how dear you cannot know. It has been in the possession of the Toothkins family for over a hundred years. My aged mother said to me—"My boy," she said, "never let that grand old sideboard pass into the possession of one who is not of the Toothkin blood." ' At the moment I nearly believed myself—tears stood in my eyes.

A strange look came into her lovely face. 'You're Loopy,' she declared.

'I'm what?' I gasped.

She was actually laughing. 'I remember now—you're Loopy.'

'Hi!' I cried, Archie had trodden heavily on my toe. I jabbed him off and turned to her again. 'Madam,' I said severely, 'I'm nothing of the kind.'

'Of course not,' she smiled, 'but that's what we used to call you.'

Then I suddenly realised who she was. Everything else was different, but the green eyes were unchanged.

'I know who you are,' I cried. 'You're . . .'

'Don't say it,' she pleaded.

I laughed, I was not going to forgo my revenge. 'You're Ethelfreda Toothkins!'

'You beast!' she said. 'Anyhow, I don't care. I've used my second name for years. I'm Ann now.'

I nodded. 'You're the cousin who had the wicked

mother—she married again—went to live in America and all that?'

'Not quite a cousin,' she smiled, 'and Mother is a dear. We're over on a visit.'

'Your great-aunt married my great-aunt's sister,' I told her. (I pride myself on my knowledge of the family tree.) 'You were a horrid little girl; you had straight hair and wore enormous white pancakey hats.'

'Did I? Anyhow, it's never been suggested that I had a hare-lip!' There was sudden laughter in those green eyes of hers.

In a vague way I heard the auctioneer saying that there would be an interval for lunch. I turned to Archie. 'Old top,' I said, 'something tells me that someone wants to see you at your club, though why he should I simply cannot think.'

For once in his life he behaved quite sensibly, despite his very unnecessary wink. 'What shall we do about the jolly old sideboard?' I asked my lovely cousin as I led her away.

She looked quite serious for a moment, then she smiled. 'Well, if one of us kept it we could fill it up with candied fruit again.'

'And rings of peel,' I added.

'And *marrons glacés*,' she said.

'And ginger biscuits,' I laughed.

'Ginger-nuts,' we said together.

. . . . .

We have that venerable sideboard still. We wouldn't swap it for the whole of Maples's stock. It holds the wireless, and the biscuits for the dog, but it gets its ration of ginger now and then. I lost that nice moustache of mine—but I got Ann instead, and of course old Archie's only trying to be funny when he says the darling married me just to shed her other name.

STORY XVII

Black Magic

A few years ago a young woman reported that she had been victimised by a Satanic circle in Birmingham. Her statement aroused such widespread interest that a National newspaper asked me to do a series of six articles on Black Magic, Witchcraft and the occult generally.

So little is understood about this subject by the general public that when writing the articles I went to great pains to express my views clearly. However, with what I can only imagine to be the object of getting the maximum amount of sensationalism out of the material I sent in, a Sub-Editor transposed many of the sentences and cut out others altogether; so that, to my mind, many of the passages no longer made sense.

Naturally, I was most indignant. But an author soon learns the futility of arguing with the editors of a great newspaper and as I did not see my articles after the Sub-Editor had done his worst—or, in his view, his best—until they appeared in print, there was really nothing to be done about it.

This series of articles, therefore, appears here, unabridged, unaltered and as originally written, for the first time.

Article No. 1

WHITE AND BLACK MAGIC

The Devil is just round the corner, and he is watching YOU. Don't you believe that? There are a lot of people who do, and some of them, even in this country, still participate in abominable rites for the purpose of courting his favour.

If you do not believe that the Devil is interested in you, then you do not believe in God, without Whose knowledge, so the Bible tells us, not a sparrow falls. You cannot believe in one and not the other.

In the beginning Lucifer, to give the Devil his personal name, was an Archangel. His pride and ambition caused him to become the leader of the first revolution. God gave St. Michael command of the loyal angels. There was a tremendous battle and Michael's angels drove Lucifer and his angels out of Heaven *down to Earth*. That is why the Devil is known as 'The Lord of This World'.

That, too, is why, when our Lord Jesus Christ was on earth, the Devil was able to take Him up into a High Place and offer Him dominion over the fair cities and fruitful plains. To deny that the Temptation occurred is to deny a fundamental tenet of the Christian religion.

In the Middle Ages it was not uncommon for people to report that the Devil had appeared to them. In those days everyone's mind was dominated by religion. Most people attended two services on Sundays, fasted on Fridays and were present at family prayers morning and evening. They had no holidays other than Saints' days and going on a pilgrimage; they went regularly to confession and, for even the smallest

sin, had to perform a penance. For them Heaven and Hell were vivid realities and, as life was cheap, they might find themselves pitchforked into one or the other with little warning. So it is not surprising that the more imaginative sometimes 'saw things'. We may, therefore, put down most of these reported 'visions' as the product of an empty stomach upon an empty brain. But not all.

Not, that is, if we can believe the late Aleister Crowley, who once assured me that it is perfectly possible to raise—he did not say the Devil, but that was what he meant.

Of course, it is not suggested that the mighty Lucifer —who is second only in power to the Lord God Himself—appears to people in person. But each of us has a Guardian Angel, and it is his opposite number, a creature of the Devil's charged with our undoing, who, in exceptional circumstances, may become visible to human eyes.

The form in which such evil entities materialise is naturally that expected of them. Hence the fire-breathing horrors with horns, cloven hoofs and spiked tail which appeared to people in the Middle Ages, and that in Crowley's case it was that of Pan—the coldly evil horned-god whom he had deliberately conjured up.

Why, you may ask, are people rarely troubled by such supernatural visitors in these days? The answer is that life is infinitely more complex, and the modern mind occupied by such things as politics, sport, the cinema, travel, broadcasts, the constant change in the fashions of clothes, and so on—to *the exclusion of religion.* They are no longer interested in either saints or demons.

But do not suppose that, for that reason, the Devil no longer exists. As part of the original Creation he is

immortal. Being no fool he has adapted himself to modern conditions and gone underground.

It is with good reason that one of his names is 'Lord of Misrule'. God's wish, clearly manifested in the teachings of Jesus Christ, is that we should avoid all cause for quarrels—and so lead *peaceful, orderly lives.* The Devil's province is to make us do the opposite. By luring individuals into sin he can break up families; by fostering trade disputes he can cause conditions which ultimately lead to poverty and crime; by arousing the passions of nations he can cause war.

From the beginning of time he has made tools of the greedy, the discontented and the ambitious, stimulating them by the temptation of power to sabotage peace, prosperity and good stable government. Can anyone maintain that he has been idle during the past half century?

These subtle and ubiquitous activities apart, the Devil still plays an active role in the lives of quite a number of people. It is a fact that any day in a bus or a train YOU may be sitting opposite to a man or woman who has made a pact with Satan, or been sold to him.

In the introduction to Story IV 'A Life for Life' I have already mentioned the case of the Essex woman who was sold as a child to the Devil; and as 'Lord of this World' the Devil does not, of course, confine his attention to Christian people. As an example there is the case of the young Australian aboriginal, Lyn Wulumu, which was recently featured in the Press.

His mother-in-law wanted him out of the way so she 'sung him the song of the dreamtime snake'. When this is done by a votary of Satan a dream-snake coils itself round the body of the victim and gradually *crushes* him until he can no longer breathe. Lyn Wulumu, unquestionably a dying man, was flown down

by the Methodist Mission to Darwin Hospital. Four doctors could find nothing whatever wrong with him physically, but they put him in an iron lung; his life was saved and it is now reported that he has regained the will to live.

My books with occult backgrounds have brought me many hundreds of letters from all parts of the world upon similar subjects. Score of them are, of course, from people with bees in their bonnets; but with some knowledge of such matters it is not difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff, and many are from doctors, magistrates and clergymen—vouching for their personal knowledge of happenings impossible to explain except as the result of witchcraft.

The fact is that, although unrealised by most Europeans, in *every* great city, in the jungles of Africa, the villages of Asia, the plantations of the West Indies, and even in some remote hamlets of our own countryside, Satanism is still practised.

The dual principle of Good and Evil, which is the basis of every religion, must continue in perpetual conflict until the end of time. On the Right hand we have light, warmth, growth and order; on the left hand, darkness, cold, decay and chaos.

Each of us, having within us a part of the eternal Spirit, is able at will to communicate with the Higher Powers and draw down from them additional power to ourselves. The Saints did so by prayer to God, which enabled them to perform their miracles. The Devil may be found even quicker to answer.

As a young officer in the 1914–18 war, while convalescing, I played a lot of *vingt-et-un*. After one ten-hour session, having become bored from drawing few cards worth betting upon, on the bank passing to me, I called on the Devil to give me luck. I drew two aces, doubled the table, drew another ace, split three times

and finished with two naturals and a five and under. Everyone paid me sixteen times his original stake.

That shook the other chaps at the table; but it shook me infinitely more, as, sooner or later, that sort of 'luck' has to be paid for.

I have never prayed to the Devil since. Neither have I ever attended any form of magical ceremony or a séance. It is obviously such a fascinating game that even the strongest-willed person could easily get drawn further and further into it until—well, there are several very real dangers. The least is that one might find oneself being blackmailed for taking part in obscene practices. The worst, failure to pull out in time, with the realisation that one had imperilled one's immortal soul. There is also the risk of slipping up in some ritual, with consequent failure to keep under control the forces one has called up. The result of that used to be called demonic possession. It is now classed as lunacy. One of Crowley's occult 'operations' misfired; so that he was found next morning a gibbering idiot, and had to spend six months in an asylum. By prayer, fasting, and mortification of the flesh, the Saints called down power in order that they might perform miracles to the glorification of God, and heal the sick. This, the use of Supernatural Power for good or *unselfish ends,* is WHITE MAGIC.

The use of Supernatural Power for wicked or *selfish ends* is BLACK MAGIC. Such magic is of the Devil and can be obtained only by such sexual depravity and bestial rites as are described in the official reports of the initiation ceremonies of the Mau Mau.

Yet it is not only in Africa that such abominations are practised. A few years ago women were giving themselves up to hideous eroticism with a great carved ebony figure, during Satanic orgies held in a secret temple in Bayswater, London, W.2.

Article No. 2

THE BLACK ART AND THE SUPERNATURAL

Perhaps the most interesting man I met while collecting data for my novels with occult backgrounds was Mr. Rollo Ahmed. He was an advanced practitioner of Yoga and made good use of it. Although a native of the West Indies he never wore an overcoat and used to go about London in the winter in a thin cotton suit. One night, when it was well below freezing, he arrived to dine with me. He had no gloves but his hands were as warm as toast.

Rollo Ahmed was deeply versed in magical lore and possessed the gift of explaining it with great lucidity. From him I learnt much of the theory of the Black Art. Briefly it may be defined as a system of short cuts to obtaining Power.

Anyone can say prayers, or think evil. God will give new strength and fortitude in answer to prayer. The Devil will give strength and resolution actually to perform the evil deed contemplated. However, the human brain resembles a radio set. It needs tuning in to get the best results.

In very early times ways were discovered of 'tuning in' more rapidly. The holy used fasting and mortification of the flesh; the unholy gross indulgence and sexual depravity. Hence the wild orgies which are a main feature of every Satanic gathering—both ancient and modern.

It was also found that contact could be more swiftly achieved by the use of certain material aids. For example, the Clairvoyant does not actually see things in the crystal. It is a device to induce self-hypnotism and turn the mind inward so that it can pick up occult

vibrations. To achieve this state practitioners of the Black Art consume potions composed of the vilest secretions of the human body. The Mau Mau do this; so, too, do the depraved followers of the Devil's cult who still live in our midst. Such acts may be compared to the ringing of a bell which summons a supernatural Power.

SUPERNATURAL is simply a word to express that which lies beyond our comprehension, and MAGIC the procuring of a result normally regarded as impossible by the accepted LAWS of cause and effect. In the MATERIAL sphere the MAGIC of yesterday becomes the SCIENCE of today; but there remains innumerable NATURAL LAWS which are not generally understood. That applies particularly to the ability of certain humans to call upon the forces of a SPIRITUAL nature; and since all spiritual power emanates from either God or the Devil those who employ them become priests and priestesses of either Good or Evil.

The good 'priest' uses supernatural power for unselfish ends; and the most common forms of his activities are 'pain-taking' and faith healing. A recent inquiry by the British Medical Association has revealed that this type of White Magic is widely practised all over Britain. The investigators admit that warts can be *charmed* away, and can offer no explanation for that. Concerning more important cures, brought about by prolonged prayer, their report states:

'In the Committee's opinion it is probably better to acknowledge that the cures are at present inexplicable on scientific grounds.'

In this connection I had first-hand knowledge of an extraordinary happening while staying with my sister-in-law in South Africa. Her old negro cook, Maria, complained of acute pains in the breast and

displayed to her an ugly tumour. Maria was at once taken down to the hospital. After examining her, the doctor put her in the waiting-room then, just outside its door, told my sister-in-law that the tumour was an advanced cancer and that it must be cut out without delay. An hour later he telephoned to ask where Maria was. She had disappeared.

Ten days later she returned with not a trace of the tumour. When asked for an explanation she said: 'I hears what that white doctor says to you, Missis, 'bout cuttin' me up. I's scared, so I slips off back to ma Kraal. The black doctor, he throws the bones for me and I's well again now.'

Another supernormal potential of the human mind which has now been recognised by the medical profession is Hypnotism. Yet no doctor can explain how it is possible for a subject to be made so iron rigid that his neck can be placed on one chair-back, his feet on another, and the hypnotist be able to kneel on the subject's stomach without his body even bending.

The French psychologist, Pierre Janet, has even succeeded in hypnotising a patient at a distance of over a mile, at a time known only to the experimenters. That brings us to Mental Telepathy, of which countless people have had personal experience. Such happenings used to be put down to coincidence; but a few years ago Dr. Soal, by infinitely patient and prolonged tests, proved the case for telepathy conclusively. And Water Divining—a common and valuable practice—what explanation can science give for that?

Turning to more sensational manifestations of the supernatural, many people have been saved from death by warnings of an occult nature. One of the most intriguing is that which was vouched for by the late Lord Dufferin and Ava.

While staying in a house in Ireland, one night

before getting into bed he looked out of the window. Below him in the bright moonlight he saw a man carrying a coffin. The man looked up; his face was striking and most unpleasant. Next morning no one in the house could offer any explanation of this extraordinary occurrence. Years later, Lord Dufferin was in Paris. He was about to enter an already crowded hotel lift. Suddenly he recognised the face of the lift attendant as that of the ghoul with the coffin. Startled, he stepped back. The man slammed the lift gates and up went the lift. At the third floor the cable broke. It crashed to the basement and everyone in it, including the lift man, was killed.

Many people will swear to having seen a ghost; but proof of the actual materialisation of a spirit is very difficult to obtain. Personally, I am prepared to take the word of that great seeker after Truth, Harry Price. He carried out countless tests of reported psychic phenomena and ruthlessly exposed scores of fake mediums; but he told me once that there could be no possible explanation, other than a supernatural one, for the appearances of Rosalie.

Every conceivable check to prevent fraud was taken. Yet on using his luminous plaque he saw this little naked girl standing in front of him; and having felt her all over would have sworn—but for the low temperature of her flesh—to her being a living child.

It was Harry Price who told me of a strange haunting in Sussex. One bedroom in this old house was so badly haunted that even the most sceptical visitors woke in it to find themselves being strangled; and any food left in a semi-basement room became putrid within a few hours. An exorcist was called in. The exorcism was carried out just before dawn in the bedroom. A ball, seemingly composed of black smoke and about the size of a football, appeared, rolled down-

stairs, out through the window of the semi-basement room and across the lawn to disappear in a small lake. The lake was later dredged and no less than three skeletons were brought up from it.

The Reverend Montague Summers told me of an exorcism he had performed in Ireland. He was called to a farmer's wife who, it was said, was possessed by an evil spirit. He arrived in the evening. On the table in the living-room the remains of a cold leg of mutton had already been placed for supper; the woman was in the same room. At the sight of a priest she became so violent that she had to be held down. As he sprinkled the Holy Water on her and commanded the demon to come forth, a small cloud of black smoke issued from her foam-flecked mouth. It went straight into the cold mutton, and within a few minutes everyone present saw that the meat was alive with maggots.

Few men had more knowledge of the Occult than Montague Summers, and his books upon Witchcraft and Werewolves are classics. But he was, to say the least of it, a curious character. Rumour has it that he was not, in fact, a priest.

My wife and I went to stay at his house for a weekend. On the ceiling of our bedroom we found a score of enormous spiders. When I mentioned this, he replied only, 'I like spiders'; and in his garden my wife came upon the biggest toad she has ever seen. He tried to sell me a rare book. When I refused to buy it, I have never seen such malefic anger come into the eyes of any man. We made an excuse to leave on Sunday morning.

With his long silver locks and, normally, benign expression, he looked like a Restoration Bishop. Years later I used his physical appearance for Canon Copely-Syle in *To the Devil—a Daughter*. For that I had a precedent, as in Mr. Somerset Maugham's early book

The Magician the sorcerer, Hado, bears a striking resemblance to Aleister Crowley.

Mentioning books reminds me of A. E. W. Mason's *Prisoner in the Opal.* In it, he rightly associates the presence of the most powerful evil entities with intense cold. Dante's lowest circle in Hell was formed of ice.

I do not regard myself as psychic but I have once felt that terrifying chill. I was building a shack by moonlight in an old walled garden behind the Somme battlefield. It came upon me without rhyme or reason. I *knew* that something incredibly evil was watching me from behind—and it had suddenly become very cold. After a minute that seemed an eternity I panicked and fled in abject terror.

All this adds up to the fact that one cannot laugh off the Supernatural, and that like everything else in the Universe it is governed by definte laws. To utilise those laws for personal ends is to practise the Black Art. And it is still practised in England today.

One of the doctors who gave evidence before the B.M.A. Committee of Inquiry into faith healing stated that Black as well as White Magic is still widely practised in Devonshire; and that among his patients *he had had one definite death caused by Witchcraft.* That is something to give pause for thought to those readers who will this summer be motoring through Devon's lovely lanes.

Article No. 3

THE WITCHES' SABBATH

The Sabbath—at which thirteen person met by night to worship the Devil with obscene rites—was in Europe the direct outcome of the spread of Christian-

ity. The New religion sought to enforce fasting, chastity and a generally puritanical existence. Many people were used to looking forward to such Roman festivals as the Saturnalia, when slaves were for a day the equal of their masters, and feasting ended in a general orgy. In consequence the Old religion went underground.

It must, too, be remembered that in the Dark Ages there were no buses to take people from lonely villages into the towns; no newspapers, football pools or television. So the Devil was on a good wicket for tempting country folk into occasional nights of wild indulgence.

Today Sabbaths—like those recently reported from Birmingham—usually take place in houses. But one cannot altogether ignore the persistent rumours of moonlight gatherings for Satan worship in Cornwall, Derbyshire and Northern Scotland; and there is very good reason to believe that a Sabbath was held on the site of an old pagan temple in the Cotswolds as recently as last April.

Aleister Crowley, so I was told by a well-known Member of Parliament who knew him intimately, held a Sabbath, of sorts, when he was up at Cambridge. He was a brilliant scholar, and planned to produce a Greek play; but owing to its immorality the Master of John's forbade him to do so. To be avenged he made a wax image of the Master, then induced some of his fellow students to accompany him on a propitious night to a field. Having performed certain rites, Crowley called on the Devil and was about to plunge a needle into the liver of the wax figure. But his companions panicked. His arm was jerked and, instead, the figure's ankle was pierced. Next day the Master fell down some steps and broke his ankle.

Covens always numbered thirteen—a parody of The Last Supper. They met in lonely dells, or sometimes in

a high place if upon it there was an ancient monolith. There had to be a pond near-by: if there were not the members of the Coven dug a hole and urinated into it.

Sabbaths were held at full-moon, and on St. Walburga's Eve (April 30th), St. John's Eve (June 23rd) and Allhallowe'en (October 31st). On those dates Grand Sabbaths were also held, by thirteen Covens uniting at such places as the Brocken mountain in Germany and on Salisbury Plain.

The badge of office of the Chief of each Coven was a string worn below the left knee. This emblem of occult power goes back to prehistoric times, and it is probable that the Most Noble Order of the Garter originated from it.

The chronicle tells us that while King Edward III was dancing with his mistress, the Countess of Salisbury, her garter fell off; and, to her great confusion, snatching it up, he proclaimed the founding of the Order. Her confusion *would* have been great if it was a witch's garter; and it is conceivable that she was the Queen Witch of England. If so, by seizing her insignia he took her power to himself. It may well have been a clever political move to merge into his person as King the Chieftainship of the followers of the Old religion, of whom in those days there were still great numbers.

It is at least curious that he should have limited the Order to the Sovereign, the Prince of Wales and 24 Knights—two Covens; and that the Sovereign's mantle is embroidered with 168 garters which, with the garter he wears, makes 169—i.e. 13 x 13 signifying lordship over that number of Covens.

The attempted suppression of the Old religion did not start till much later, and had its origin in the growing Puritanism which led to the Reformation. There then began the horrible witch-hunts in which old

women, often guilty only of ugliness or practising White Magic, were ducked in ponds to see if they would float, stripped and searched for a third teat from which they were believed to feed their familiars —a cat, owl or toad—and stuck with pins, to find the spot rendered painless by the touch of the Devil's finger when he had accepted them as his own.

When preparing for a Sabbath, witches smeared their bodies with an unguent. Some unguents had stupefying qualities which caused them to *dream* that they had ridden naked through the night on a broomstick and that the Devil had had sexual intercourse with them.

The cult of the Voodoo goddess Erzulie is of a similar nature. Today, in the West Indies, every Thursday night thousands of negroes light candles to her, put clean sheets on their beds and—as she is violently jealous—turn their unfortunate wives out of the house; then give themselves up to dream embraces with this female counterpart of Satan.

The use of unguents by those who actually attended the Sabbaths is paralleled by modern worshippers in Satanic Temples inhaling the smoke from burning certain herbs. This has the effect of overcoming the scruples of the more timid, who might otherwise be revolted by the acts they are called on to perform, and stimulating the more hardened to a frenzy of abandonment. Aphrodisiacs are, of course, taken by all to increase sexual potency.

A Sabbath must have been a truly hellish spectacle. Head masks of goats, bats, cats and other animals were worn to conceal the identity of the participants. In a great cauldron a hell-broth bubbled—'eye of newt and toe of dog, wool of bat and tongue of dog', etc. A band struck up but each member of it played a different tune, resulting in cacophony. Grabbing up food and

drink, the company gorged themselves to a surfeit. Naked but for their masks, they danced in a circle back to back. The Chief of the Coven presented his posterior and the others kissed it in homage. He, or she, then 'blessed' evil amulets, among which there was sometimes a dead man's hand—a talisman that was said to enable a robber to enter any house without being heard. Finally, in a wild orgy they vied with one another in sexual excess and every form of perversion.

The equivalents of Sabbaths are held by the Mau Mau to initiate recruits. Among other horrors the initiate, male or female, is made to perform most bestial acts with a goat—and one of the Devil's names is 'The Goat of Mendes'.

In Haiti, too, such abominations still take place. There, the most terrible rite ever conceived is performed—the taking of a man's soul. The selected victim is bewitched and to all appearances dies. After he has been buried his body is dug up and reanimated. He does not know who he is; his memory has been completely obliterated. He has become a Zombie. The wizard who has stricken him puts him to work in the fields. There he labours automatically and tirelessly, day after day, until he really dies from natural causes.

Zora Huston, a coloured American journalist of repute, carried out an exhaustive investigation into this subject. In her book, *Voodoo Gods,* she publishes a photograph of a Zombie.

Article No. 4

THE BLACK MASS

Witches' Sabbaths, in various forms, are still held by people of every race and religion, but the Black Mass is exclusively a perversion of Christianity. It is a religious ceremony as distinct from a Satanic 'beanfeast'.

Each Holy Mass is dedicated to a definite 'intention'; so are Black Masses. It will be recalled that King Albert I of Belgium died in most mysterious circumstances. He was an exceptionally good man, so his premature end was a tragedy for all Europe. Soon after the publication of my book *The Haunting of Toby Jug* I received a letter from a woman who stated that she had been present at a Black Mass held in Brighton the day before King Albert died, and that it had been held *with the intention of bringing about his death.* Her account was highly circumstantial and showed her to have a thorough knowledge of the Black Art.

Incidentally, it was at Brighton that Aleister Crowley was cremated in 1947, and the Black Magic rites that his disciples performed at his funeral led to an inquiry by the Town Council.

The mummery indulged in during the celebration of a Black Mass might seem rather childish, were it not so horrible and carried out *with intense seriousness* by those who participate. It is a complete travesty of the Christian ritual and the supreme act in the worship of the Devil.

The celebrant and his assistant—who is always a woman—wear their vestments back to front, and hitched up so as to expose their sexual parts. The altar is furnished with a broken crucifix standing upside down, and black candles in which brimstone has been mixed

with the tallow. The ceremony opens by the congregation reciting the Lord's Prayer backwards.

Of this particular blasphemy I was an unconscious witness three years ago in a cellar Night Club in Nice. The compère of the cabaret was a haggard-looking man of about sixty, with a shock of white hair. After a husky rendering of some questionable songs, he began to intone. My French is limited almost to reading a restaurant menu, so I asked the friends who had brought me there what he was saying.

'The *Paternoster* backwards.' they replied, shrugging it off as a memory feat in ill taste. But my own belief is that it was a subtle form of 'invitation'—an indication to anyone present who was interested in Black Magic that the blasphemer could put them in touch with a Satanic Circle.

A more usual means of recruiting for the Devil is through Spiritualism. I cannot believe that any good ever comes of trying to get in touch with loved ones who have died, although one cannot blame broken-hearted people who attempt to do so; but others attend séances only in search of excitement. At many séances the Black fraternity have what might be termed 'talent scouts'. They are on the look-out for widows 'of a certain age', for wealthy gentlemen in the fifties who have developed a prostate, and for young women who show signs of being neurotic.

They tell such people that the medium's 'act' is kindergarten stuff, and that they can show them something really thrilling. The older ones of both sexes who accept such invitations soon find their desires satisfied—at the price of having been photographed by hidden cameras and later blackmailed—the younger, drugged, dragooned and terrified, become the unpaid prostitues of the Satanic Temples—from which hideous bondage they rarely manage to escape.

At a Black Mass the whole ritual is recited backwards, then Communion wafers are defiled. These wafers are stolen from churches, and during the past twenty years the Press has reported numerous cases of such thefts. Next the sacrifice is offered up, its throat cut, the blood caught in a chalice and drunk in place of Communion wine. Finally the celebrant has intercourse with his assistant on the altar and the congregation, made frenzied by incense containing drugs, throw themselves upon one another in a general orgy.

To be of maximum effectiveness the Black Mass should be celebrated by an unfrocked priest, and the sacrifice be an unweaned babe. Madame de Montespan, the beautiful mistress of Louis XIV, ordered many Black Masses with the 'intention' of retaining the King's waning love; and, it is said, both gave herself to the infamous Abbé Guibourg, who celebrated them for her, and bought unwanted babies for sacrifice.

The case of the warrior-sorcerer Gilles de Rais—upon whom the Blue Beard story was founded—permits of no doubt. After his execution the remains of 140 murdered children were found in the dungeons of his castle.

From fifteenth-century France to twentieth-century Australia is a far cry, but in the past few years I have had at least half a dozen letters reporting Black Masses there; and many readers will have seen in the Press the allegations made against Sir Eugene Goossens. It was stated that the Australian Customs had found in the well-known composer and conductor's luggage certain items connected with the practice of Black Magic, which he had been asked by friends to bring out to them.

In our modern world it is not easy to buy infants, or kidnap them without risk of detection; so the usual sacrifice is a cat. Aleister Crowley, so a disciple of his told me, always used cats at his Abbaye de Thelême in Sicily.

There was, too, the severed paw of a white kitten left on the altar of the Church of St. John the Baptist at Yarcombe, Somerset, in 1948. The church had been broken into and desecrated in various ways, making it evident that a Black Mass had been celebrated there.

The parallel Pagan rituals of the Carthaginians, the Aztecs and the Druids, all called for human sacrifice, but not necessarily of a child. And there remains unsolved the murder of Charles Walton at Meon Hill, Warwickshire, in 1945, to which no explanation could be found—other than that it was a ritual killing.

Article No. 5

THE DEVIL'S SECRET SOCIETIES

'They draw pentacles on the floor, sir, and late at night the men dress up in silk smocks with the signs of the Zodiac on them. The ladies come down wearing masks and red, high-heeled shoes. I've seen black candles, too.

'I hadn't an idea what it was all about. Just thought they were playing charades, or something, until I read your book *To the Devil—a Daughter*. Of course, I tumbled to it then. There can be no doubt about it, my employers are Satanists.'

The above is from a letter written to me by a chauffeur. He was employed by wealthy people who lived in a big house in the Eastern Counties. He went on to say that these parties sometimes numbered as many as twenty people, some of whom came down from London in big cars and drove off in them again before dawn.

This man wrote to me three times. He gave his address, signed his name and offered to meet me in his nearest town. In view of that, and the fact that his letters showed

no signs of hysteria, I see no reason to suppose that he was not telling the truth.

Such gatherings to practise the Black Art undoubtedly take place. There are, of course, phony imitations, organised only for the purpose of lechery followed by blackmail, but genuine Satan worship is still as prevalent today as—shall we say—the dope traffic.

Magic is a science. It cannot just be picked up. One would have to have a quite exceptional brain to make, unaided, any practical use of Eliphas Levi's *Doctrine and Ritual of Transcendental Magic,* or the famous *Malleus Maleficarum,* or even of Aleister Crowley's *Magick in Theory and Practice*; let alone of the rare but great classics such as *Le Clavicule de Salomon* and *Grimoire of Pope Honorius.*

Without a sound understanding of the esoteric doctrine it would be futile—if not actually dangerous—to call up evil forces, or to rely for protection on a pentacle the Cabalistic signs of which had been chosen by guesswork.

It follows that the sorcerer or witch must be taught his or her business, just as the priests of any other religion are taught theirs. Therefore, secret societies to hand down the Devil's mysteries, and to spread his cult as widely as possible among the ignorant, have always existed.

Their most successful operations have been to infiltrate themselves into the leadership of movements for reform. Many saintly men have led revolts against the abuses of the Church, but their words have been misinterpreted and their work worse than undone by the disciples of evil a generation later.

An example is cited in the first volume of Sir Winston Churchill's book, *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples.* The Albigenses, a people who in the thirteenth century inhabited a large part of south-western France,

were led to believe that 'life on this earth in the flesh was the work of Satan', which meant that 'they were freed from the menaces of the next'. Like a prairie fire immorality and disorder spread through the whole region. The King of France launched a 'home Crusade'; they were massacred by the thousand, until none were left.

Then there were the Knights Templar, an Order of Chivalry founded for the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre. Their main base was Malta. In their decadence, perverted by evil successors to their early Grand Masters, initiates had to spit three times on the Cross and swear allegiance to the Devil in the form of a bearded idol named Baphomet.

Their headquarters in Paris was a palace-fortress called the Temple. King Phillippe IV had their Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, and many of his Knights arrested there, and brought to trial for heresy. They were burnt at the stake. But the Order swore to be avenged upon the Monarchy of France.

Five hundred years later it was. From the tower of the Temple Louis XVI was taken to the guillotine. And that the Temple had been chosen for his prison *was not chance*. The French Revolution was directed by the Masonic Lodge of the Grand Orient, which had inherited the championship of evil.

It should be clearly understood that Masonry in the British Commonwealth has no connection whatever with the Grand Orient. Continental Masonry is altogether different. Its inner circles are the successors of those of the German Illuminati and the Rosicrucians—two other great secret societies whose leaders started them with good intent, but which later fell into evil hands. Even its rank and file members are avowed atheists.

In the past two hundred years the Grand Orient has brought about many revolutions and in 1902–4, with the French War Minister, General André, in its toils, it

succeeded in so weakening the High Command of the Army that France would have proved incapable of resisting invasion.

It is the Grand Orient, more than all other factors together, which has reduced France, once the most powerful nation in Europe, to her present pitiful condition. But now its activities are being surpassed by those of its fellow revolutionaries and atheists—the Communists. Their founder, Karl Marx, advocated the destruction of the middle classes by every means *including violence,* and their efforts are world-wide.

The dual principle of Good and Evil, which is the basis of every religion, must continue in perpetual conflict until the end of time. On the Right hand we have warmth, light, growth and order; on the Left hand darkness, cold, decay and chaos.

Do the authorities know of any Satanic societies operating in our midst today? I can only tell you that when discussing this matter in 1938 with one of my oldest friends—a man who has spent most of his life in MI.5—he asked me :

'Does "The Shadow" convey anything to you?'

'No,' I replied.

He made a wry grimace and said : 'Believe me, Dennis, I would rather be up against a combination of the most dangerous German and Russian agents I have ever known, than up against "The Brothers of the Shadow".'

Article No. 6

FORETELLING THE FUTURE

There is a 'gap in the curtain' through which some people can see. Of that I have incontestable proof.

In the 1920s I used occasionally to visit a seer named

Dewhirst. He predicted to me the circumstances in which I should meet my wife and even described the way she did her hair.

In 1932 I went to see him again. Immediately I entered his room he exclaimed : 'You've written a book !'

That was pretty staggering as I had not seen him for two years and I had only just sent the manuscript of my first novel to an agent. But he went on :

'You are on your right road at last. Someone whose name begins with H will sell millions of your books. They will be read in every country under the sun.' Then he named a date, seven weeks ahead, on which I would have good news about my book.

On that date I learned that Walter Hutchinson had taken The Forbidden Territory *for publication.*

He used no cards or crystal. Only lesser soothsayers require such aids for tuning in to the occult. And I have never known anyone else with such powers of supernormal vision.

Fortune-telling of this kind is not evil. But it becomes so when cruelty to animals and/or Satanic rituals are employed. The Ancients examined the entrails of still living birds and beasts; and necromancy entails raising the dead—as that dark tale in the Bible tells us the Witch of Endor did for Saul.

Whole life forecasts are obtained by casting horoscopes. That means relating the day and hour of birth to the position of the Heavenly bodies. It is a long and complicated process, as the Sun, Moon and Planets are all credited with contributing to a person's character and influencing his acts. Each, too, has a number, and every person has a number arrived at by a combination of his birth date and the numerological value of the letters forming his name. The ancient belief is that from these lucky and unlucky days and periods can be foretold.

This possibility cannot be ruled out. There is good

reason to believe that plants thrive better when planted under a waxing Moon. It is possible that each Heavenly body emits something in the nature of what we now term 'cosmic rays', to which the human mind is sensitive.

If so, they are governed by Natural Laws not yet fathomed by science, and we regard predictions of this kind as supernatural only because we have no explanation for them.

Palmistry is definitely a science, although not yet accepted as such. I learned to read hands while serving as a subaltern on the Western Front. With practice anyone can tell character, talents and health tendencies from the shape of the hands, their resilience, the nails and the lines on the palms. But, *when it comes to predicting the future,* the latter must be regarded as a means of tuning in.

Disappointment and warped judgement are the price that nearly everyone pays who *seeks guidance* by having his fortune told—however innocent the means. Because, even apart from fraud, the tendency is always to interpret predictions in the sense *one would like them to mean.*

The most famous oracle of ancient times was at Delphi. In a cellar priestesses threw themselves into a trance by inhaling the smoke of burning herbs, then answered questions put to them through a crack in the ceiling. Their utterances usually contained the germ of truth, but were so cryptic that numerous Greek generals were led by them into doing the wrong thing.

The extraordinary prophecies of Nostradamus, in the sixteenth century, were so obscure that few people understood them when made; yet many of them have since been fulfilled. Among other things, he predicted that in the year 2000 Paris would finally be destroyed by fire sent down from a flock of giant man-made birds coming from the Far East. That must have sounded sheer nonsense 400 years ago. But, were I likely to live

that long, you would not find me drinking a champagne cocktail in the Ritz bar there round about the year 2000.

Perhaps, though, by then the Russians will be occupying Paris, and the atom-belching missiles have been despatched from an Australia which has become the home base of the British people?

It is so easy to put a wrong construction on prophecies. The stars may foretell that on Wednesday 'Something is coming your way'. It may be an old boot at your head.

And predictions can lead you into trouble. When Dewhirst foretold big money from my book for me, I might have gone on a spending spree. But it was not till a year later that I received more than an advance of £30, so I would have landed myself in a nasty mess.

The following shows how futile it is to make plans based on information received by occult means. Hitler employed the best astrologers and soothsayers that could be found in the Nazi empire, and never made a move without consulting them. Churchill on the other hand, had no dealings with such people. All War Cabinet decisions were based upon reasoned assessments submitted by our Chiefs of Staff. Yet the British—for a year, alone—held the whole might of Germany at bay.

A few more words on Magic. No saying is less true than that 'The Devil looks after his own'. I have never yet met anyone who practised Black, or even Grey, Magic who was not hard up.

Finally: should you ever have reason to believe that you or yours have come into the orbit of malignant occult forces, do not hesitate to consult your parson or priest. They will not laugh. And should you ever be confronted with an evil manifestation, have no fear. Pray for help. It will immediately be given to you. Make the Sign of the Cross and 'thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night'.

STORY XVIII

The word 'Stalingrad' will remain emblazoned in the annals of Russian military history for all time. It was the Russians' greatest victory since the destruction of Napoleon's Grande Armée in the terrible retreat from Moscow one hundred and thirty years earlier. At least, we might say that. But would the Russians? They might count an earlier defeat of their enemies at Stalingrad—then called Tzaritsyn—in 1918, an even greater achievement; for the odds against them were just as great and, but for that victory, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics would have been destroyed in its infancy.

Before the new Arrow edition of this book went to press I wrote a new general introduction to it, wrote introductions for the items that have not hitherto appeared beween the covers of a book and revised most of those for the other stories, to bring them up to date. But in this instance I will let the greater part of the original introduction stand. It ran :

Hitler's megalomania has led him to condemn an entire army of 22 divisions to a certain and terrible death outside the 'Red Verdun' and Voroshilov, coming into the news once more after a long absence from it, has raised the siege of Leningrad.

During that long absence he and his old comrade, Budenny, have been mobilising and training the great

new Soviet armies which have only recently been launched against the enemy with such devastating effect, while the younger marshals have conducted the actual operations. But it is of interest to note that most of these brilliant Soviet generals, including Timoshenko, and Yeremenko the saviour of Stalingrad, were picked by Voroshilov as outstanding young fighting men to be the Corps Commanders of the armies which he personally led to victory nearly a quarter of a century ago.

The greatness of the Soviet Army's contribution to the defeat of Hitler has amazed the world. Voroshilov as partisan leader, General, Senior Marshal and, finally, Commissar for Defence of the U.S.S.R., has played a far greater part than any other single individual in the formation, training and organisation of that Army. He will go down to history as the man who, in a little over twenty years, and starting from scratch with an ill-disciplined, ill-armed rabble, forged the world's mightiest military machine.

Therefore I felt that, in addition to the story of the first siege of Tzaritsyn (Stalingrad) it would be worth while also to reprint the preceding chapter from my book *Red Eagle,* since this leads up to it; telling the story of how Voroshilov became a General overnight and of his first great military exploit.

The Epic Retreat from the Ukraine

After the October Revolution Voroshilov was given a post in the *Cheka.* The Bolshevik secret police had, as its chief, Dzerzhinski, a Pole of noble descent, who was a sadist and extremist. Perhaps the most infamous of all the Terrorists, he was determined to maintain the Revo-

lution against every opposition, whatever it might cost in blood, and delighted in his work.

Voroshilov developed a great admiration for Dzerzhinski on account of his efficiency, and has often been heard to declare: 'Now he was a *real* organiser. Damn it all, that's a man I envied. If I had half his qualities I could tackle my responsibilities without the least trouble at all.' Fortunately for humanity Voroshilov had not got half Dzerzhinski's *qualities*; he lacked the subtle mind of a born spy and he loathed the frightful daily shootings of whole batches of people whose only crime was that the Party wanted them out of the way.

In consequence, he resigned from the *Cheka* and was made the first Bolshevik police prefect of Petrograd and chairman of the committee for the defence of the city; but trouble was brewing for the new Soviet Republic.

Voroshilov's fire and enthusiasm were wasted in an office. He was sent to his own country, the Don Basin, to raise the workers there in defence of the Revolution.

When he arrived he found everything in confusion. The officials of the old Government had fled; the natual leaders of the people had gone into hiding from fear of the armed mobs. It was no longer a question of scrapping with the forces of law and order but being overrun by a foreign foe; an uprush of patriotic feeling caused the workers to determine to resist the invader, yet there was no one to guide them and they had no idea how to set about it.

Voroshilov formed the Lougansk Red Guard and soon had the best part of 2,000 men under arms, in batches, scattered up and down the Don Basin, many of them being old comrades who had served in the fighting squads he had organised twelve years before at the beginning of the first revolution.

The out-at-elbow bands of factory workers held a great mass meeting at Lougansk. Voroshilov, with other

speakers, urged them to leave their homes and take the field against the torrent of steel-helmeted Germans which was pouring into the blazing Ukraine. The speeches were received with acclamation, but it was a great armed mob without any military organisation, and they had to decide who should be their leader. It was here, amidst the din and shouting, that Voroshilov's future career was settled for him.

'Clim!' shouted the workers. 'Clim, you command us! Take command, Clim!'

'But I'm no soldier,' he protested loudly, 'we must have a military man.' He tried to wave them away but they still yelled their insistence. A young army officer named Nikolai Roudinev, who had long been a secret adherent of the Bolsheviks, jumped up on the platform and slapped Voroshilov on the shoulder, shouting:

'Don't be afraid. Clim. Don't play the fool. Don't wriggle. Take over the command and we'll help you. I'll be your chief of staff.'

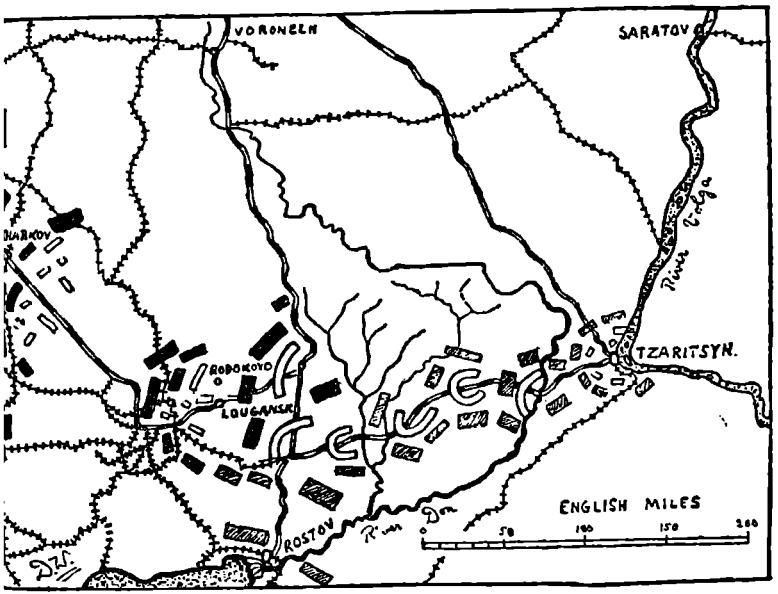
A great roar of cheering rose up from the multitude. Voroshilov gave a despairing shake of his head but agreed. 'All right, comrades,' he cried. 'What the hell's the good of wasting time? Since you force me to it I'll take command. Only, bear this in mind. With me shrift is short. This thing is going to be handled in a disciplined manner. You must obey me as though I were a proper general. If you're afraid to die—you can go to hell. If you're not—come with me.'

Thus, all against his will, the ex-pit-boy received his first command direct from the hands of his fellow workers.

Most of his Red Guards were scattered in townships and villages up and down the country-side; many of these groups were going off to the front on their own, or with other units, so his detachment numbered only about four to five hundred men. There were plenty of cart-

ridges in the munition factories of Lougansk, so they helped themselves to a good supply and set off for Kharkov. On the way Roudinev and a few other ex-soldiers among Voroshilov's followers gave the men all the training they ever got.

At Kharkov he made contact with Antonov and other Party men who had come from Petrograd to organise the resistance to the Germans. Isolated groups of the Red Guard were already in contact with the enemy, but they were ill-trained, ill-equipped and in many cases ill-led, so they were falling back, often without fighting at all, upon Kharkov. Poplavski tells us :



THE RETREAT FROM THE UKRAINE. APRIL–JUNE, 1918

Germans. Voroshilov's Bolsheviks. General Krasnov's Cossacks.
Railways. Main lines. Water.

'I was Assistant Front Commissar and I first met Voroshilov at the station in Kharkov, after we had retired to the Alexandrovsk line. None of us knew what to do and we were up against the well-organised Germans directed by a single mind. We told Voroshilov the situation and asked his advice, suggesting that we should dig in and make a stand.

' "Not worth it until we're better organised," he replied unhesitatingly. "We shall only lose men and gain no advantage. Continue the retreat."

'It was a hot time. We had been badly knocked about and there had been a lot of rain. We were coated with mud and looked like devils.'

To visualise the fighting, think of our own Black Country, or any great industrial area, where open rolling downlands are dotted with grimy, depressing little villages containing rows of small houses all alike; here and there a factory town with its tall chimneys pointing to leaden spring skies. It was open warfare, in which the combatants were fairly safe as long as they could keep the crest of a rise between themselves and the enemy, but that enemy was liable to appear at any moment, or on any side, and machine-guns might open, mowing down a score of men, without the least warning. There was little cover and no connected line; each unit had to fight its own rearguard action and retire when things got too hot for it, without reference to the others. A network of railways linked up the factory towns; there were plenty of derelict trains and plenty of skilled drivers from the engine shops of Lougansk in Voroshilov's detachment, so, as far as he could, he stuck to the railways and rallied his men at each wayside halt or village station.

Zveriaka carries on the story: 'We fell back until we reached Douvoviazodo and there Voroshilov determined on a stand, so we fought our first engagement. We deployed, but the enemy outflanked us. Reports came in

that other bodies of the Red Guard were falling back and the men got into a panic, but Voroshilov galloped up and down on horseback from point to point shouting: "I'll shoot the first man who runs away."

'He jumped off his horse near me, carbine in hand, and the men immediately took up their positions again, but it was soon apparent that all was not well with the units on either side of us. The Germans were well-trained and courageous. They broke through upon our flanks and started to shoot at us from the rear. Voroshilov and his lieutenants consulted as to what was to be done. One of the men knew the district and with him as guide we attempted an outflanking movement. Antonov arrived on the scene with an armoured train and we fell back upon it as a rallying point, but an enemy shell crashed into a truck of ammunition which began to blow up with loud explosions. Many of our men fled in terror. Voroshilov only succeeded in getting the remainder clear from the Germans with the greatest difficulty and we had to abandon the armoured train.

'That evening Voroshilov called us together and asked for volunteers to go with him and get back the train. About fifteen men stepped forward and clambered on to a derelict locomotive. The others waited and Clim said quietly: "You can let us go alone if you like but we're not coming back without that train."

'The rest were shamed into clambering on board. It was dark when we started out and when we arrived we found that the Germans had retired some distance to dig in for the night; so we were able to save the armoured train without fighting, except for the stray shots they sent at us.'

The armoured train proved invaluable and they took it with them down the railway line as they continued their retreat towards the south-east.

General Krasnov had now risen against the Bolshevik

régime at the head of a large force of Cossacks. His troops, having cleared the Don country behind Voroshilov's men and other Red Guard units which were being driven back by the Germans, then took up their positions astride the main railway line, cutting off the Ukraine from Great Russia.

After the Germans had taken Kharkov, the hastily gathered Bolshevik army went to pieces entirely. Antonov and the other commanders were killed, captured, or took to flight; their staffs disappeared with them. The army that before had only had the flimsiest cohesion was now in utter confusion; it was composed solely of bands of terrified men numbering a few score, or, at most a few hundred, all trying to get away from the enemy, but not knowing in which direction to retreat. They were caught between the Cossacks and the Germans; the two enemy armies had them in a vice.

Voroshilov's original detachment from Lougansk was mixed up with this semi-anarchial rabble. At Rodokovo, twenty kilometres north of Lougansk, he held a council of all the prominent men in each group he could get together. He was the principal speaker at the meeting, and explained that the official commanders having let them down they would all be killed unless they acted together. He proposed that they should form the whole mass of stragglers into one unit under a single command and with one headquarters' organisation. His plan was accepted immediately and, as the only leader of any prominence in the old fighting squads days who remained to them, they unanimously elected him as Commander of all the Red forces in their area. Overnight he was pushed up, owing to force of circumstances and his own popularity, in one jump, from leader of a half battalion to General Commanding the Fifth Ukrainian Army.

That army had yet to be formed and a plan made to save it from immediate annihilation. The plan must

come first and the details later. He conceived the idea that, if only they could make a break through to the east, they might reach the city of Tzaritsyn on the Volga, which was still in the hands of the Bolsheviks. It seemed sheer madness; the Germans were fiercely assaulting their front, the whole of the Don country behind them swarmed with Cossacks, and half-a-dozen rivers lay between them and Tzaritsyn. Everyone declared that his scheme was impossible.

'What's the good of remaining here?' he shouted. 'The Germans will attack again tomorrow, and they'll slaughter every one of us. We *must* break through.'

Roudinev shrugged his shoulders. 'But Clim,' he protested, 'you don't understand. The retreat you're suggesting is over a thousand *versts*. The Germans and the Cossacks will squeeze us to death long before we get to Tzaritsyn.'

'Well, where the hell are we to go then? You're my chief of staff and I tell you to draft a plan for a breakthrough to Tzaritsyn. Those are my imperative orders.'

To the accompaniment of violent swearing from the turbulent pit-boy, Roudinev worked out a scheme for this insane enterprise; a forlorn attempt to cross the Don Steppes and reach the Volga by following the twisting track of the railway line.

The council ended about midnight and next morning a large engagement was expected, as the Germans were preparing to advance all along the front. The mob leaders worked like demons all night; by morning Voroshilov had formed his staff, merged the tiny bands of workmen into larger army units and issued field orders for the defence of Lougansk. About midday the army, now reorganised, took up its positions. Some units, anarchistic in mood and not submitting at first to the new measures, had to be reformed in the rear, and only an insignificant

part of the new army was able to be brought into operation.

Voroshilov galloped from group to group on horseback, assuring the waverers that the Revolution was not perishing as they supposed. He told them that their own participation in the recent fighting was only an episode, and that whatever the difficulties and the dangers they must hold together even if they were all destroyed; because the longer they could hold out and the more Germans and reactionary Whites they could occupy, the more time they would be giving Lenin in Moscow to consolidate the centre of the Revolution, which would ensure him the possibility of leading the whole Working Class Movement of the World.

The battle began at about two o'clock in the afternoon. The Germans flung a whole Corps against Rodokovo. The battle went on with varying success; about six o'clock, Voroshilov ordered the right wing to make a counter-attack, and routed the enemy. Two batteries, twenty machine-guns and two aeroplanes were taken. The enemy fled, leaving behind a large number of dead and wounded; Voroshilov had won his first battle. The Bolshevik success was only temporary, however, and a far-flung outflanking movement by the German cavalry compelled him to fall back again. He retired on Lougansk and established temporary headquarters there.

An officer named Sokolov tells us: 'I had under me some men from Lisichan. When we were retreating from before the Germans, I managed to collect a crowd from some of the broken units numbering altogether 450 bayonets and 75 sabres. I reported to M. L. Roukhimovich, the Commissar for War at Lougansk. In the hotel apartment he occupied, I found a stranger of medium height with chestnut hair, a stern face and keen penetrating glance. As I entered the room the stranger immediately broke off his conversation with Roukhimo-

vich and deliberately looked me up and down from head to foot. Roukhimovich introduced us saying: "This is Comrade Vodoshilov who has just been appointed as commander of the newly created Fifth Ukrainian Army. Your unit is to be included in it."

'Voroshilov looked me up and down again attentively and said: "You're a former officer, aren't you?"

' "I am."

' "Rank?"

' "Reserve cornet—rose to staff captain."

' "Party member?"

' "Former Left Social Democrat."

' "Your unit?"

'I gave him detailed information on the make-up and condition of my unit, and added that I expected to be ready in about a week. Voroshilov said: "I know the Lisichan boys, the Menshevik influence among them is strong, but we'll see. Perhaps the Bolshevik thread you speak of will prove itself; then something good may be made of your unit!"

'Two days later I was ready to meet the commander's train at the rendezvous he had given me. About four o'clock it arrived, but nobody got out. I went to the staff coach and found Voroshilov discussing forthcoming operations with his chief of staff, Roudinev. When he saw me he said in a tone that permitted no discussion: "Comrade Sokolov, I expect you at Kavanye in two days from now." Then he turned to Roudinev and the rest of his staff with the words: "Come on, what are we waiting for!"

'That abrupt termination of the conversation threw us all into confusion, as not only myself but all the others naturally expected that he would want to inspect this new unit which had just come under his command. Roudinev and I suggested that, but he replied: "I'm not used to parades. I'll get to know your men in battle."

Then turning to his staff, he added: "Come along, get a move on. We're late as it is." '

In Lougansk, Voroshilov and his staff worked like furies. Among them was a local tailor, a cross-eyed fellow named Shchadenko, an old friend of Voroshilov's and destined to become, with him, another of the great fighting leaders. The Cossacks were eating up the country through which the newly formed Fifth Ukrainian Army must pass to reach Tzaritsyn. They would be starved into surrender unless they took adequate supplies with them. Derelict trains were filled with all the food they could lay their hands on. Others were loaded with cases of cartridges, hand grenades, shells, from the now silent munitions factories, others again with the goods of the wretched people of the district. Thousands of refugees were flooding in; old men, women and children, many of them dependents of the Workers' Army. The Germans were coming. These non-combatants could not be left behind. Every engine in the Lougansk shops was put into use, and a huge convoy of trains organised, occupying both lines of the double track. Under the intrepid leadership of the completely inexperienced but courageous civilian soldier the terrible retreat began.

The difficulties were immense. Day after day, night after night, they were attacked by the Germans or the Cossacks. Rearguard actions were fought every day. The pace of the retreat was the pace of the last in the long double strings of trains, and there were frequent breakdowns. Many rivers had to be crossed and often the bridges needed repair, having been partially destroyed by the enemy. The line did not run direct, but north to Likhaia before they could head due east towards their goal.

Sokolov takes up the story: 'When he arrived at Kavanye with his army, Voroshilov ordered the armoured train to guard Svatovo station, and deployed his left

flank along the shore of the River Krasnaia. There was a heavy engagement at Mostki, and our men were forced to retire on Kavanye under cover of armoured cars. Information came in that the Germans were outflanking us, and so Voroshilov issued orders to fall back and we entrained at Kavanye.

'Just before sunrise, a train on the right-hand track overtook a train on the left-hand track, and through faulty loading caught the other; as a result of which an open wagon of each train and an armoured car were derailed. The line was completely blocked, so, one by one, the trains were brought to a standstill. The sun was already colouring the eastern sky, and on all faces there was anxiety and alarm, as we knew that the Germans were in hot pursuit of us. Timorous words of advice from one to another could be heard, and these gradually passed to threatening demands to tip the blocking wagons down the embankment together with the armoured car. Suddenly the commanding voice of Voroshilov cut in :

' "What's the matter, what are we waiting for?"

' "An accident."

' "Get that car out of the way. Get that wagon back on the track. Not a nail is to be left for those German bandits. What are you standing like dummies for? Get jacks, crowbars, ropes, pulleys! Look alive!'

'In a second the men were hunting everywhere for tools. Timbers to raise up the wheels were found and the men set to work casting sidelong glances at the army commander who was here, there and everywhere, getting a jack under an axle, risking the car slipping off the track on to him, or gathering stones to put under a lever. He was so enthusiastic and confident of success in shifting the weighty truck that the crowd submitted to his will, and within two hours the trains were running again, one after another, towards Kremennoie. The last train

to pass through the town was the staff train, in which Voroshilov and his companions were discussing further operations.

'When the train came over the bridge over the Donetz, there was a loud report and shrapnel whined overhead. A second shell followed and then a third, which struck the brige just as the last coach of the staff train crossed it. The armoured train which was now the last in the string rapidly came into action and silenced the enemy battery.

'When the trains were under a ridge of country which stretched for some two and a half miles along the track, with buildings overlooking it from the heights, there suddenly came a rattle of machine-gun and rifle fire. Our first impression was that the Germans had surrounded us, but it turned out that a Menshevik organisation of the Sodovoy factory were aware that the Germans were drawing near, and thinking that we Bolsheviks were in full retreat had decided to attack.

'Voroshilov ordered the trains to be stopped and the men formed up for an assault. The shooting ceased immediately and a deputation, including women, came hurrying down the hill to beg Voroshilov not to send a punitive expedition, as they were agreeable to hand over the culprits who had fired upon us. Although they had wounded men and killed one in the armoured train, Voroshilov agreed, and gave the order to move on.

'A few minutes later we hear three gun reports and learned that the men in the armoured train had sent three shells smashing into the factory to revenge their dead comrade. Alyabaiev, who commanded the armoured train, was immediately summoned.

' "Did you order that reprisal?" demanded Voroshilov.

' "I did," Alyabaiev confessed.

' "Then take note I will not allow these terrorist tricks," Voroshilov said severely. "We may be retiring now, but

that is only temporary, and in order to ensure a friendly return we mustn't leave enemies in the places we pass through. Make it clear to your men that your shells may have killed or crippled innocent people, and that we Bolsheviks do not make war upon a peaceful population."'

The railway line was only the thin thread which guided the retreating army; their detachments were spread out for several miles on either side of it, but Voroshilov soon grasped the management of this large military concentration. He found that the old method of doing everything in an office from a map and reports was quite useless. Each night he made his dispositions in the staff car of the train and issued his orders, but at daybreak he mounted his horse and, with a few of his staff, rode out to visit his principal units, and see for himself what progress they were making.

When the Germans advanced on Likhaia the whole army was threatened, as there were still eighty trains to come through the junction. Voroshilov was compelled to make a stand and fought a desperate battle. On the old principle that attack is the best form of defence, he flung his best units against the town of Goundorovskaia and here, for the first time, his men came into conflict with General Krasnov's White Cossacks.

The Bolsheviks stormed the town and drove out the Cossacks. Spurred on by victory they felt no fatigue, and chased the retreating enemy for a couple of miles. Beside themselves with delight, they took up a position on a rise of ground, and began to paint pictures of further victories which would enable them to clear the Ukraine, but they had little experience of warfare, and did not realise that this was only a single skirmish on a fair-sized front.

The worker Mikhail Ovski recounts the engagement:

'We had got ahead of the other units and had lost

contact with them. Taking advantage of hollows and ravines the enemy outflanked us and our whole detachment would have been cut to pieces had not Clim Voroshilov saved us.

'He observed the outflanking movement; despatched the other officers with him in various directions and then came galloping up to our hill on a foaming horse.

' "Retire at once," he shouted; "you're being surrounded on the right from the Donetz. Hurry or you'll be cut off."

'We filed back through burning Goundorovskaia and behind it was a deep hollow which made a dangerous defile. It was only by the skin of our teeth we were able to get through it in time and save ourselves from the machine-gun and artillery cross-fire of the Whites. Had we delayed another half-hour it would have been too late.

'The following day we found ourselves surrounded on three sides at Likhaia. The Cossacks were pressing us hard from Kamenskaia while the Germans were coming up the line from Rodokovo. A large number of our columns had met at Likhaia and the units were in great confusion. The incessant artillery fire from the enemy put many units in a state of panic, but in spite of that Voroshilov managed to save the eighty trains and the majority of the capable units after his first pitched battle, which raged for three days without ceasing.'

The trains crawled on through Likhaia to Belaia Kalitva, and now they had left the factory country for the open steppes. For spring it was suffocatingly hot; the steppe was like a furnace. Drawn up in squares, like the old British infantry formation, they fought off Krasnov's Cossacks again and again. As they marched, in short, uneven spurts, the morale of the troops sank lower and lower; the hope of a successful break-through seemed an impossible thing, but Voroshilov was every-

where among them and wherever he heard despondent murmurs he waved his automatic shouting: 'Who's spreading panic! Who's leaving? Show me the man and I'll shoot him on the spot.'

Mikhail Ovski relates another incident: 'In one of our biggest engagements, Voroshilov was with the Kharkov detachment and Mamontov's cavalry bore down upon the column with cries that froze the blood.

'A sharp order came from Clim: "Don't shoot. Let them draw near." The order was caught by the junior officers and passed down the line. The Cossacks came thundering across the grass waving their sabres. There was another sharp order: "Fire!"

'Our men opened a hellish fire from rifles and machine-guns, The front ranks of the charging cavalry seemed to stagger; men and horses rolled to the ground.

'"Comrades," yelled Voroshilov, "follow me to the attack." There was a tremendous answering "Hurrah!" from the men and the Red infantry poured down the hill like a flood of lava on to the disorganised cavalry. We had used all our ammunition and had no cartridges left, so we went at them with the bayonet.

'A Cossack colonel was immediately in front of us. Ivan Lakatosh, the Commander of the Kharkov detachment, did not shout but shrieked in an unnatural sort of falsetto: "Clim, Clim, shoot!" . . . An oath followed. . . . Voroshilov aimed. His automatic cracked. . . . The colonel seemed to jump in his saddle, his fur cap flew up and he rolled off his horse. Our men leapt at him, tore off his silver-mounted sabre and handed it to Clim.'

Again and again Voroshilov's men were driven in, but again and again they rallied round the long lines of halted trains, crawling beneath them and using the wheels and wagons for protection. At last they reached the great railway bridge over the Don at Nizhniy-Chers-

kaia. It had been blown to smithereens and there seemed no possible way to get the trains over the broad river. Many of Voroshilov's lieutenants wanted to abandon them and, taking only a minimum of stores with horse wagons, continue on down the banks of the river; but he knew that without the armoured trains to give them some protection they would all be massacred.

He refused to listen and dug himself in on a semicircle round the edge of the broken bridge with both flanks of this horse-shoe resting on the river, and for a month he sustained a siege in this position.

He had no materials to make a bridge, no instruments, no engineers, but the immense labour was undertaken of damming the whole river with earth so that it flooded over its banks, but railway lines could be laid across the embankment that dammed it.

One day while this work was in progress an armoured car was going out scouting in the direction of Pyati Izbyausk, so he took a seat in it. The car was driven into the heart of the White Cossacks' territory and the chauffeur, being lost, pulled up at a farm. They had run straight into an ambush; the place was occupied by the enemy and suddenly there was a terrific burst of rifle fire from the farm buildings. The chauffeur panicked in trying to back out of the yard and got stuck, but Voroshilov reassured him that the steel plating was bullet-proof. After fifty minutes of a hellish tattoo they succeeded in getting the car out; two hours later Voroshilov had issued the approprite orders and the Cossacks were driven out of the farm.

Men, women and children worked on damming the Don. Everybody worked, officers did not cease to be officers, but they were worker-officers; the bridge had to be made so that the armoured trains which were their base and only strength might pass over the river. The saving of a Tartar who was fighting in the partisan

ranks ran through the worker-army: 'The land-owner builds an iron bridge which can be blown up, but the worker builds a bridge of sand and the worker's bridge is stronger.' Krasnov made the most desperate efforts to drive the Red Army into the river, but at the end of thirty days and thirty nights of incessant fighting Voroshilov had his trains and baggage safely over the Don and recommenced his retreat towards Tzaritsyn.

Progress was slow as the Whites had torn up the railway lines for miles in advance of them and these could not be relaid at a quicker rate than three-quarters of a mile to a mile a day; so the speed of the retreat was reduced to this tortoise pace.

News now reached Voroshilov that Tzaritsyn itself was in danger. Its main railway cut, isolated from Moscow and the other centres of Revolution, it was almost surrounded by the Whites. The leaders in Tzaritsyn sent Voroshilov an urgent appeal to hurry, and now he was faced with a dual task; not only to save his own forces from destruction but to fling them into Tzaritsyn and so relieve the city.

Near the village of Morozovskaya a long and severe battle took place. Voroshilov's force was completely surrounded and Krasnov flung great masses of his cavalry at the almost exhausted workmen; but finally Voroshilov broke through the ring and staggered on towards his goal. He reached it in the month of June—still fighting.

For three solid months Voroshilov, the untrained leader with his ragged bands, had out-manœuvred and out-fought both the German Army and the great Russian cavalryman, General Krasnov. When history comes to be written the story of the retreat will rank with that of the immortal Ney, who saved the remnant of the Grande Armée in the terrible retreat from Moscow. By sheer will power and indomitable courage, Voroshilov, the

ex-pit-boy, succeeded in conveying 35,00 non-combatant refugees across a thousand *versts* of enemy territory and bringing 500 trains with a great store of munitions and 15,000 fighting men to the relief of Tzaritsyn.

The Red Verdun

(TZARITSYN—LATER RENAMED STALINGRAD)

When Tzaritsyn was first attacked by the Whites the town was held by a defence committee headed by the Bolsheviks, Minin, Yerman and Toumak. The Bolsheviks were in a state of panic. Many of their detachments had to be disarmed on account of disaffection and others hung about in the streets refusing to obey orders.

Information came in that two Red concentrations were moving down on Tzaritsyn from the Donetz Basin, one under the command of Sievers and the other of Voroshilov. The Bolshevik, Serditch, tells us: 'I remember as if it were yesterday a meeting at the French factory. The Chairman of the Tzaritsyn Soviet, Comrade Yerman, was asked: 'What are these units? And who are Voroshilov and Sievers?" He replied: "Sievers is an officer, but according to our information he's on our side. As for Voroshilov he is an old secret Bolshevik worker of Lougansk and absolutely trustworthy." Messengers were sent off at once asking both groups to hurry to our assistance.

'Shortly afterwards Voroshilov arrived with his battered army. The Cossacks were close behind him and pressing us on three sides. Our men were just resisting them as best they could, but there was hardly any central control of the defence at all. We all lived from hour to

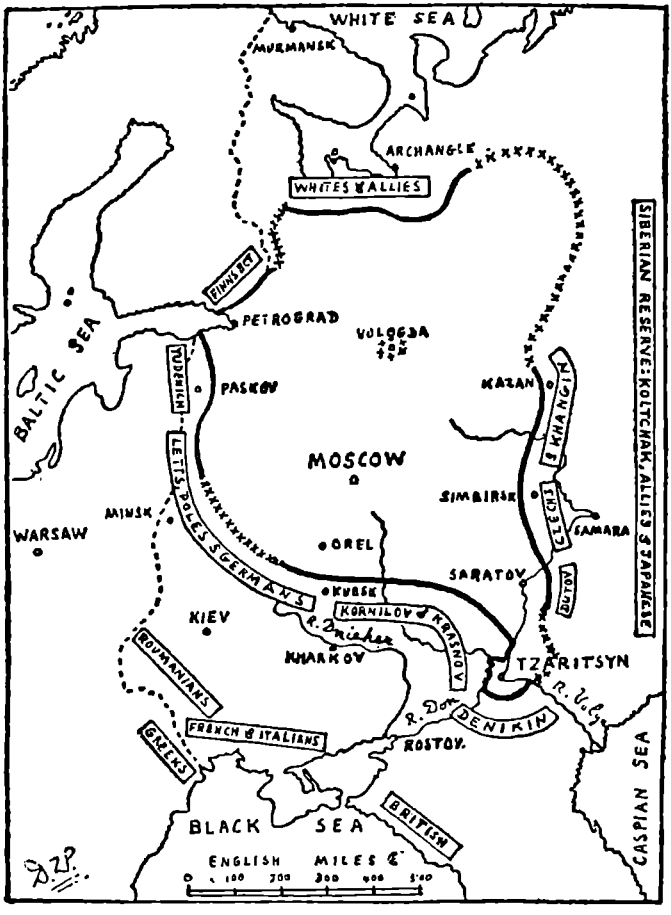
hour, each unit in the defence helping its neighbour as best it could, but hundreds of the men were loafing in the town, occupying the station as though it were a camp and living in the trains so that these could not be used for getting supplies in from the outer districts.

'Voroshilov showed such vigour and determination upon his arrival that the Revolutionary Committee immediately appointed him to the command of all our forces for the defence of Tzaritsyn.'

Many of the men in his own army were so war-weary that they wished to call a halt. They felt that the city was virtually certain to fall to the Whites upon which they would all be slaughtered, and that therefore the sensible thing was to get the best terms they could from Krasnov by surrendering right away. They thought that Tzaritsyn was only one among many towns that were being held throughout the country by the Red forces, so that its surrender would not materially affect the safety of the Revolution.

Voroshilov, however, insisted that Tzaritsyn was the decisive point of the whole civil war. Under threats from the Allies, the pressure of the German invaders, and with anti-Bolsheviks flocking to the White's standards in every direction, the power of the Kremlin was rapidly slipping away. A bloody fight was being waged upon the steppes outside the new capital by Tukachevsky, but even if he succeeded in holding out, Tzaritsyn meant life or death to Moscow. Not only was the town the key to the granary, but it was also the last hope of preventing a junction between the White forces of Admiral Koltchak and General Denikin. Tzaritsyn was the only Red wedge driven into the White armies and Voroshilov insisted to his comrades that they must hold it at all costs.

He immediately set about organising the scattered units, with his own tried fighters as the nucleus, into the Tenth Army of the Republic, gave orders for the streng-



BOLSHEVIKS' DESPERATE SITUATION, SPRING–SUMMER, 1918

More or less permanent fronts, marked ▬▬▬ Sporadic fighting, marked xxxxxxxxxxxx Note the "salient of death" at Tzaritsyn.

thening of the defences at critical points and began preparations for a prolonged siege.

Tzaritsyn lies on the west bank of the Volga, but the mighty river bends sharply away from it on both sides, forming an angle: one arm of which runs north-east towards Saratov, Simbirsk and the Urals, and the other south-east to the Caspian Sea. General Krasnov's army occupied the west bank of the Volga encircling the town on three sides. The railway to Moscow was cut, but the pointed east bank of the river remained open to the Bolsheviks and the river itself was still free although under fire. As long as the town held out they were able, by running the gauntlet of machine-guns and artillery each time, to send long strings of barges loaded with grain up to Saratov, and from there the cargoes could be railed to the starving centres of the Revolution.

Only a short time before there had been music in the gay town park and plays had been given on the open-air stage, but now the place resembled a military camp. Government buildings, theatres, cinemas and big private houses were turned into hospitals. The prisons were filled to overcrowding with Mensheviks and Whites. In the streets and at every crossroad were patrols stopping all passers-by and examining their documents. Two cruisers, a destroyer and an armoured steamer lay in the Volga. Round the town itself, which formed a 'U' in the great salient of the southern revolutionary front, proper trenches were dug and barbed-wire defences put up. Communications were established with the Red partisans who were fighting on an irregular front along both the far-flung wings which stretched for several hundred miles. Soon Voroshilov was directing not only the defence of Tzaritsyn but the operations of the Red forces as far north as Archeda and as far south as Astrakhan. Even the North Caucasus and, for some time, the Red front at Baku came under his control. The total length

of the line he was holding exceeded 375 miles.

When Voroshilov took over the defence of Tzaritsyn he not only became the fighting general responsible for this important point, but took a hundred other matters into his capable hands as well. As a metal worker of many years' experience he understood munition plants, and to one who had slaved like themselves the factory workers responded to his appeals for co-operation in a way they would never have done for a regular soldier. He soon had the idle machine shops running again and staffed by willing workers, who plugged at it night and day turning out every sort of munition.

He organised his command into six divisions and certain additional brigades of specialists as army troops. Their number was nothing like sufficient to hold so wide a front, so he had to devise a way to keep his main bodies perpetually on the move from one threatened sector to another. This was in 1918, when the great armies of Western Europe were still drearily footslogging from place to place. 'Waste of energy,' declared Voroshilov, 'and loss of what may be vital time.' In consequence *this civilian soldier was the first man to mechanise an entire army.* He commandeered every working motor vehicle in Tzaritsyn and repaired all the old ones so that they could rush his infantry to each danger point in turn, built dozens of armoured cars to support them, converted 39 ordinary trains into armoured trains and made 11 more brand new ones. It was, perhaps, because he had spent his early life in the machine shops instead of exercising horses that he was able to visualise war from a new angle. The following passages are from the memoirs of Tarassov-Rodionov who was present at the siege.

. . . . .

'The Soviet Government was not then a year old. Trains hardly crept from one station to another in twenty-four hours. All over Russia rusting factories stood in cold grim silence. The worker families pounded potato peelings and greedily waited for any word from their vanished breadwinners, who were scattered over the innumerable and endless fronts of war. At that time from the walls of houses greyish tatters of newspaper placards frenziedly shrieked the grim news.

'LOCKHART AND NOLAN'S PLOT AGAINST SOVIET GOVERNMENT. . . . DORA KAPLAN SERIOUSLY WOUNDS LENIN. . . .GERMANS PLUNDER UKRAINE. . . FRENCH LAND ARMY AT MURMANSK. . . . ENGLISH TAKE ARCHANGEL. . . . CZECHOSLOVAK WHITE GUARDS EXECUTE KAZAN WORKERS. . . . JAPANESE MOVE ON CHITA. . . . GENERAL KRASNOV CONCENTRATES ALL FORCES ON RED TZARITSYN.

'Had you entered the Central Recruiting Depot in Moscow and pushed your way down the dark narrow corridors of that stuffy house through crowds of torn leather jackets, with volunteers awaiting travelling papers for all parts of the country and had you, at last, asked any of the secretaries, "Comrade, which of all these fronts is at present the most dangerous?" you would unquestionably have received this answer: "Tzaritsyn, Comrade. At present it is the sole key to our food supply; without grain we cannot keep on. Tzaritsyn too is the only Red wedge we have thrust into the United Counter Revolution by which our enemies are hemming us in."

'In Tzaritsyn the factories were working at full blast turning out the thousand-and-one necessities needed by the army. Middle-class folk huddled in their little homes peering through their windows, constantly saw the newly-formed units of Red Guards marching off from the barracks to the front, repaired armoured cars issuing from the factory gates, wagons taking mountains of bread, bundles of uniform coats, ammunition and cases

of water-melon sugar to the Army supply centres.

'Voroshilov was everywhere. Something went wrong with the dockers who were loading the grain barges; he went down to the docks and settled it. The Mensheviks tried to sabotage our motions in the Soviets; he threw them out. The downhearted elements at the factories talked of throwing up their jobs; he put new life into them.

'The troops of Krasnov lay like an iron horse-shoe round the town; their flanks resting on the banks of the flooded Volga. The Whites knew that the fall of Tzaritsyn meant an open road to Moscow and victory. They dared not leave it untaken in their rear.

'In August, Krasnov's attacks became positively ferocious. He sent his bearded Don Cossacks under Mamontov hurtling against us and his White Officer infantry battalions sometimes came to the assault with the bayonet as often as three times in one day. They pressed us right back on to the Volga and at some points they penetrated to within five miles of the town. Our units, badly armed, half equipped, bleeding, ragged, fought rearguard action after rearguard action. They became so desperate that one night a number of the Commanders met to arrange for a retirement across the river the following morning.

'That evening an order came from Voroshilov: "Not a step back. We counter-attack at dawn." He had roused the whole town, equipped a worker regiment to reinforce us, and was forming still further battalions all that night in the French factory, which reached us during the course of the morning. After fierce fighting at Beketovka and Vorontonov the Whites were thrown back and retired with heavy losses.

' "Food, food," came the perpetual cry from the divisions. "Why so little sugar issued? We must have a little meat. Not enough boots—we must have boots!" Some-

how, Voroshilov found time to see to everything and yet was always present whenever a sector was seriously threatened at the front. Here are two typical incidents. Riding out to the south of Krivaia-Mouzda one day he saw that the so-called "steel division" commanded by Zhlova, which numbered some 5,000 bayonets, 2,000 sabres, and 25 guns, had been badly shaken by a cavalry attack and that the Cossacks had succeeded in turning the division's left flank. Voroshilov rode straight at the enemy. The men who were fleeing before the Cossacks rallied immediately upon seeing his well-loved figure. The encircling movement was checked and the White cavalry driven off.

'On another occasion, the Whites were making a separate attack on Goumrak. The day was silvery with a pale sun. Voroshilov had gone himself to the front to see that his orders given during the night had been carried out. He entered a staff coach on a train at Voroponovo station, a few miles outside Tzaritsyn, for a conference. He took his seat in a corner and bent over the map. Next to him sat black-bearded Koulik, the commander of the Army artillery; on the other side Alyabaiev, commander of the armoured trains, his pale young face propped in his hands from weariness. Khoudiakov, commanding the First Communist Division, which was holding a distant sector, came in unshaven and hoarse from shouting; he dragged a wounded foot, wrapped in a sock and soft slipper.

'Through the window we could see the trains loaded with goods and refugees from the Don, standing peacefully on the sidings; and other trains with the wounded, some of which were from the previous night's battle. There were not sufficient engines at this time, and the station was hopelessly choked. As the army commander and his assistants were intently studying the situation

there came a sudden wild cry from somewhere near the trucks: "Cossacks!"

'In an instant the half-naked children and women and old men refugees poured shrieking from the wagons, on to the track, under the wheels, out on to the level grey steppes; and the wounded soldiers creeping round the door jambs tumbled out on to the ground, their bandaged stumps bleeding, groaning and gasping. Some of them tried to grip their rifles and load them with their teeth, though all that hopeless heroism was useless among the helpless mass of fleeing refugees.

'Voroshilov, Koulik, Alyabaiev and the rest leapt out of their coach in a second, and stood staring towards the south. The wounded Khoudiakov was already running down the station platform; one foot in a boot and the other in a sock only as his slipper had fallen off. He was cursing terribly, waving his revolver in the air, and trying to turn out a dozen Red Army men who had hidden beneath a truck.

'Voroshilov calmly unslung the carbine he always carried. Against the background of the village orchards to the south could be seen a cavalry column of the enemy making for us across a hollow. Perhaps it was only a few squadrons, perhaps it was a whole regiment, which had broken through. None of us knew, but one thing was clear, there was no force at the station which could put up a defence. In about five minutes the enemy would be on us and cut every man down. Someone beside Voroshilov whispered swiftly: "Your horse is good. Get off at once. Escape! Escape!"

'The speaker had voiced the thoughts of us all. Our one reaction had been—how can we save our irreplaceable and beloved army commander? Voroshilov turned and looked the man who had spoken up and down with a scornful glance. Next second his eye fell on a machine-gun just by the station building, evidently mounted for

defence, but now abandoned in the panic.

'He rushed at it, tumbled it into a ditch behind the building, trained it on the enemy, pushed a ribbon of bullets into it, and suddenly the angry tattoo of the gun echoed hollowly among the abandoned trains. We all rushed to help him, but the squadron of enemy cavalry, deploying as it came out of the hollow, was already plunging about in disorder as the bullets found their mark. The rearward ranks hastily turned about and galloped off into the distance.

'Voroshilov left some of the Red Army men posted by the gun and, pulling his map out of his pocket, went back to the train. He took up the conversation exactly where it had been broken off, as though those recent moments, when we were all in imminent danger of our lives, had never happened.

'He used to say: "We must always be ready to fight in an unexpected position. It is better to perish in an attack than to be killed or wounded while falling back," and he grafted that idea on the army.

'Even such chance Allies of the Red Army as Doumenko, the Cossack chief, whom Voroshilov restrained from excesses and showing their brigand natures, who recognised neither party nor the decencies of humanity, who stayed with us only from love of fighting; even these, who would not accept orders from the Revolutionary Council, obeyed Voroshilov with respect—but only Voroshilov.

'He was always at the front among his lads. Some he would teach quietly, others lecture, and others again give a thorough blowing up, but he would always do it without any fuss. To those who had behaved stupidly he would give a sharp, fixed glance, then smile and say something so simple, but at the same time so much to the point, that the culprit would immediately wish that the earth would open and swallow him up.

' "Of course," he would say later, "we are all partisans. We have had no military schooling, and for lack of that we are paying dearly now. One cannot expect too much, but all will be well as long as the men continue to show such splendid courage."

'Sometimes those civilian soldiers were under the fiercest pressure from the trained troops of the enemy, and the bands of gold-epauletted officers nearly broke their way into the outskirts of the city. Then the sirens shrieked the alarm. The workers streamed out of the munition factories and made for the hillocks or a roof-top nearby, with the very rifles which they had been repairing still in their hands. The troops of the Czarist Army could not break them.

'In the middle of the town the three-storied mansion of a rich mustard manufacturer had been taken over as the headquarters of the Tenth Army.

'The ground floor held the general offices, where typewriters rattled without cessation, and the telephone exchange. There were lines to all the principal units and a direct one to Moscow. Roukhimovich hung on it night and day without a sign of weariness, except for blinking his eyes which were red from want of sleep. Tall Marochkin also worked there; he could constantly be seen with his Kuban fur *papenka* on the back of his head running between the office and the factories. Koulik, the ex-sergeant artillery commander, too; he was known as "Grand-dad" in the army on account of his thick black beard.

'Voroshilov, wearing a felt cloak, a leather jacket girt round with a strap, and a Mauser pistol at his side, would come storming in from one of his daily tours of the battle front.

' "Marochkin!" he would shout. "Are we never to have the girths and traces promised us? Koulik, why are the panoramic gun sights short on the last order? Rouk-

himovich, get on the telephone to Moscow and hurry them up with the heavy shells. You're all asleep, damn you!' and he would curse loud and long.

'The first floor of the great house contained the ballroom, where sessions of the Army Council were held, and other rooms for the Operations Staff; Efim Shchadenko, an ex-tailor, Maguidov, an ex-watchmaker, and Minin, the son of a priest; all key men in the defence of the beleaguered city. Here also was a big room in which the fluctuations of the battle front were marked off on a large wall map with scrupulous care in coloured wools. Not a single non-Party man was ever allowed inside that Holy of Holies of the War. Young Roudinev guarded it with the jealousy of a tiger, until he was killed on one of his trips to the front; then his place was taken by the new chief of staff, dour, thin Matziletzki, whose sunken eyes glinted darkly from beneath the crumpled forage cap he always wore.

'On the top floor were the living quarters. In a spacious well-lit dining-room five or six of the Revolutionary Council always fed, and any divisional commanders who had come in from the front. The food was simple and good, but during this time of critical operations Voroshilov would never allow any spirits on the table. Outside was a sort of cupboard, where Voroshilov's faithful follower, Shchadenko, the Political Commissar of the Tenth Army and special emissary of the Central Military Council of the Revolution, dossed down on a tumbled heap of coats and top-boots. Across the landing was Voroshilov's room, where his young wife, that stylish elegant woman, Caterina Davydovna, the ballet dancer, spent a good part of her time lounging on a wide mahogany bed, smoking cigarette after cigarette, while the cursing, stamping din went on below.

'When she was bored she would amuse herself dashing up and down the town in a military motor car, wearing

a wide-skirted Persian lamb coat and a rakish Cossack *papenka,* cocked at an angle on her handsome head. She seemed much too much of an aristocrat for the wife of a workers' leader; they resented the sight of her beautiful clothes and carefully tended person in that war-scarred city, but Voroshilov had never been a hypocrite. He had never held that because the workers led drab and ugly lives they should always remain drab and ugly. He wanted plenty of culture and beautiful things for all. For many years he had given eleven out of every twelve waking hours to his work for the Revolution, but he reserved his right in the twelfth hours to enjoy himself as he saw fit; and he was a great enjoyer. No man living could accuse him of ever having sold the cause for special benefits. Clim Voroshilov was above reproach and even the revolutionaries, who believed that one could not be a true proletarian without dirty hands, suffered the presence of the beautiful Caterina Davydovna without a murmur.'

All through the summer, Lenin and the Council of People's Commissars, in Moscow, had been tensely watching Tzaritsyn. They had no troops with which to reinforce it, but among them was one man who was worth an army corps; a round-shouldered, unimpressive-looking individual with a long drooping moustache and a face pitted by smallpox—'Koba' Stalin.

In the autumn, Lenin asked him to go to the 'Red Verdun,' as the Bolsheviks so proudly called Tzaritsyn, and by his presence support Voroshilov. Before his departure, Stalin said in a tired voice to the council: 'For a long time now I seem to have become a *specialist* in cleaning up the Augean stables of the Ministry of War.'

That was a sly dig at his irreconcilable enemy, the Jew journalist Trotsky, who was President of the Revolutionary Army Soviet and War Lord of the new Republic. Every general was under him, and all supplies

and munitions and army reserves were in his hands. His was supposed to be the final word in all army matters, but whenever his arrangements broke down or a Bolshevik army looked like being smashed—in fact, at every danger point in turn—Stalin, the incorruptible, would suddenly make his appearance, secure the dismissal of incompetent leaders, weed out the untrustworthy element among the officers, and support the most dependable through his immense power of personal touch with Lenin, and his privilege of going over Trotsky's head.

Trotsky, as we know, was also now appearing in person on the most important fronts at critical times, and the methods of both these men for strengthening the resistance of the Red troops were the same—merciless cruelty and wholesale executions. Trotsky would also address meetings of the worker masses before the shootings, making speeches of hysterical denunciation against the men who were to be shot, and lengthy exhortations to fighting troops which were meant to go down to history. Stalin, on the other hand, could neither speak nor write well, but he had the nose of a ferret for disaffection and carried out his work in ruthless, sinister silence. The two men hated each other; Trotsky because of Stalin's interference, and Stalin because he considered Trotsky an incompetent windbag.

Before Stalin left the Kremlin, Lenin expressed anxiety regarding a revolt of the Mensheviks in the south, but Stalin reassured him in his melancholy voice:

'You can rest quiet about those hysterical creatures, Vladimir Ilyitch. I'll have no scruples whatever. Enemies must be treated as enemies,' and pressing Lenin's hand he departed.

In dusty Tzaritsyn on the Volga, the dried leaves were fluttering down from the trees and the wind was whistling through the streets with the penetrating cold of the

October steppes when Stalin arrived. He knew Voroshilov well, having worked with him as an underground revolutionary at Baku in 1911. They worked together again with complete trust and confidence in each other.

Voroshilov remained the actual army commander responsible for the defence of the town. Stalin was the political agent of the Kremlin; there to stamp out treachery and strengthen Voroshilov's hand by overawing the civil population into a state of terror which should ensure their not striking the army in the back. They were in communication with Moscow by direct wire and it was in use every hour. It was rumoured that the pair never slept at night. Voroshilov planned and organised. Stalin controlled the personnel and broke traitors without mercy.

With them, in the mustard manufacturer's mansion, was Cherviakov, the head of the Tzaritsyn *Cheka* and his executioners. Those arrested on Stalin's orders were taken to the Volga where, in the middle of the silvery water, lay a long black barge. It was there, almost nightly, that executions took place and the bodies were flung overboard into the river. Stalin was doing his work of clearing out the Augean stable and his name was only mentioned with bated breath. The Red Terror gripped the town.

The siege dragged on. Voroshilov was desperately short of men. Trotsky promised him reinforcements and sent the whole Volskia Division down the Volga. The officers were reactionaries and untrustworthy and allowed the men to desert. Only one brigade reached Tzaritsyn and that did not withstand the first enemy attack. Part of it was taken prisoner and part of it ran away; Voroshilov had to rush up his fighting partisans to fill the gap. These worker-soldiers became so devoted to him that they began to call themselves. 'Voroshilov Men', but he refused to allow it, saying that they must

regard themselves as 'Lenin Men' only.

By this time Voroshilov had developed into an extremely capable fighting general. He knew nothing of strategy and tactics as laid down in military manuals, but he had enormous energy and was prodigiously brave. Even the Whites wrote of him in November: 'One has to give credit where credit is due. Though the former mechanic Voroshilov is no strategist in the generally accepted meaning of the word, it cannot be denied that he has great ability for stubborn resistance and for shock tactics.'

He showed his presence of mind in many a battle. Over and over again he led the attack on the enemy's machine-guns himself or rushed in his car to a point in the line where danger threatened to take a hand personally in driving off the Cossacks.

Nominally he was under the orders of the ex-Czarist General Sytin, and later the ex-Czarist General Vazetis, whom Trotsky had placed in command of the whole south revolutionary front, but he refused to obey their orders and went on fighting in his own inimitable way. Stalin supported him, telling him again and again: 'You are the Red general for the men, Clim. They know you're to be trusted and you're worth a hundred of these treacherous ex-White officers.'

Trotsky was not slow to see that an opposition of strong determined men was being forged against him in Tzaritsyn. Stalin, Voroshilov, Shchadenko and the rest were not of the Intelligentsia, neither were they international revolutionaries; they were Russian working men who had determined to build a new Russia from their own knowledge of how the Russian people could better work and live. They did not like scribblers and they did not like Jews. Tale bearers whispered that in the mustard manufacturer's mansion talkers and theorists were despised, and that a real Russian spirit reigned

there, including the enjoyment of drink and women. They would not listen to the advice of the ex-White military experts, but were determined to fight their own war in their own way.

One night when the Tzaritsyn Army Council was in session, in the big ballroom, the Whites were pressing forward and the position was desperate. Instead of sending more shells Trotsky sent an angry telegram from Moscow that the ex-Czarist General Nossovitch was on his way to take over the command.

Voroshilov was furious. 'Of course,' he shouted, 'we are only partisans. We've had no training in military schools and academies, but that fool Trotsky will never learn his lesson and realise that we are more to be relied upon then these ex-Czarists who don't give a damn for the Revolution and would betray us at the first opportunity.'

The taciturn Stalin, ever sucking at his pipe, sat slouched over one corner of the table. He took the telegram and scribbled across it: 'No notice to be taken.'* Voroshilov gave an order to Cherviakov of the *Cheka* that General Nossovitch was to be arrested immediately he arrived and confined on the black barge in the river. The Council continued its session.

Autumn drew into winter. Voroshilov had succeeded in straightening one wing of his salient and cleared the railway, opening up communications by train with Moscow. The snow had come, the men were freezing in their trenches, and Mamontov's Cossacks were still attacking doggedly. Urgent appeals were again made to Trotsky for reinforcements. He promised to send the Eleventh 'Iron' Division, but this also failed to arrive. When it reached Novakhopersk, the much praised 'Iron' Division with its two brigades of 35 guns and 100 machine-guns, under the command of officers just re-

* This telegram is now in the Soviet War Museum.

leased by Trotsky's express orders from the Nizhniy Novgorod *Cheka*, unfurled its banners and went straight over to the Whites.

'We must send cavalry that we can trust against Mamontov,' said Voroshilov, 'but where the devil are we to get it? Doumenko is a good fighter, but he's cunning and we can't depend upon him. If he were to find Mamontov too hard a nut to crack he might quite well take his men over to the enemy. We know from the *Cheka* report that Krasnov wrote him a letter promising forgiveness if he would. You, Shchadenko, keep a sharp eye on Doumenko. Send him reinforcements, but see that there are plenty of trustworthy politicals among them. There's one fellow called Budenny, a great big chap with an enormous moustache, an ex-sergeant of the dragoons. I noticed him the other day; he's bold and reliable. Send him, and make him responsible for Doumenko's good conduct.'

It was in that way that Budenny, who afterwards became famous as the great cavalry leader and was christened 'The Red Murat', first came to prominence through that eagle-eyed picker of men, Voroshilov.

In spite of the magnificent way in which he was conducting his operations Main Headquarters were constantly sending in complaints of him to Trotsky. 'Voroshilov will not obey orders. Voroshilov does not reply to questions. Voroshilov has arrested General Nossovitch whom you sent to supersede him in his command.' Trotsky sent frantic telegrams to Tzaritsyn but Stalin tore them up.

In the Kremlin, however, Lenin was growing anxious. Could Voroshilov's 'resistance of the people' continue to withstand the strategy of the White generals? Had the ill-favoured 'Koba' Stalin succeeded in giving this 'resistance' a renewed strength?

From the Headquarters of Vazetis Trotsky sent tele-

gram after telegram to the inscrutable Lenin who had not yet pronounced in favour of either party, and ended up with one which read: *'Imperatively insist upon the recall of Stalin. Tzaritsyn is in a bad way although we have a preponderance of man-power there. Voroshilov is capable of commanding a regiment but not a force of 5,000 men. I have ordered him to send me reports of operations and reconnaissances twice daily. If this is not done tomorrow I shall have him court-martialled.'*

It seemed as if Trotsky had won this internal war, for Lenin recalled Stalin to Moscow and Trotsky went down by train himself to Tzaritsyn to tackle Voroshilov.

Trotsky's train drew up in one of the stations beside that of Stalin who was proceeding in the opposite direction, to Moscow. Stalin got out of his train and slouched across to Trotsky's carriage. The War Minister was there surrounded by his staff of commissars and *ci-devant* officers. Stalin stood in the doorway wearing a worn soldier's coat, a dirty cap and unclean top-boots. The splenetic journalist rounded on him, crying: 'I must have a Left Wing to the Southern Front that I can depend on. I must have it. I will have it. I will have it at all costs.'

Stalin leaned against the door jamb, a faintly insolent smile in his lazy oriental eyes. He sucked at his pipe and spat: 'But surely, Comrade Trotsky, you don't intend to get rid of all the leaders at Tzaritsyn, do you? I shouldn't try that if I were you. They're good fellows.'

'These "good" fellows will ruin the Revolution,' raged Trotsky, 'and the Revolution can't wait for them to grow up. I don't know yet who I shall get rid of, but somebody's got to go. There's one thing I insist on, Comrade Stalin, and that is the inclusion of Tzaritsyn in Soviet Russia. Do you understand? Whoever is in command there must take his orders from me.'

Stalin screwed up his yellow eyes, shrugged his sloping shoulders and left the carriage.

When Trotsky's train steamed into besieged Tzaritsyn a few hours later Voroshilov did not come to the station to meet him. He was busy and in his place he sent his reckless adherent, the artful, heavy-browed, squint-eyed Political Commissar Shchadenko, the ex-tailor. While Shchadenko was feeling out the lie of the land Voroshilov was raging up and down his room at Headquarters swearing in good Russian at Trotsky, the ex-Menshevik who had only come over to the party eighteen months before. He cursed him for a miserable cosmopolitan *émigré* who had not set eyes on Russia for years yet dared to come here and threaten to sweep out the real Russians who had made the Revolution; for a meddling Jew who had the insolence to talk of replacing them by treacherous Czarist generals.

When Trotsky arrived Voroshilov received him in the room where the Army Council sittings were held. He had with him his chief of staff and Trotsky was accompanied by his secretary. Voroshilov had just returned from a visit to the northern sector of his front; he was clad in his usual leather jacket, girt round with a strap and had a Mauser pistol at his side. He had thrown his felt cloak over the back of a chair.

The two men differed in every way; in culture, in mind, in habit of thought, in temperament as well as in appearance. The one, a typical Jew with a sharp, rather cruel face and oriental head of black wavy hair over a big forehead; the other a typical broad-nosed, square-jawed Russian workman, with a cleft chin and blue eyes as hard as ice.

When they were seated Trotsky took off his glasses, wiped them carefully and spoke: 'In my quality of President of the Army Soviet, Comrade Voroshilov, I consider it my duty first of all to put one cardinal question

to you. Do you consider it necessary for the victory of the Revolution to obey implicityly *all* the orders of the Commander in Chief?'

Voroshilov drew his eyebrows together. 'I consider it necessary to obey *such* orders as I recognise to be right.' He stared with open hostility in front of him and his fingers drummed upon the butt of the automatic in his belt.

This was something very different to the reception Trotsky had been used to from other revolutionary generals. 'Comrade Voroshilov,' he said, 'in my quality of President of the Army Soviet responsible for all fronts of the Republic, I must bring to your notice that unless, here and now, you undertake in future unconditionally to obey *all* orders and carry out *all* operations as instructed, I shall send you under guard to Moscow to be tried by the revolutionary tribunal.'

'What!' shouted Voroshilov, springing up and kicking away his chair from under him. 'I'm no diplomat, Comrade Trotsky. I go straight to the point. While I'm in command at Tzaritsyn I will obey all orders I consider suitable. I'm in a better position here on the spot to judge than either you or the C. in C. Vazetis at Headquarters. You sent me a White general and where is he now, this Nossovitch? I arrested him on his arrival as a suspect, instead of having him shot as I should have done. At your order I let him free and like the snake he is he has deserted to the Whites with all his staff and all the confidential papers of one of your armies. That's the man you would have liked me to hand over my command to. As for the tribunal—all right. I'm a Bolshevik and a Bolshevik of older standing than you. I've no fear of any tribunal. I've worked in the *Cheka* myself. Let them judge me.'

Trotsky's sickly face went white with rage. 'You fool,' he sneered, 'the time for guerilla warfare is over. If we

keep on as we have in the past, the train of the Revolution is going to crash. As for the desertion of Nossovitch, are you sure he didn't go over to the Whites because you put him in the hands of the *Cheka* instead of letting him do the work he was sent here to do? He didn't desert while he was with Sytin. D'you know how many military specialists we've won over to our cause? Thirty thousand! Would you replace them all by untrained worker partisans?'

Voroshilov banged the table with his clenched fist. 'I know how many Don Basin workmen broke through the hornet's nest of Cossack armies with me. I know how much real heroism was shown by these plain people uneducated in military finesse. They'll fight like devils under me, but they won't fight under your ex-Czarist generals and colonels whom they've every reason to distrust.'

'We'll see about that,' sneered Trotsky, and he stamped from the room.

That night Trotsky, stretched on a sofa in his room upstairs, said to his secretary: 'I can see that Stalin has been very clever here in choosing all the people with corns that have been trodden on; but I know how to deal with them.' He laughed, and went on to mention whom he would dismiss and whom he would replace by whom in Tzaritsyn. But Trotsky did not send Voroshilov under guard to Moscow, nor did Voroshilov submit to Trotsky.

In the meantime Stalin had arrived in Moscow and seen Lenin. Next morning a telegram was handed to Trotsky from the master of them all which read, '*Stalin has arrived today, bringing with him the news of three great victories to our arms at Tzaritsyn. He has persuaded Voroshilov and the rest of those whom he considers valuable and even irreplaceable to remain on and in future work with heaquarters. In Stalin's view the sole reason for their dissatisfaction is the extreme delay*

in your delivery of munitions to them. That is also why the Caucasian army of 20,000 excellently disposed men is being destroyed. In bringing these statements of Stalin's to your notice I ask you to think them over and reply, firstly, whether you are willing to have a heart-to-heart talk with him yourself, for which he is quite prepared to come to you, and secondly, whether you think it is possible under certain stated conditions to put aside all former misunderstanding and to arrange to work together, which is what Stalin so much desires. As for me, I am of the opinion that is it absolutely necessary to do all in your power to attain co-operation with Stalin.'

Trotsky knew that Stalin had beaten him for the moment, but he was not resigned to accept total defeat, and without seeing Voroshilov again he wired to the Kremlin : '*Agree to meet Stalin, but to leave Voroshilov here after the failure of all attempts at compromise is impossible. We must send a new staff and a new commander to Tzaritsyn. Moving Voroshilov to the Ukraine.*

Party discipline demanded that Voroshilov obey the order. Frowning and cursing, he penned a farewell order in his schoolboy hand to the army of the Red Verdun, calling upon the men to continue stubbornly and mercilessly in the fight to beat the enemy. Gloomily thumping his heavily iron-shod greased boots, he went downstairs to the staff offices and threw the order to a typist to copy. Immediately afterwards he set out for Moscow with his personal entourage and Caterina Davydovna.

In Moscow he found that the representative of the Tazritsyn army, a sailor named Zhivoder, had already been 'liquidated' by Trotsky. In Moscow, too, on Voroshilov's arrival Trotsky's friend Sosnovsky, the editor of *Pravda,* published an article under the heading, 'The Small Defects of our Machinery'. It was a detailed account of one of Voroshilov's Tzaritsyn orgies when, after a victorious battle, the commander of the army,

accompanied by his friends, had galloped madly about the town in three spanking *troikas* with women and, in one of the villages outside, had danced the *trepak*, made a row and finished up by smacking somebody's face; which performance, so the article ran, brought grave discredit upon the Soviet State.

Voroshilov was furious. 'All right,' he stormed, 'I did smack somebody's face. And drank. And kicked up the devil's own row in the company of women! Well, and what then? Do I cease to be a man just because I command an army?' But on the advice of his friends he wrote a refutation to *Pravda*, saying that nothing of the kind had ever happened, and that all this talk was sheer invention on the part of counter-revolutionaries.

For the moment Trotsky, the scribbler and windbag, had bested him; but only for the moment. Lenin had known him and trusted him for many a year. 'Koba' Stalin, the round-shouldered, shrewd-brained Georgian who was the power behind the throne, had worked and fought with him for many months and realised his capabilities. The army that he had led out of the death-trap in the Ukraine to the shelter of Tzaritsyn would have died for him to a man. The soldiers who had defended the Red Verdun with him had adored him for his bravery. Even the ex-White officers who had come over to the Reds admired the splendid vigour of his tactics and to the fighting workers he was still one of themselves, yet gifted beyond them all. From June to December, unaided by experienced military commanders, he had held the Red Verdun against the Cossack hordes. Whatever might happen now, Voroshilov would go down to history as the man who had hung out in the 'salient of death' on the southern front, fed Moscow, and saved the Revolution.

STORY XIX

To close this series of tales and oddments I give the first of my stories ever to appear in print.

In the autumn of 1932 my agent had been putting out a few of my earliest efforts for some weeks when, one day, he telephoned to me to say that the great George Doran would like to see me to discuss one of these stories if I was prepared to make certain alterations to it.

George Doran was one of the mightiest powers in the American publishing world but he had been living over here for some time as the governing editor of *Nash's Magazine* and numerous other productions.

On arriving at the Savoy I was shown up to his luxurious flat on the top floor of the hotel. He was in bed for he had not been very well, he said. I have rarely seen a more distinguished-looking man and he reminded me irresistibly of the old-world American diplomat one used sometimes to see in the early plays of this century.

He scarcely mentioned my story. It was clear that he had only sent for me because he wished to see what I was like. For over an hour he talked, giving me many invaluable hints out of his vast experience in literary matters, then sent me away as happy as a sandboy (whatever that may be) in the knowledge that my first

published work was to receive the double crown of appearing both in *Nash's* here and in the *Cosmopolitan* in the States.

Before closing this volume I would like to wish any of its readers who have literary ambitions as happy and fortunate an interview with the first editor who asks to meet them as I had with the great George Doran.

The Snake

I didn't know Carstairs at all well, mind you, but he was our nearest neighbour and a stranger to the place. He'd asked me several times to drop in for a chat, and that week-end I'd been saddled with a fellow called Jackson.

He was an engineer who had come over from South America to report on a mine my firm were interested in. We hadn't got much in common and the talk was getting a bit thin, so on the Sunday evening I thought I'd vary the entertainment by looking up Carstairs and taking Jackson with me.

Carstairs was pleased enough to see us; he lived all on his own but for the servants. What he wanted with a big place like that I couldn't imagine, but that was his affair. He made us welcome and we settled down in comfortable arm-chairs to chat.

It was one of those still summer evenings with the scent of the flowers drifting in through the open windows, and the peace of it all makes you think for the moment that the city, on Monday morning, is nothing but a rotten bad dream.

I think I did know in a vague way that Carstairs had made his money mining, but when, or where, I hadn't

an idea. Anyhow, he and young Jackson were soon in it up to the neck, talking technicalities. That never has been my end of the business; I was content to lend them half an ear while I drank in the hush of the scented twilight; a little feller was piping away to his mate for all he was worth in the trees at the bottom of the garden.

It was the bat started it; you know how they flit in on a summer's night through the open windows, absolutely silently, before you are aware of them. How they're here one moment—and there the next, in and out of the shadows while you flap about with a newspaper like a helpless fool. They're unclean things, of course, but harmless enough, yet never in my life have I seen a big man so scared as Carstairs.

'Get it out!' he yelled. 'Get it out,' and he buried his bald head in the sofa cushions.

I think I laughed, anyhow I told him it was nothing to make a fuss about, and switched out the light.

The bat zigzagged from side to side once or twice, and then flitted out into the open as silently as it had come.

Carstairs's big red face had gone quite white when he peeped out from beneath his cushions. 'Has it gone?' he asked in a frightened whisper.

'Of course it has,' I assured him. 'Don't be silly—it might have been the Devil himself from the fuss you made!'

'Perhaps it was,' he said seriously. As he sat up I could see the whites of his rather prominent eyes surrounding the blue pupils—I should have laughed if the man hadn't been in such an obvious funk.

'Shut the windows,' he said sharply, as he moved over to the whisky and mixed himself a pretty stiff drink. It seemed a sin on a night like that, but it was his house, so Jackson drew them to.

Carstairs apologised in a half-hearted sort of way for making such a scene, then we settled down again.

In the circumstances it wasn't unnatural that the talk should turn to witchcraft and things like that.

Young Jackson said he'd heard some pretty queer stories in the forests of Brazil, but that didn't impress me, because he looked a good half-dago himself, for all his English name, and dagoes always believe in that sort of thing.

Carstairs was a different matter; he was as British as could be, and when he asked me seriously if I believed in Black Magic I didn't laugh, but told him just as seriously that I did not.

'You're wrong, then,' he declared firmly, 'and I'll tell you this, I shouldn't be sitting here if it wasn't for Black Magic.'

'You can't be serious,' I protested.

'I am,' he said. 'For thirteen years I roamed the Union of South Africa on my uppers, a "poor white", if you know what that means. If you don't—well, it's hell on earth. One rotten job after another with barely enough pay to keep body and soul together, and between jobs not even that, so that at times you'd even lower yourself to chum up to a black for the sake of a drink or a bit of a meal. Never a chance to get up in the world, and despised by natives and whites alike—well, I suppose I'd be at it still but that I came up against the Black Art, and that brought me big money. Once I had money I went into business. That's twenty-two years ago—I'm a rich man now, and I've come home to take my rest.'

Carstairs evidently meant every word he said, and I must confess I was impressed. There was nothing neurotic about him, he was sixteen stone of solid, prosaic Anglo-Saxon; in fact, he looked just the sort of chap you'd like to have with you in a tight corner. That's why I'd been so surprised when he got in such a blue funk about the bat.

'I'm afraid I'm rather an unbeliever,' I admitted, 'but

perhaps that's because I've never come up against the real thing—won't you tell us some more about it?'

He looked at me steadily for a moment with his round, blue eyes. 'All right,' he said, 'if you like; help yourself to another peg, and your friend too.'

We refilled our glasses and he went on: 'When I as good as said just now, "that bat may be the Devil in person", I didn't mean quite that. Maybe there are people who can raise the Devil—I don't know, anyhow I've never seen it done; but there is a power for evil drifting about the world—suffused in the atmosphere, as you might say, and certain types of animals seem to be sensitive to it—they pick it up out of the ether just like a wireless receiving set.

'Take cats—they're uncanny beasts; look at the way they can see in the dark; and they can do more than that; they can see things that we can't in broad day. You must have seen them before now, walk carefully round an object in a room that simply wasn't there.

'These animals are harmless enough in themselves, of course, but where the trouble starts is when they become used as a focus by a malignant human will. However, that's all by the way. As I was telling you, I'd hiked it up and down the Union for thirteen years, though it wasn't the Union in those days. From Durban to Damaraland, and from the Orange River to Matabel, fruit farmer, miner, salesman, wagoner, clerk—I took every job that offered, but for all the good I'd done myself I might as well have spent my time on the Breakwater instead.

'I haven't even made up my mind today which is the tougher master—the Bible-punching Dutchman, with his little piping voice, or the whisky-sodden South African Scot.

'At last I drifted into Swaziland; that's on the borders of Portuguese East, near Lourenço Marques and Delagoa

Bay. As lovely a country as you could wish to see; it's all been turned into native reserve now, but in those days there was a handful of white settlers scattered here and there.

'Anyhow, it was there in a saloon at Mbabane that I met old Benny Isaacsohn, and he offered me a job. I was down and out, so I took it, though he was one of the toughest-looking nuts that I'd ever come across. He was a bigger man than I am, with greasy black curls and a great big hook of a nose. His face was as red as a turkey cock, and his wicked black eyes were as shifty as sin. He said his store-keeper had died on him sudden, and the way he said it made me wonder just what had happened to that man.

'But it was Benny or picking up scraps from a native kraal—so I went along with him there and then.

'He took me miles up country to his famous store—two tins of sardines and a dead rat were about all he had in it, and of course I soon tumbled to it that trading honest wasn't Benny's real business. I don't doubt he'd sized me up and reckoned I wouldn't be particular. I was careful not to be too curious, because I had a sort of idea that that was what my predecessor had died of.

'After a bit he seemed to get settled in his mind about me, and didn't take much trouble to conceal his little games. He was doing a bit of gun-running for the natives from over the Portuguese border and a handsome traffic in illicit booze. Of course all our customers were blacks; there wasn't another white in a day's march except for Rebecca—Benny's old woman.

'I kept his books for him; they were all fake, of course. Brown sugar meant two dummy bullets out of five, and white, three. I remember; the dummies were cardboard painted to look like lead—cartridges come cheaper that way! Anyhow, Benny knew his ledger code all right.

'He didn't treat me badly on the whole; we had a

shindy one hot night soon after I got there, and he knocked me flat with one blow from his big red fist. After that I used to go and walk it off if I felt my temper getting the best of me—and it did at times when I saw the way he used to treat those niggers. I'm not exactly squeamish myself, but the things he used to do would make you sick.

'When I got into the game, I found that gun-running and liquor weren't the end of it. Benny was a money-lender as well—that's where he over-reached himself and came up against the Black Art.

'Of the beginnings of Benny's dealing with Umtonga, the witch-doctor, I know nothing. The old heathen would come to us now and again all decked out in his cowrie shells and strings of leopards' teeth, and Benny always received him in state. They'd sit drinking glass for glass of neat spirit for hours on end until Umtonga was carried away dead drunk by his men. The old villain used to sell off all the surplus virgins of his tribe to Benny, and Benny used to market them in Portuguese East, together with the wives of the poor devils who were in his clutches and couldn't pay the interest on their debts.

'The trouble started about nine months after I'd settled there; old Umtonga was a spender in his way, and there began to be a shortage of virgins in the tribe, so he started to borrow on his own account and then he couldn't pay. The interviews weren't so funny then—he began to go away sober and shaking his big black stick.

'That didn't worry Benny. He'd been threatened by people before, and he told Umtonga that if he couldn't raise enough virgins to meet his bill he'd better sell off a few of his wives himself.

'I was never present at the meetings, but I gathered a bit from what old Benny said in his more expansive moments, and I'd picked up enough Swazi to gather the

gist of Umtonga's views when he aired them at parting on the stoep.

'Then one day Umtonga came with three women—it seemed that they were the equivalent of the orginal debt, but Benny had a special system with regard to his loans. Repayment of capital was nothing like enough—and the longer the debt was outstanding the greater the rate of interest became. By that time he wanted about thirty women, and good ones at that, to clear Umtonga off his books.

'The old witch-doctor was calm and quiet; contrary to custom, he came in the evening and he did not stay more than twenty minutes. The walls were thin, so I heard most of what went on—he offered Benny the three women—or death before the morning.

'If Benny had been wise he would have taken the women, but he wasn't. He told Umtonga to go to the Devil—and Umtonga went.

'His people were waiting for him outside, about a dozen of them, and he proceeded to make a magic. They handed him a live black cock and a live white cock, and Umtonga sat down before the stoep and he killed them in a curious way.

'He examined their livers carefully, and then he began to rock backwards and forwards on his haunches, and in his old cracked voice he sang a weird, monotonous chant. The others lay down flat on the ground and wriggled round him one after the other on their bellies. They kept that up for about half an hour, and then the old wizard began to dance. I can see his belt of monkey tails swirling about him now, as he leapt and spun. You wouldn't have thought that lean old savage had the strength in him to dance like that.

'Then all of a sudden he seemed to have a fit—he went absolutely rigid and fell down flat. He dropped on his face, and when his people turned him over we could

see he was frothing at the mouth. They picked him up and carried him away.

'You know how the night comes down almost at once in the tropics. Umtonga started his incantation in broad daylight, and it didn't take so very long, but by the time he'd finished it was as dark as pitch, with nothing but the Southern Cross and the Milky Way to light the hidden world.

'In those places most people still act by Nature's clock. We had the evening meal, old Rebecca, Benny, and I; he seemed a bit preoccupied, but that was no more than I would have been in the circumstances. Afterwards he went into his office room to see what he'd made on the day, as he always did, and I went off to bed.

'It was the old woman roused me about two o'clock—it seems she'd dropped off to sleep, and awoke to find that Benny had not come up to bed.

'We went along through the shanty, and there he was with his eyes wide and staring, gripping the arms of his office chair and all hunched up as though cowering away from something.

'He had never been a pretty sight to look at, but now there was something fiendish in the horror on his blackened face, and of course he'd been dead some hours.

'Rebecca flung her skirts over her head, and began to wail fit to bring the house down. After I'd got her out of the room, I went back to investigate—what could have killed Benny Isaacsohn? I was like you in those days—I didn't believe for a second that that toothless old fool Umtonga had the power to kill from a distance.

'I made a thorough examination of the room, but there was no trace of anybody having broken in, or even having been there. I had a good look at Benny—it seemed to me he'd died of apoplexy or some sort of fit, but what had brought it on? He'd seen something, and it must have been something pretty ghastly.

'I didn't know then that a week or two later I was to see the same thing myself.

'Well, we buried Benny the next day—there was the usual kind of primitive wake, with the women howling and the men getting free drinks—half Africa seemed to have turned up; you know how mysteriously news travels in the black man's country.

'Umtonga put in an appearance; he expressed neither regret nor pleasure, but stood looking on. I didn't know what to make of it. The only evidence against him was the mumbo-jumbo of the night before, and no sane European could count that as proof of murder. I was inclined to think that the whole thing was an amazing coincidence.

'When the burying was over he came up to me. "Why you no kill house-boys attend Big Boss before throne of Great Spirit?" he wanted to know.

'I explained that one killing in the house was quite enough at a time. Then he demanded his stick, said he had left it behind in Benny's office the night before.

'I was pretty short with him, as you can imagine, but I knew the old ruffian's stick as well as I knew my own hairbrush; so I went in to get it.

'There it was lying on the floor—a four-foot snake stick. I dare say you've seen the sort of thing I mean; they make them shorter for Europeans. They are carved out of heavy wood, the snake's head is the handle, the tail the ferrule. Between, there are from five to a dozen bands; little markings are carved all down it to represent the scales. Umtonga's was a fine one—quite thin, but as heavy as lead. It was black, and carved out of ebony, I imagine. Not an ounce of give in it, but it would have made a splendid weapon. I picked it up and gave it to him without a word.

'For about ten days I saw no more of him. Old Rebecca stopped her wailing, and got down to business. Benny

must have told her about most of his deals that mattered, for I found that she knew pretty much how things stood. It was agreed that I should carry on as a sort of manager for her, and after a bit we came to the question of Umtonga. I suggested that the interest was pretty hot, and that the man might be really dangerous. Wouldn't it be better to settle with him for what we could get? But she wouldn't have it; you would have thought I was trying to draw her eye-teeth when I suggested forgoing the interest! She fairly glared at me.

'"What is it to do with you?" she screamed. "I need money, I have the future of my—er—myself to think of. Send a boy with a message that you want to see him, and when he comes—make him pay."

'Well, there was nothing to do but to agree; the old shrew was worse than Benny in some ways. I sent a boy the following morning, and the day after Umtonga turned up.

'I saw him in Benny's office while his retinue waited outside; I was sitting in Benny's chair—the chair he'd died in—and I came to the point at once.

'He sat there for a few minutes just looking at me; his wizened old face was like a dried-up fruit that had gone bad. His black boot-button eyes shone with a strange, malignant fire, then he said very slowly, "You—very brave young Baas."

'"No," I said, "just business-like, that's all."

'"You know what happen to old Baas—he die—you want to go Great Spirit yet?"

'There was something evil and powerful in his steady stare; it was horribly disconcerting, but I wouldn't give in to it, and I told him I didn't want anything except his cash that was due, or its equivalent.

'"You forget business with Umtonga?" he suggested. "You do much good business, other mens. You no forget, Umtonga make bad magic—you die."

'Well, it wasn't my business—it was the old woman's. I couldn't have let him out if I'd wanted to—so there was only one reply, the same as he'd got from Benny.

'I showed him Benny's gun, and told him that if there were any monkey tricks I'd shoot on sight. His only answer was one of the most disdainful smiles I've ever seen on a human face. With that he left me and joined his bodyguard outside.

'They then went through the same abracadabra with another black cock and another white cock—wriggled about on their bellies, and the old man danced till he had another fit and was carried away.

'Night had fallen in the meantime, and I was none too easy in my mind. I thought of Benny's purple face and staring eyes.

'I had supper with the old hag, and then I went to Benny's room. I like my tot, but I'd been careful not to take it; I meant to remain stone cold sober and wide-awake that night.

'I had the idea that one of Umtonga's people had done something to Benny, poisoned his drink perhaps.

'I went over his room minutely, and after I'd done, there wasn't a place you could have hidden a marmoset. Then I shut the windows carefully, and tipped up a chair against each so that no one could get in without knocking it down. If I did drop off, I was bound to wake at that. I turned out the light so that they should have no target for a spear or an arrow, and then I sat down to wait.

'I never want another night like that as long as I live; you know how you can imagine things in the darkness—well, what I didn't imagine in those hours isn't worth the telling.

'The little noises of the veldt came to me as the creepings of the enemy—half a dozen times I nearly lost my nerve and put a bullet into the blacker masses of the

shadows that seemed to take on curious forms, but I was pretty tough in those days and I stuck it out.

'About eleven o'clock the moon came up; you would have thought that made it better, but it didn't. It added a new sort of terror—that was all. You know how eerie moonlight can be; it is unnatural somehow, and I believe there's a lot in what they say about there being evil in the moon. Bright bars of it stood out in rows on the floor, where it streamed in silent and baleful through the slats in the jalousies. I found myself counting them over and over again. It seemed as if I were becoming mesmerised by that cold, uncanny light. I pulled myself up with a jerk.

'Then I noticed that something was different about the desk in front of me. I couldn't think what it could be —but there was something missing that had been there a moment before.

'All at once I realised what it was, and the palms of my hands became clammy with sweat. Umtonga had left his stick behind again—I had picked it up off the floor when I searched the office and leant it against the front of the desk; the top of it had been there before my eyes for the last three hours in the semi-darkness—standing up stiff and straight—and now it had disappeared.

'It couldn't have fallen, I should have heard it—my eyes must have been starting out of my head. A ghastly thought had come to me—just supposing that stick was not a stick?

'And then I saw it—the thing was lying straight and still in the moonlight, with its eight to ten wavy bands, just as I'd seen it a dozen times before; I must have dreamed I propped it against the desk—it must have been on the floor all the time, and yet I knew deep down in me that I was fooling myself and that it had moved of its own accord.

'My eyes never left it—I watched, holding my breath to see if it moved—but I was straining so that I couldn't trust my eyesight. The bright bars of moonlight on the floor began to waver ever so slightly, and I knew that my sight was playing me tricks; I shut my eyes for a moment—it was the only thing to do—and when I opened them again the snake had raised its head.

'My vest was sticking to me, and my face was dripping wet. I knew now what had killed old Benny—I knew, too, why his face had gone black. Umtonga's stick was no stick at all, but the deadliest snake in all Africa—a thing that can move like lightning, can overtake a galloping horse, and kill its rider, so deadly that you're stiff within four minutes of its bite—I was up against a black mamba.

'I had my revolver in my hand, but it seemed a stupid, useless thing—there wasn't a chance in a hundred that I could hit it. A shot-gun's the only thing that's any good; with that I might have blown its head off, but the guns weren't kept in Benny's room, and like a fool I'd locked myself in.

'The brute moved again as I watched it; it drew up its tail with a long slithering movement. There could be no doubt now; Umtonga was a super snake-charmer, and he'd left this foul thing behind to do his evil work.

'I sat there petrified, just as poor Benny must have done, wondering what in Heaven's name I could do to save myself, but my brain simply wouldn't work.

'It was an accident that saved me. As it rose to strike, I slipped in my attempt to get to my feet and kicked over Benny's wicker waste-paper basket; the brute went for that instead of me. The force with which they strike is tremendous—it's like the blow from a hammer or the kick of a mule. Its head went clean through the side of the basket and there it got stuck; it couldn't get its head out again.

'As luck would have it, I had been clearing out some of Benny's drawers that day, and I'd thrown away a whole lot of samples of quartz; the basket was about a third full of them and they weigh pretty heavy; a few had fallen out when it fell over, but the rest were enough to keep the mamba down.

'It thrashed about like a gigantic whiplash, but it couldn't free its head, and I didn't waste a second; I started heaving ledgers on its tail. That was the end of the business as far as the mamba was concerned—I'd got it pinned down in half the time it took you to drive out that bat. Then I took up my gun again. "Now, my beauty," I thought, "I've got you where I want you, and I'll just quietly blow your head off—I'm going to have a damn fine pair of shoes out of your skin."

'I knelt down to the job and levelled my revolver; the snake struck twice, viciously, in my direction, but it couldn't get within a foot of me and it no more than jerked the basket either time.

'I looked down the barrel of the pistol within eighteen inches of its head, and then a very strange thing happened—and this is where the Black Magic comes in.

'The moonlit room seemed to grow dark about me, so that the baleful light faded before my eyes—the snake's head disappeared from view—the walls seemed to be expanding and the queer, acrid odour of the native filled my nostrils.

'I knew that I was standing in Umtonga's hut, and where the snake had been a moment before I saw Umtonga sleeping—or in a trance, if you prefer it. He was lying with his head on the belly of one of his women as is the custom of the country, and I stretched out a hand towards him in greeting. It seemed that, although there was nothing there, I had touched something—and then I realised with an appalling fear that my left hand was

holding the waste-paper basket in which was the head of the snake.

'There was a prickling sensation on my scalp, and I felt my hair lifting—stiff with the electricity that was streaming from my body. With a tremendous effort of will-power I jerked back my hand. Umtonga shuddered in his trance—there was a thud, and I knew that the snake had struck in the place where my hand had been a moment before.

'I was half-crazy with fear, my teeth began to chatter, and it came to me suddenly that there was an icy wind blowing steadily upon me. I shivered with the deadly cold—although in reality it was a still, hot night. The wind was coming from the nostrils of the sleeping Umtonga full upon me; the bitter coldness of it was numbing me where I stood. I knew that in another moment I should fall forward on the snake.

'I concentrated every ounce of will-power in my hand that held the gun—I could not see the snake, but my eyes seemed to be focussed upon Umtonga's forehead. If only my frozen finger could pull the trigger—I made a supreme effort, and then there happened a very curious thing.

'Umtonga began to talk to me in his sleep—not in words, you understand, but as spirit talks to spirit. He turned and groaned and twisted where he lay. A terrible sweat broke out on his forehead and round his skinny neck. I could see him as clearly as I can see you—he was pleading with me not to kill him, and in that deep, silent night, where space and time had ceased to exist, I knew that Umtonga and the snake were one.

'If I killed the snake, I killed Umtonga. In some strange fashion he had suborned the powers of evil, so that when at the end of the incantation he fell into a fit, his malignant spirit passed into the body of his dread familiar.

'I suppose I ought to have killed that snake and Umtonga too, but I didn't. Just as it is said that a drowning man sees his whole life pass before him at the moment of death—so I saw my own. Scene after scene out of my thirteen years of disappointment and failure flashed before me—but I saw more than that.

'I saw a clean, tidy office in Jo'burg, and I was sitting there in decent clothes. I saw this very house as you see it from the drive—although I'd never seen it in my life before—and I saw other things as well.

'At that moment I had Umtonga in my power, and he was saying as clearly as could be—"All these things will I give unto you—if only you will spare my life."

'Then the features of Umtonga faded. The darkness lightened and I saw again the moonlight streaming through the slats of old Benny's office—and the mamba's head!

'I put my revolver in my pocket, unlocked the door, and locking it again behind me, went up to bed.

'I slept as though I'd been on a ten-day forced march, I was so exhausted; I woke late, but everything that had happened in the night was clear in my memory—I knew I hadn't dreamed it. I loaded a shot-gun and went straight to Benny's office.

'There was the serpent still beside the desk—its head thrust through the wicker basket and the heavy ledgers pinning down its body. It seemed to have straightened out, though, into its usual form, and when I knocked it lightly with the barrel of the gun it remained absolutely rigid. I could hardly believe it to be anything more than a harmless piece of highly polished wood, and yet I knew that it had a hideous, hidden life, and after that I left it very carefully alone.

'Umtonga turned up a little later, as I felt sure he would; he seemed very bent and old. He didn't say very much, but he spoke again about his debt, and asked if

I would not forgo some part of it—he would pay the whole if he must, but it would ruin him if he did. To sell his wives would be to lose authority with his tribe.

'I explained that it wasn't my affair, but Rebecca's; she owned everything now that Benny was dead.

'He seemed surprised at that; natives don't hold with women owning property. He said he'd thought that the business was mine and all I had to do was to feed Rebecca till she died.

'Then he wanted to know if I would have helped him had that been the case. I told him that extortion wasn't my idea of business, and with that he seemed satisfied; he picked up his terrible familiar and stumped away without another word.

'The following week I had to go into Mbabane for stores. I was away a couple of nights and when I got back Rebecca was dead and buried; I heard the story from the house-boys. Umtonga had been to see her on the evening that I left. He'd made his magic again before the stoep, and they'd found her dead and black in the morning. I asked if by any chance he'd left his stick behind him, although I knew the answer before I got it—"Yes, he'd come back for it the following day."

'I started in to clear up Benny's affairs, and board by board to pull the shanty down. Benny didn't believe in banks and I knew there was a hoard hidden somewhere. It took me three weeks, but I found it. With that, and a reasonable realisation of what was outstanding, I cleared up a cool ten thousand. I've turned that into a hundred thousand since, and so you see that it was through the Black Art that I come to be sitting here.'

As Carstairs came to the end of the story, something made me turn and look at Jackson; he was glaring at the elder man, and his dark eyes shone with a fierce light in his sallow face.

'Your name's not Carstairs,' he cried suddenly in a

harsh voice. 'It's Thompson—and mine is Isaacsohn. *I* am the child that you robbed and abandoned.'

Before I could grasp the full significance of the thing he was on his feet—I saw the knife flash as it went home in Carstairs's chest, and the young Jew shrieked, 'You fiend—you paid that devil to kill my mother.'

'In Gunmen, Gallants and Ghosts there is a series of stories generally entitled The Ghost Hunter, which have the same central character. In addition to these four stories, there are four other stories of the occult, eight stories about crooks or spies and a passage which makes a story in itself from each of my biographies, *A Very Private Life of Charles II* and *Red Eagle*, an account of the Russian Revolution. In addition, in this new Arrow edition, I have added seven articles on black magic, the unexpurgated versions of six of which have never before appeared in print.' Dennis Wheatley

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