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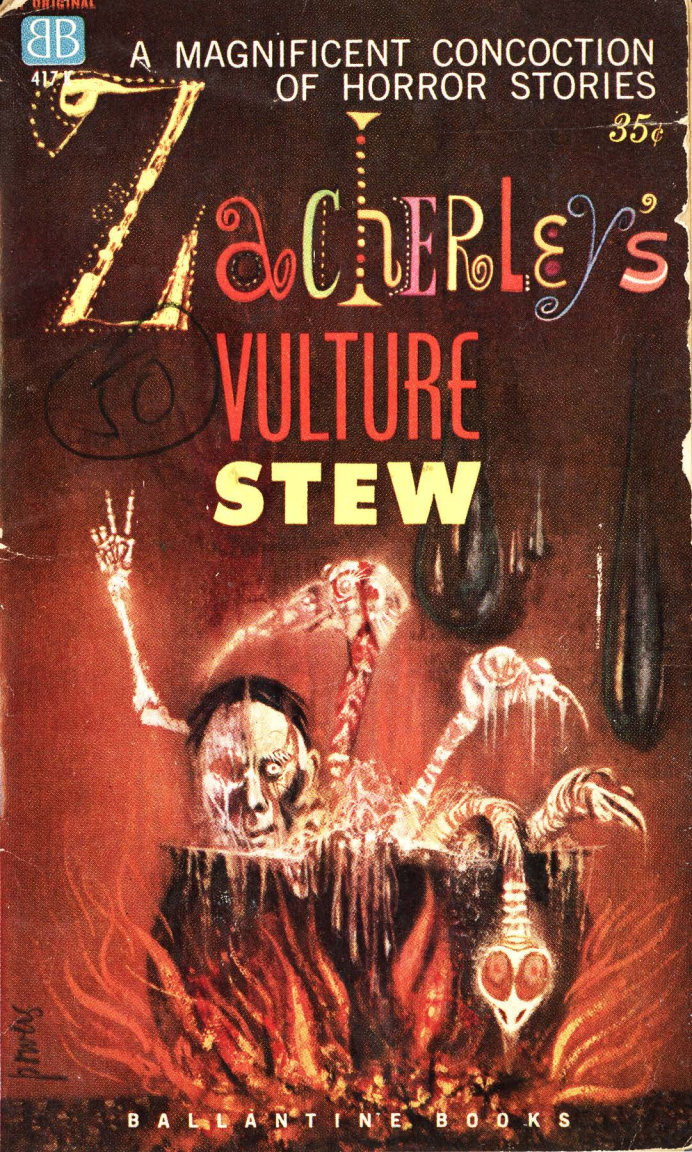
ZACHERLEY'S VULTURE STEW



BALLANTINE BOOKS

Ancient Tranfylvanian Recipie . . .

Firſt, get a head. Fimmer thoroughly in broth for three dayſ, to which muſt be added juice of deadly muſhroom (uſe feveral), a handful of mandrake rootſ dug at full moon, alſo deadly nightſhade a goodlie quantity, three toadſ and a black widow ſpider. Now add your vultureſ (at leaſt two—they are meager birdſ though ſtrong in flavor). Be careful that they are firmly tied or they will flop out of the pot and cauſe a great commotion. Three hourſ before midnight of the fifth day, remove the vultureſ from the broth, ſtuff well with henbane and ſet aſide. Now ſift the brew of featherſ (ſifting iſ eaſier than plucking and beſideſ ſome monſterſ are ticklifh) and combine brew and ſtuffed birdſ for another three hourſ. On the ſtroke of midnight, ſerve your ſupper with a garniſh of fried locuſtſ, followed by blood pudding for deſſert.

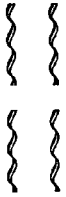
(Note: it is not necessary to lisp to prepare this exquisite meal—merely substitute ess's for ef's throughout—but avoid garlick at all coſtſ).

Also by Zacherley

ZACHERLEY'S MIDNIGHT SNACKS

This is an original publication—not a reprint.

Zacherley's



Vulture Stew

Ballantine Books New York

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BALLANTINE BOOKS, INC.
101 Fifth Avenue, New York 3, N. Y.

CONTENTS

UNLIKE MOST GHOULS, ghosts and monsters, Zacherley is a self-made tradition. He is alleged to have been conceived in the mountains of Transylvania, reared with werewolves and schooled at the Transylvanian Technical College of Poltergeistery.

A creative figure of the world of shrieks and shrouds, he talks on equal terms with the known hoots and haunts of antiquity. But his urbane laughter and dexterous derring-do, whether in the haunted vaults or vaunted halls of legend, always put him a step ahead of routine monsters.

To grasp fully the ephemeral mystery of Zacherley, study this book and then watch his ghost-to-ghost tv program in New York on WOR TV, and in Los Angeles on KHJ TV (both Channel 9).

For those who know, Zacherley represents the triumph of artful laughter and keen satire over ancient films peopled with the cinema's most contrived spooks and nightmares. Whether it is Dracula, Frankenstein or the Hound of the Baskervilles, Zacherley's celluloid magic always triumphs.

HE DIDN'T LIKE CATS

L. Ron Hubbard

When you whip up a little vulture stew . . . it's quite the thing to toss in a few stray cats . . . if you can catch the little rascals! . . . But let me warn you . . . toss them in gently and with reverence, or you may end up with a severe case of acid stomach. . . .

A WISE MAN could have told Jacob Findley that vindictiveness is usually synonymous with downfall, even vindictiveness in minute things. But Jacob Findley lived in Washington, D. C.

Ordinarily, Jacob took from life all its faults without complaint for as a civil servant of the United States he was inured to many things and, through practice, quite complaisant in general. But, perhaps, bottling official insults within himself was not wholly possible since common logic tells one that a vessel can be filled just so full, after which it leaks or overflows. Jacob was not the type of man to overflow. Cup by cup he was filled; somewhere along the route from desk to desk in his department he had to have a means of release.

People in official position quite often pass down in kind what is received from above and Jacob, as a file clerk, was down so low that it was most difficult to find a means of spilling.

So he didn't like cats.

A more defeated and resigned man would have been difficult to find for he was a veritable sponge for abuse. His hair was graying, his eyes downcast, his walk a slouch and even his clothes had a tired air.

But he didn't like cats.

His was not a vindictive nature. In most things he was

patiently kind, Joblike enduring. He often gave candy to little children, quite strangers to him. While it might be said that his generosity was more like the offering of tribute in turn for immunity, it was still generosity.

However—or perhaps, therefore—he did not like cats.

Tonight he was in an average mood. The day had been tedious, monotonous, wearying. And tonight he was on his way to attend a church supper which, because he would be, as usual, forgotten in the midst of many, would be tedious, monotonous, wearying.

Clad in a shiny Tuxedo, topped with a rusty derby, swinging his cane in half-hearted imitation of his office chief at the state department, he walked patiently up Sixteenth Street toward the Lutheran Church, pausing obediently at all the lights, absence of cars notwithstanding on the lettered streets. A steady parade of cabs and limousines coursed busily upon his left, discordantly giving forth blasts of radio music, a blast bracketed in silence either side, and yelps or laughter or conversation.

He had just crossed N Street when he met his fa—when he met the cat.

It was not a polite meeting nor a sociable contact, for the cat arrogantly ignored Jacob Findley and issued from an apartment-house shrub to lay its course across the bows of the man.

As cats went he was at best a second-rate feline in looks, but in the cat world he must have been singularly respected if his tattered and scarred condition was any indication of victories hardly won. He was a huge cat, a dirty cat and a very proud cat. He was missing half his right ear, several of his port whiskers, a third of his right forefoot and about a sixteenth of his tail, to say nothing of patches where fur had been. His air was gladiatorial for he strutted rather than walked and there was a vain heft to his brows which bespoke his disdain for cats less proficient in the art of plying claw and tooth and for all humans without any exceptions. Here was a cat that was tough and proud of it, but which had commingled with that toughness a wary glance for possible enemies and a lewd leer in event he passed any ladies.

Jacob was so overlaid with strata of servility that only a sharp start could have brought him leaping out of himself

the way he leaped. The cat startled him, for he supposed in the brief glimpse he had that he was about to trip over some treacherous object.

Then he saw that it was a cat.

He realized that he had been startled by a cat.

And, as the reader might have gathered, he did not like cats.

"Scat!" cried Jacob Findley.

The feline pursued his swashbuckling way, his strut a bit more pronounced. This effrontery yanked Jacob Findley even further out of himself, far enough for him to act wholly on impulse.

He aimed a kick at the cat. It was not a ferocious kick. It was not even intended to land. But Findley had been led this far to his doom and any momentum yet wanting fate seemed to supply.

The cat received the sharp black toe in his side. He swooped upward with it, draped inextricably over it. He received the inertia thus imparted to him and described a parabola streetward. The cat sought to twist in the air and fall short, but doom was now on the march. The noisy, swift traffic coursed along Sixteenth Street. The cat lit in the road and, having lit, tried to scramble back to the curb.

A tire rocketed catward. The whole car vibrated to the jolt. And then it jolted again.

Clawing and crying, the cat struggled to reach the gutter, hitching himself inch by inch. He was out of the way of further wheels now, but he had done himself an unkindness. His back was broken so that while his hind legs lay twisted to the right, his forefeet convulsed toward the left.

The cat's cry stretched dismally.

Jacob Findley was confused. He was shamed. The agony of the animal reached him and made him shudder and sweat. Having just committed the most violent and wanton act of his life, he felt ill.

He felt his drums would burst under the onslaught of that cry, and it seemed to him that there were words in it, human words and curses.

Gradually the wail changed and faded and then it was as if the cat had truly found, in his death throes, a human voice. But there were no words. Only agony.

Jacob Findley heard the rattling last of it. He trembled.

And then, savage that he should be made to feel so, he stalked angrily upon his way, angrily stating to himself that, for all that, he *still* didn't *like* cats.

"Good riddance," said Jacob Findley. That heartened him. A cat was a cat and that one had been a filthy and useless cat. He got braver. He turned and looked back toward the shadow in the gutter and raised his voice.

"Good riddance!" jeered Jacob Findley.

He went on and every time a shudder sought to rise along his spine he was there with another statement as to the uselessness of cats in general and of that cat in particular. Still —what had that cat said when—

"Served him right," growled Findley.

Funny, though, how those yowls had sounded—

"Mangiest cat I ever saw. Better off dead, damn him!"

Two wheels had hit it and yet what a long time it had taken to die! It had even been able to move and—

"Hah, hah," said Jacob Findley with false merriment. "I guess I used up all his nine lives in a batch. "Damn him!"

Had he been in error when he had supposed the cat to stare at him, glare at him even in its death—

"Try to run over me, would he? Well, I guess I finished him. Yes, sir! I guess I finished him, all right, all right. Deadest cat I ever saw. Damn him!"

Odd how there had been words in that agonized scream—

"Made enough noise for fifteen cats. Hah, hah. Maybe he had to die nine times and so made nine times as much noise. Cats like that bother me? Not on your life. Kick dozens of them under trucks. Dozens of them. Made recordings of their voices and listen to them of an evening. Yah! Damned, mangy, good-for-nothing *cat!*"

What had that cat said when it was dying?

"Why, Jacob Findley! Whatever are you muttering about?"

Jacob nearly leaped from his cracked shoes, shying away from the voice. With foolish relief he saw that it was Bessy Green who spoke, and that he had come into the church hall without realizing it. In fact he had even checked his hat and cane and stood now at the entrance to the lower room which was being used for the supper-dance. However had he gotten this far without knowing it?

His perturbation was nearly extinguished by the realiza-

tion that Bessy Green was smiling at him and chattering on in a merry fashion. This was an oddity, indeed, for while she had never snubbed him, she had never paid any attention to him, either.

She was a secretary to an official in the interior department, employed more because of efficiency than beauty. She was climbing up toward retirement age, and her forthcoming pension had been a target for much amorous attention. She had a fault of wearing too much make-up, poorly applied, and had a head of somewhat scarce hair which she had dyed black.

Jacob's astonishment at her attention was born from the knowledge that she had been receiving for a long time the court of one Krantz, a guard at the department of commerce.

"And I think it is wicked! Terribly, terribly wicked! There are so few men in Washnigton as it is and then this silly draft sweeps away those who are here. But Joe said that his duty was with his country and so he left. A dear, dear boy, Jacob, but I don't think I shall ever forgive him."

"The country must be served," said Jacob, having overheard that this day from the protocol.

"Ah, yes, the country must be served. And here we poor lonely women, bereft, must also stand back with bowed heads and submit. Ah, yes. If it weren't for my cats I should be terribly, terribly, terribly lonely."

"Cats?" gulped Jacob.

"Ah, yes, the poor dear things. Isn't it strange how you just can't keep from loving them? You do love cats, don't you, Jacob?"

Jacob blinked rapidly. He kept his wits, however, for attention from Bessy Green was to be valued and her pension was not uninvolved as a factor in her charm.

"Cats?" said Jacob. "Oh, yes, yes, yes. Cats. Certainly I am fond of cats. Shall we dance, Miss Green?"

They danced and Jacob concentrated hard upon the effort, for he was experiencing a great desire not to step upon her or lose the rhythm. Along the side lines ladies and the sparce scattering of men looked on and there was much behindhand talking.

One woman in particular remarked the intimate way Miss Green was whispering into Jacob's ear and this one woman, Doris Hanson, sat more alertly and her eyes took on a

faintly greenish hue. Rival for Krantz, Doris Hanson was not to allow a second male to get securely into the hands of *that woman.*

Quite by accident Doris Hanson was near when the music stopped and Jacob and Bessy walked from the floor. Doris Hanson was a heavily built, purposeful woman whose ideas were intensely practical. She fancied herself as a psychologist, for she had attended a night university for years and years and years.

"Why, Jacob!" said Doris. "I am so happy to see you!"

Jacob was confused. He had never been noticed by Doris Hanson before. In fact, because she was noted as a brainy woman, he had been in fear of her.

"You look," said Doris Hanson, "exceedingly well tonight. But then, of course, you always look splendid. Oh, how do you do, Miss Green?"

"I do very well," said Miss Green.

The two women smiled at each other. Jacob felt chilly.

"Ah, the music! The 'Tiger Rag'!" said Doris. "My favorite song."

Jacob did not know quite how it had happened, but he found himself being thrust about the floor by this amazon and was aware of acute displeasure from the direction of Bessy Green.

So overwhelmed had he been by such attention that he had nearly forgotten the cat.

He was reminded.

In the piece being played were certain trumpet slurs which were, at first, only jarring to Jacob. And then, little by little, those slurs and wails and cries began to eat into his ears and touch there sympathetic vibrations which, sent again into motion, caused him to behold and hear the dying cat. He grew nervous and if he sagged a little bit, Doris Hanson did not notice.

" 'Hold that Tiger! EEEeeeeyow! Hold that tiger! EEEEEEEEEEEEeeeeeyow—' "

Jacob felt himself getting ill. Why did they have to keep doing it, bar after bar! Chorus after chorus!

" 'Hold that tiger! EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEeeeeeeee YOW! Hold—' "

Had he been a less repressed individual, he might have plugged his ears or screamed or damned the orchestra, for

now it began to seem to him as if the cat himself was up there in the box, glaring gloatingly about the floor after Jacob and taking high glee in mocking him.

"'Hold that tiger! Eeeeeeeyow! Hold that tiger! EEEEEEEEEEEYOWWWWWWWWW!"

He could see the cat! On the bandstand!

And on that instant the music stopped and Jacob, adrip with perspiration, goggled confusedly at the musicians. No cat. Just some fellows with trumpets and drums.

Feeling ill and weak he was glad of Doris Hanson's support, given quite unconsciously. He was dragged from the floor and again found himself surrounded by the two women. He hardly noticed either of them as he sank into a chair and they, interested in the battle more than the spoils, did not notice his state.

Jacob became angry with himself and commenced to form chains of invective in which to bind the cat.

"And it was an intensely interesting trip," said Doris Hanson. "I don't know when I have ever been so intrigued! It is not usual to be permitted to get into St. Elizabeth's, you know, but I knew a brother of the director—"

"I went visiting there once," said Bessy Green. "Of a Sunday. The public is always admitted on a Sunday—"

"Of course!" said Doris. "But not admitted to the halls, to the corridors, to the very cells of the unfortunate people. As a student of psychiatry I, of course, had a greater insight into the difficulties of attempting to bring sanity back to the poor unfortunates."

"I went there one Sunday," interposed Bessy Green. "I saw a man who was pushing a wheelbarrow, but he had it upside down. And if anybody asked him why he had it upside down, he looked sly and said if he turned it rightside up, why somebody might put something in it. Isn't that funny, Jacob?"

Jacob dutifully, if weakly, laughed.

"He," said Doris Hanson in a superior way, "had a persecution complex. It was fortunate you did not press him for an explanation for they very often require very little to become violent, just as they require little to become insane."

"B-beg pardon?" said Jacob.

"Oh, you have no idea," said Doris, gripping and nearly strangling this spark of interest from the quarry. "In just such a way are some people touched off. Insanity may lie

latent and unsuspected in a disposition for years and then, suddenly, *poof!* a full case of dementia praecox!"

"Just—*poof?*" said Jacob.

Doris quickly laughed, an eye on Bessy. "You are so droll, Jacob. Just—*poof!*"

"I—really wanted to know," said Jacob.

"It's true," replied Doris with a sniff in Bessy's direction to make her sensible of a victory, even if a minor one. "It is amazing how so many people go insane. One day a man is a normal, friendly husband and the next he suddenly becomes a raging schizoid and slays his wife and himself as well. The result of what cause? Why, perhaps he chanced to find some schoolgirl treasure of another beau who had been his greatest rival and is stunned to discover that she secretly retains this. But usually the matter is not so simple, you know. Next to nothing may happen, jarring awake some sleeping monstrosity in a man's complex mental machinery and turning him from a sane person to a mentally sick individual. It is wholly impossible to say when a man is sane, for"—she tittered—"scarce one of us is normal."

"You mean—it might happen to any of us?"

"Of course," said Doris, charmed by all this interest. "One moment we are seated here, behaving normally and the next some tiny thing, a certain voice, a certain combination of thoughts may throw out the balance wheel of our intellects and we become potential inmates for asylums the rest of our lives. No, not one of us knows when the world will cease to be a normal, ordinary place. You know, no one ever knows when he goes insane. He supposes it is the world altering, not himself. Rooms become peopled with strange shapes and beings, sounds distort themselves into awful cries and, *poof!* we are judged insane."

"Poof—" said Jacob, feeling weak and ill.

Bessy smiled acidly sweet upon Doris. "Of course that is the tenet of 'modern science,' but there are yet other explanations, you know." She gave Jacob a comforting look.

"Other? I am not aware of mumbo jumbo—"

"Not mumbo jumbo," Bessy interrupted her. "I happen to be a very advanced student of spiritualism and it is quite likely that insane people see and hear beings and actualities which are more than the twisted ideas of deranged intellects. If one cares to extend his study beyond mere daily concep-

tions, he can swiftly realize the immense probability and possibility of such. Belief in evil spirits is too persistent in the history of man to be easily discounted, and it is my belief that our 'insane asylums' house many who are, to be blunt, too psychic."

"Too—psychic?" said Jacob.

"Why, yes. They see and perceive things which are beyond the sight and perception of the ordinary, crass intellect and so are judged, or rather misjudged, by their fellow humans. Ghosts, angry spirits, avenging demons, it is wholly probable that these things exist in truth.

"Exist?" echoed Jacob.

"Wholly possible," said Bessy with a jerk of her sparse, dyed head.

Under this onslaught, calculated to attack and discredit her by doing that to her tenets, Doris remained wholly aloof as though such things were completely ridiculous and beneath any natural consideration.

"Then . . . then things can haunt people?" managed Jacob.

"Naturally," said Bessy, "and I have no doubt at all that many is the murderer who has been driven to the grave by the avenging spirit of his victim!"

"H-how?"

"You have heard of men turning themselves in to the police and confessing crimes which were not otherwise to be solved?" said Bessy. "You have heard of murderers eventually seeing the faces of their victims in everything about them? Very well. Is it not just as possible that the murdered being appeared to him? Or at least caused events and impressions to surround the criminal until the criminal considered himself better off dead?"

"Rubbish," said Doris.

"I beg pardon?" said Bessy.

"I said rubbish! The words of our most learned doctors put everything you say back into the Dark Ages!"

"And the wisest of them all," said Bessy grimly, "has no knowledge or experience of philosophy!"

"That is not philosophy!" said Doris. "That is stupid African voodoo rubbish!"

"If it is," said Bessy, "then our finest physicists are heading straight for African voodoo rubbish every time they ad-

mit that beyond a certain point no knowledge can be gained at all without the admission of God."

"What has God to do with this?" said Doris.

"God has everything to do with it, since he is the regulating factor of the universe and if he chooses to drive men mad with the appearance of evil beings and avenging spirits, then dare you deny his ability to do so?"

Doris opened her mouth to speak and then saw the cunningness of this trap. Almost she had allowed herself to give forth blasphemy. Her wit was not agile enough to encompass a counter measure and she did not dare sniff lest that, too, be accounted blasphemy.

They had argued longer than Doris had supposed, for it was with surprise that she heard the music stop and saw that the supper had been laid out. Thankful for this she rose.

"I shall bring you something, Jacob," said Doris and departed.

Jacob would have protested that food would stick in his throat and lie heavily in his stomach, but he had not the energy to protest. Accordingly he was soon holding a plate which was heaping with lobster salad. He felt it would be an insult to Doris not to eat it. Slowly, he ate it. Thankfully he got rid of the last mouthful. Shudderingly he put the plate away.

Bessy leaped up and seized the plate. "Oh I must get you some more!" And she hurried away to come back in a moment with an even larger portion and a glare for Doris.

Jacob knew he could not refuse. Manfully he marshaled his will power and concentration. He began to eat.

"Speculation in the realm of the Unknowable is a fruitless folly," stated Doris, fondly rolling the words around in her mouth. "Men can only grasp what they can sense. Hence, having sensed a thing, a man cannot lose his belief in it until he has proof which can also be sensed!"

"Ah," glittered Bessy. "What a simple way to deny the existence of everything which man, in his benighted mortal mind, cannot sense! What a charming way to dispose of God!"

"Oh, no!" said Doris.

"Oh, yes," said Bessy, having found the Achilles heel and now not letting go. "You deny the mind any other power

than its material senses. In such a way you dare not dispose of the soul! Man's immortal spirit is within him and he is in contact with it and it is in contact with the Immensity of God. With the Immensity of God," she repeated, liking the term. "Belief in itself has performed many miracles and I do not think one dares take it upon herself to deny the Bible."

"Certainly not!" said Doris, angrily wondering how she could get out of this trap.

"The mind, properly attuned, can become One with All, for man, in the image of God, is certainly a servant of God if he so wishes."

"Naturally, but—"

"And as God can create, so can man create," stated Bessy. "There are miracles and miracles to prove that. Even modern miracles. Faith is belief and, if a man can believe anything enough, then certainly that thing becomes an actuality."

"But—" limped Doris.

"The mind of man, becoming attuned to the All, is, of course, endowed with some of the Power of God. For example, if a man desires a thing enough, then that thing is his. In a sense he has created that thing and his desire for it has altered or shaped it to his liking. A man can create out of his own belief just as God can create, for man is one with the Universe and the Universe is God. Any belief, intense enough, creates actuality." She smiled sweetly upon Jacob, who had now manfully managed the second plate. "Would you have some dessert?"

Jacob was too dazed to protest, physically and mentally slugged into resistlessness. He was trying to rally, but rally he could not, since it weighed upon him that he would somehow have to eat the dessert as well.

Bessy came back and placed it before him. Exerting all the last dregs of determination he sat up, raised the spoon to attack the ice cream and then shuddered.

A cooky lay there. A cooky which was cut in the shape of a *cat*. And even as he looked the cooky seemed to grin at him.

"Oooooooooooooooh," said Jacob and quietly collapsed.

They escorted him home in a cab, both of them apparently concerned about his condition, but nevertheless finding much time to glare at each other over his back. Under

other circumstances Jacob might have been flattered into near expansiveness, but now he was brought to such depths of misery, both physical and mental, that he scarcely heeded their solicitousness.

Of course neither of them had said a thing about that cat, and he certainly could not tell them. But now Bessy, to soothe him, began to rub in the salt.

"You will simply have to come and see my cats sometime," she was saying as the cab rolled to a halt before Jacob's door. "They are so sweet and so cute. Cats are nearly human, don't you think, Jacob?"

"Th-this is where I live," said Jacob.

Supporting himself by gripping the doorknob he managed to wave good night to them and call out a feeble thanks. At the bottom of the steps they both turned and nodded and then went their separate ways.

"Meeow," said a night prowler in the gloom.

Jacob let himself into the house and dashed up the steps so fast that he was in his room, with door closed and bolted, before the animal had finished the final syllable.

"You are being foolish," said Jacob. "You are being very silly. It is not true what Bessy said about evil things. It is not true that animals have souls. It is not true that that cat could arrange a series of events after it was dead and so drive me to something desperate. What do I care about a mangy, filthy, decrepit, stupid, useless *cat?*"

Bessy was being silly. The world was a wholly rational place. Doris had the proper idea. *She* couldn't be shaken by superstitious nonsense. No, sir. Doris had good, sound, practical ideas. Scientific! That was it. Scientific. People didn't go crazy because they saw ghosts and evil beings. People went crazy because they were obsessed with an idea or something. The mind didn't create anything, either. It was just a mind, a delicate instrument which could be thrown out of adjustment by some shock—

From the backyard came a cry, "Errrower, fssztl"

Jacob leaped and wrestled the window down. Shaking, he supported himself by the foot of the bed and felt the cold rivulets of sweat course down under his arms.

What had that *cat* said when it was dying?

No! He wouldn't think of it. He would whisk it from his mind forever. He would be strong and put it aside! He

crawled into bed in the darkness and pulled the covers up to his chin.

The next thing he knew he was aware of a weight upon his chest which was warm and uncomfortable. He struggled up through the layers and layers of infolding slumber to shove restively at the thing.

His hands contacted fur!

His eyes snapped open.

There was a cat sitting upon his chest, looking at him and purring gently. He was a huge cat, a dirty cat, and a very proud cat. He was missing half his right ear, several of his port whiskers, a third of his right forefoot and about a sixteenth of his tail to say nothing of the patches where fur had been.

"SCAT!" cried Jacob.

The cat did not move, but only purred the louder. Jacob tried to leap out of bed, but he was frozen where he lay with the terror of it. There could be no mistaking this cat! It was the same cat and it was a dead cat. Its spine had been broken so that its forefeet lay in an opposite direction from his hind feet and it was dead. But it was here and it didn't look at all dead!

"Rrrrrrrrrr-rrrrrr," purred the cat.

Almost thankfully Jacob realized that this was a nightmare. It had all the peculiarities of a nightmare. The weight on his chest, the chilled feeling all over. This was a nightmare. The cat would dissolve and go away.

It wore a gentle smile which bared a pearly tooth. It seemed comfortable and well disposed.

Jacob wildly decided to lie still and let it fade away into the nothingness of his own imagination.

The cat stayed there. Jacob lay there.

And then the cat began to grow.

It grew and it grew and it grew. Its head became the size of a sugar bowl and then the size of a cantaloupe and then the size of a pumpkin. And still it grew. And still it smiled. And the purr of it was now so loud that it had begun to shake not only Jacob, but the bed as well.

Now Jacob knew that it was a nightmare, but that did not mitigate his fear. It was certain to be a nightmare. He merely believed that the cat was there and that the cat was growing and so the cat was there and the cat was growing. He

would suppose that the cat was not there and the cat would then go away. It was very simple.

The cat grew and grew some more. Its head became larger than a tiger's, larger than a horse's, larger than an elephant's. Its eyes were now like dinner plates and its whiskers as big as wire cables and its fur was standing all separately, each hair as large as a porcupine quill.

Jacob was looking up at its chin. A paw was on either side of him. The exposed tooth was like a marble column. The claws in its paws were sheathed sabers. Its breath was foul as a sardine can.

"RRRRRRRR-RRRRRRRRRR," purred the cat.

Jacob's heart was racing. He sought cautiously to draw himself upward and beyond the paws and then made a startling discovery. His hands hooked into the bed sheet very neatly. But they were hands no more. They were tiny, black paws. Gagging at the sight of them he looked at his side. It was smooth and sleek and gray. And into his vision grew his long, graceful tail!

He was a mouse between the paws of a cat!

Jacob wriggled upward to the head of the bed and dropped hurriedly down to the floor. The heavy fall stunned him, but he scuttled along the baseboard and dived into a pile of papers.

There was no sound in the room. And then came the soft footfalls of the cat, the loud snuffling of its breath. The paper rattled.

With a squeak of horror Jacob sped away, again following the baseboard in an insensate effort to locate a hole and dive to safety. But there were no holes in the baseboard. He lunged with a skidding scramble behind the leg of the bureau and, looking out, saw the feet of the stalking cat approach.

Madly Jacob gripped the scarf of the bureau, his leap successful. He scurried behind a stack of books there and crouched with fluttering heart and burning lungs. The bureau rocked. He was staring straight up at those huge eyes.

With one bat of his paw the cat sent him hurtling out into the center of the room and then leaped after him to plant, abruptly, a paw on either side of him.

Jacob trembled. He looked up at the acre of fur chest. He looked higher to the great yellow orbs which were now

dilating and contracting with pleasure. The cat's tail made loud sounds as it swished and lashed back and forth.

"RRRRRRRRRR-RRRRRR," said the cat.

Jacob played dead. He lay and shivered and played dead.

After a little the cat arose and became interested in washing its face. Jacob hearkened to the rasp of tongue on fur and finally opened his eyes. A great cavern appeared in the cat's face as it yawned. The fences of teeth gleamed. The cat sighed and wandered away to inspect something interesting.

Now was his chance! He could make a dash for the crack under the door and get out!

He gathered himself. He leaped away. He sped like the wind toward the crack of the door. It got bigger and bigger. He was almost there! He had—

BOW!

With a moan Jacob rolled to his feet in the center of the room. His side was bleeding. He was bruised. His beautiful gray fur was plastered flat with blood.

The cat lay down with a paw on either side of him. It batted him to the right paw and then batted him back to the left. The saber claws drew and sheathed in sensuous delight. Back to the left paw. Then to the right paw. Dazed and aching, Jacob fainted.

After a little he came around. He looked for the cat and could find no trace of it. Jacob was lying there, battered and bloody in the center of the room and the cat was gone! He opened the other eye. He studied the chairs. He viewed even the window ledge. Why, the cat had vanished!

Jacob gathered his long black tail about himself and crouched there, studying the exits. That crack under the door still looked good. But he was so broken up inside that he couldn't make much speed. He leaped up and raced for it.

Freedom! Liberty! He was almost there. It grew bigger and bigger. His nose could feel the rush of cold air.

BOW!

The cat had leaped down from the bed to knock him tumbling. And now the cat gathered him up in its sharp teeth and carried him back to the center of the room.

Right paw to left paw. Let him run a few inches. Snatch him back. If he lay still for a moment, he was stirred into agonized life by the teeth, and if he ran, he was knocked back by the paws.

Gasping, a mass of pain, slit and slashed and broken, dripping with the thick glue of the cat's saliva, Jacob knew he was nearly done.

He looked across the cobbly expanse of the carpet. He looked about the immensity of his room. Heartbroken, too weary now to move, he knew his end was near.

The cat growled, angry that so little life was left in him. A mighty set of claws scraped him and took the skin from his left side. Teeth worried him. And then, once again, the cat apparently decided that he was dead. The cat got up and strolled away. It became interested in boxing the tassle which hung from the bridge lamp. It knocked a match box across the room and scurried after it.

Jacob hitched himself toward the crack under the door. If only he could get there. If only his broken legs would support him long enough. If only the cat would completely forget him for the seconds necessary for him to bridge this distance.

He halved the width. He quartered it. In agony, which sent waves of nausea over him, he made his broken legs support him, though now the right one showed its shattered bone. Feet to go. And then less distance and less. The cold air there began to revive him. He was going to make it for the cat was too far away. He was going to make it. HE WAS GOING TO MAKE IT!

BOW!

The cat knocked him back into the center of the room.

Heart and body broken, Jacob lay still. The claws raked him. The teeth punctured him. He lay still.

With a bored sigh the cat opened its mouth and took in his head. There was a crunch. There was another crunch.

Jacob Findley woke up quite sound, quite whole, and—for a moment—vastly thankful that it was, to be sure, no more than a dream. Then he realized, almost simultaneously, two things: the cat had died only once, and rather quickly, and he had a perfectly correct conviction that *he*, on the other hand, would die all night, every night—

DR. JACOBUS MELIFLORE'S LAST PATIENT

Mindret Lord

Charming story of the life of my old classmate Meliflore (we studied under Baron Frankenstein) . . . . A grand fellow who had a passion for very small brains . . . perfect in every detail . . . all handmade . . . each one as alive as you or I . . . dear old Jacobus had such infinite patience . . . until the day he flipped his learned lid. . . .

AFTER A LONG and reasonably successful career, Dr. Jacobus Meliflore finally retired from medical practice at the age of 70. In doing so, he cut himself off not only from active practice, but from all contact with his profession; gradually he forgot much of what he had known, and he never learned, nor wanted to learn, anything at all about modern theories or techniques. During the next fifteen years he devoted himself with passionate zeal to constructing in miniature the great Gothic cathedrals. Rheims required four years; Chartres, six; and at the end of the following five years, Notre Dame de Paris was still far from completion. The doctor worked in clay, casting each detail separately in plaster—a difficult, exacting process, demanding skill and infinite patience. The delicate flying arches and pinnacles were apt to crack or crumble at a touch. But the many failures and disasters detracted nothing from the doctor's joy. He was delighted with his work and he sharply resented anything that interfered with it. At 85, all his friends had died long since, but such was his preoccupation that he had scarcely noticed their going. So long as Mrs. Stane, his housekeeper, gave him his meals and kept out of his way, he was content. And Mrs. Stane served him well; she liked and respected

him, she had been with him close to 30 years, and she was to inherit his comfortable house and savings. On the whole, Dr. Meliflore's retirement was more peaceful and happy than can easily be imagined.

Actually, the only emergency that was ever allowed to interrupt Dr. Meliflore's architectural labors was the illness or indisposition of Miss Eugenia Latterly. Though she had never seen the woman, Mrs. Stane did not approve of Miss Latterly. Miss Latterly's voice on the telephone was imperious and demanding. Miss Latterly never paid any bills (the doctor never sent any, but also, he never had any more money in his pockets when he came home than when he left). And, above all, Mrs. Stane's distrust was due to the very unorthodox nature of Miss Latterly's complaints.

When Miss Latterly called (it rarely happened more than once a year or so), Mrs. Stane relayed the message to the doctor who would always be up to his knees and elbows in clay or plaster. He would sigh, rub the top of his bald head distractedly, and say, "Is that woman still alive? Well, Mrs. Stane, send for a conveyance." He would dress himself in clothing which had been suitable and proper to a physician perhaps half a century earlier, clap on his head a tall black hat that, with the loss of his hair, had gradually become too large for him, and, carrying a tattered, dusty leather bag, set off on the journey to his sole remaining patient.

In an hour or two he would be back, stripping off his hat and coat as Mrs. Stane opened the front door. Without pausing, he would start back to his cathedral. Mrs. Stane would ask, "What was it this time, Doctor?" "Oh, she was bitten by a bat." "A *bat*, Doctor!" "Oh, yes. Quite painful." And he would be gone beyond further questioning.

Sometimes, later in the day, or at dinner, Mrs. Stane would attempt to discover more about Miss Latterly's case, but invariably the doctor was too absorbed by his own interests to satisfy her curiosity.

On one occasion when Dr. Meliflore returned from his patient's bedside, he mentioned that Miss Latterly was suffering a touch of sulphur poisoning. "But you take sulphur with molasses," Mrs. Stane objected. "I didn't know it was poisonous." "It is when you breathe too much of it," the doctor said, shedding his collar and tie as he climbed the stairs.

Another time, even Dr. Meliflore had seemed a trifle du-

bious. At least, unless Mrs. Stane's hearing was at fault, he had muttered something to the effect that "Of course, the disease was common enough among goats, but so far as he knew Miss Latterly was the only human being on record who'd—." The end of the report was lost as the doctor closed the door of his workroom, and Mrs. Stane could never persuade him to return to the subject. At the time, he was much too involved with the intricacies of the rounded chevet at the east end of the Notre Dame.

Again, upon returning from a call, Dr. Meliflore remarked, "This time the idiotic woman's managed to get herself branded." "Branded?" asked Mrs. Stane. "Surely you mean burned, Doctor?" "Branded," Dr. Meliflore repeated. "Painful, I suppose, but only superficial. Help me with this scarf will you, Mrs. Stane?[2] On the whole, perhaps it was not so very odd that Mrs. Stane disapproved of Miss Latterly.

On an especially bitter day in mid-winter, Miss Latterly telephoned and in her stiff, uncompromising way, commanded that the doctor come immediately. Mrs. Stane felt that she was amply justified in replying, "I really don't think it's possible, Miss Latterly. Why don't you call another physician? The doctor's too old, and this weather is so bad—" "You tell Dr. Meliflore I wish to see him at once! That's all, my good woman!" And Miss Latterly hung up.

Mrs. Stane obediently delivered the message, though she was extremely annoyed and determined not to let the doctor venture out of the house. "You really can't go, Doctor. You mustn't. Just let me call her back and tell her."

Dr. Meliflore was very busy preparing the mold for a small casting, but he sat down, rubbed a plaster-covered hand around the top of his head, and said, "Well, well. I did hope to finish this bit today. But call me a conveyance, Mrs. Stane."

"No, Doctor—please! Why can't she get somebody else for her crazy ailments?"

"Well," Dr. Meliflore was doubtful. "She could, I suppose. But she won't. So there's no use talking about it."

"She would if she had to."

"No, I don't think so."

"But why not, Doctor? Why not?"

The doctor paid no attention to the question. Starting to

his bedroom, he muttered, "The miserable creature! The silly, silly creature. . . ."

A taxicab set him down at Miss Latterly's house. It was a narrow building with a dirty stone façade. Dr. Meliflore mounted the steps and entered without knocking; he knew the door would have been left unlatched for him. In the hallway he was met by a large black cat whose name was Higgins. Higgins led the doctor up the stairs and into a dimly lit, very warm chamber where Miss Latterly lay in bed, clad as usual in a black robe and pointed nightcap.

Ignoring Higgins and whatever it was that seemed to be swooping through the air, Dr. Meliflore said, "Well, what is it this time?" and without waiting for an answer, sat down beside the bed, took Miss Latterly's wrist to feel for her pulse, and pushed a thermometer into her mouth.

Mrs. Stane spent almost two hours at the front window watching for the doctor's return. The last minutes were almost intolerable. It had begun to snow and the footing was treacherous. Suppose he slipped and broke his hip? Suppose Miss Latterly deliberately pushed him! Goats! That woman! Suppose she threw him down the stairs? Mrs. Stane pushed her insignificant nose against the cold window pane and worried. Fog formed on the glass and she wiped it away with her small fat palm. Presently a taxi drew up to the curb and Dr. Meliflore lurched out of it. Mrs. Stane was very annoyed with him for having caused her so much anxiety. She went to the door to let him in and pay off the driver.

Dr. Meliflore sat down on the bench in the hall and stuck out his feet. While Mrs. Stane removed his galoshes, she said, "I never should have let you go. I know I never should have let you go. What was the matter with her this time, Doctor?"

"She's dead."

"Oh?" She remembered to add, "The poor woman! What was it?"

"Well," said the doctor, turning his head while Mrs. Stane unwound the woolen scarf from his throat, "toad poisoning, I should think."

"Toad poisoning! Frog legs, you mean, of course."

"Toads."

He stood up and started to the stairs, but at the first step he paused. "Ah—Mrs. Stane."

"Yes, Doctor?"

"You're very careful of yourself, aren't you?"

"Why, I think so, Doctor." His voice had sounded quite concerned.

"No—experiments?"

"No *what*, Doctor?"

He rubbed his hand over his shining pate. His foot was still on the first step. "No, no," he said, "of course not."

There was a loud knock on the front door. It startled both the doctor and Mrs. Stane.

"Who could that be!" said Mrs. Stane.

"If it's Miss Latterly—"

(There was another, more demanding knock.)

"If it's Miss Latterly," Dr. Meliflore repeated, "tell her to go away. I simply will not be disturbed. I have a cathedral to finish."

"But, Doctor!" cried Mrs. Stane. "You said Miss Latterly was dead!"

"Quite true. So I did." (The knocking on the door was louder and more urgent.) "Please open the door, Mrs. Stane."

"Poor dear!" thought Mrs. Stane. "His memory has failed."

She went to the door and opened it. Higgins entered with a kind of stiff, aggressive suspicion, his back and his tail arched almost painfully. Next came Miss Latterly, rather decrepit, supporting herself with the aid of a broom. She ignored Mrs. Stane and glared at the doctor who was two steps up the stairs.

"Doctor," said Miss Latterly, "I must see you at once!"

"I'm sorry," said Dr. Meliflore, "I'm afraid your case is quite hopeless. I've already told you that." Higgins grinned at Dr. Meliflore in a rather nasty way, and Dr. Meliflore added: "And I'm afraid Higgins' case is hopeless, too." He started up the stairs, saying over his shoulder, "Now if you'll forgive me? Show them out, Mrs. Stane."

Neither Higgins nor Miss Latterly paid her the least attention. In fact, when Mrs. Stane turned back from the door, both the cat and the old lady were at the head of the stairs, waiting for Dr. Meliflore to complete the last few steps.

Dr. Meliflore paused. "Very well, Miss Latterly," he said, "but you're a silly woman and Higgins is a silly cat. You've both annoyed me for years. When I retired from practice, I thought I'd be rid of you. I've been patient, very patient.

Tonight I thought was the end, but I see I was wrong." In a very dignified way Dr. Meliflore rubbed a few flakes of plaster off his forehead. He seemed to be considering. "Miss Latterly," he said, "are you interested in architecture? Let me show you my model of Notre Dame."

He passed them and led the way into his workroom. The door closed after them. After a while Mrs. Stane went to bed. The next morning she opened the door. Dr. Meliflore was dead, with a rather contented smile on his broad face, sitting in front of his final creation which seemed, at last, to be complete. At least the exterior was perfect in every detail. He had long ago modeled the front doors of the cathedral, and now he had put them in place—closed. Then, his work finished, he had lain his head down on the bench so that he seemed to be peering into the dark interior through the rose window. There was no sign of Miss Latterly and her awful cat. They must have left sometime during the night.

After Dr. Meliflore's mortal remains had been removed and the house was quiet again, Mrs. Stane, deeply grieving, stared through the rose window into the cathedral as the doctor had done, as a child peeks into a house of cards.

It was dark inside, the light that filtered through the stained glass was very feeble, yet as Mrs. Stane's vision adjusted to the religious gloom she could dimly make out the altar, the choir loft and perhaps a station of the cross, though she could not be certain. She *was* certain, however, that she did not really see the black-clad figure of a woman with a cat at her heels, trying vainly to break her way out of the solid walls. If there were screams and curses Mrs. Stane heard them not. Certainly not.

THE DEVIL IS NOT MOCKED

Manly Wade Wellman

Some of you outsiders have cast aspersions upon the loyalties of my fellow Transylvanians during the last war . . . . This I bitterly resent and protest . . . we were right in the thick of it . . . biting and scratching with the best of them . . . . My beloved old grand-father-in-law . . . dear old Drac . . . was a leader in the resistance . . . an inspiration to us all . . . .

DO YOU not know that tonight, when the clock strikes midnight, all the evil things in the world hold sway? Do you know where you are going, and what you are going to?

BRAM STOKER.

Balkan weather, even Balkan spring weather, was not pleasant to General von Grunn, leaning heavily back behind the bulletproof glass of his car. May 4th—the English would call it St. George's Day, after their saint who was helping them so little. The date would mean something to Heinrich Himmler, too; that weak-chinned pet of the Fuehrer would hold some sort of garbled druidic ritual with his Schutzstaffel on the Brockenburg. Von Grunn grimaced fatly at thought of Himmler, and leaned forward to look out into the night. An armed car ahead, an armed car behind—all was well.

"Forward!" he growled to his orderly, Kranz, who trod on the accelerator. The car moved, and the car ahead took the lead, into the Borgo Pass.

Von Grunn glanced backward once, to the lights of Bistritz. This country had been Rumanian not so long ago. Now it was Hungarian, which meant that it was German.

What was it that the mayor of Bistritz had said, when he had demanded a semiremote headquarters? The castle along this pass, empty—ready for him? The dolt had seemed eager to help, to please. Von Grunn produced a long cigarette. Young Captain Plesser, sitting beside him, at once kindled a lighter. Slim, quiet, the young aid had faded from von Grunn's consciousness.

"What's the name of that castle again?" inquired the general, and made a grimace when Plesser replied in barbarous slavic syllables. "What's the meaning in a civilized tongue?"

"Devil's castle, I should think," hazarded the captain's respectful voice.

"*Ach,* so—Transylvania is supposed to be overrun with devils," nodded von Grunn, puffing. "Let them defer to us, or we'll devil them." He smiled, for his was a great gift for appreciating his own epigrams. "Meanwhile, let the castle be called its German name. *Teufelstoss*—Devil's Castle."

"Of course," agreed Plesser.

Silence for a while, as the cars purred powerfully up the rough slope of the pass trail. Von Grunn lost himself in his favorite meditation—his own assured future. He was to establish an unostentatious command post for—what? A move against Russia? The Black Sea? He would know soon enough. In any case, an army would be his, action and glory. There was glory enough for all. Von Grunn remembered Wilhelm II saying that, in the last war.

"The last war," he said aloud. "I was a simple oberlieutenant then. And the Fuehrer—a corporal. What were you, captain?"

"A child."

"You remember?"

"Nothing." Plesser screwed up his courage to a question. "General von Grunn, does it not seem strange that the folk at Bistritz were so anxious for you to come to the castle—*Teufelstoss*—tonight?"

Von Grunn nodded, like a big fierce owl. "You smell a trap, *nicht wahr?* That is why I bring two carloads of men, my trusted bodyguard. For that very chance. But I doubt if any in Transylvania dare set traps for me, or any other German."

The cars were slowing down. General and captain leaned

forward. The car ahead was passing through the great open gateway of a courtyard. Against the spattered stars rose the silhouette of a vast black building, with a broken tower. "We seem to be here," ventured Captain Plesser.

"Good. Go to the forward car. When the other arrives, form the guard."

It was done swiftly. Sixteen stark infantrymen were marshaled, with rifles, bombs, and submachine guns. Von Grunn emerged into the cold night, and Kranz, the orderly, began to bring out the luggage.

"A natural fort, withdrawn and good for any defense except against aircraft," pronounced the general, peering through his monocle at the battlements above. "We will make a thorough examination.

"*Unteroffizer!*" he barked, and the noncom in charge of the escort came forward woodenly, stiffening to attention. "Six of the men will accompany me inside. You will bivouac the others in this courtyard, maintaining a guard all night. *Heil Hitler.*"

"*Heil Hitler,*" responded the man briskly. Von Grunn smiled as the *unteroffizer* strode away to obey. For all the soldierly alacrity, that order to sleep outdoors was no welcome one. So much the better; von Grunn believed in toughening experiences for field soldiers, and his escort had lived too softly since the Battle of Flanders.

He walked to where a sort of vestibule of massive rough stone, projected from the castle wall. Plesser already stood there, staring at the heavy nail-studded planks of the door. "It is locked, *Herr General,*" he reported. "No knob or latch, bell or knocker—"

But as he spoke, the door swung creakingly inward, and yellow light gushed out.

On the threshold stood a figure in black, as tall as von Grunn himself but thinner than even Plesser. A pale, sharp face and brilliant eyes turned upon them, in the light of a chimneyless oil lamp of silver.

"Welcome, General von Grunn," said the lamp holder. "You are expected."

His German was good; his manner respectful. Von Grunn's broad hand slid into a greatcoat pocket, where he always carried a big automatic pistol.

"Who told you to expect us?" he demanded.

The lamplight struck blue radiance from smooth, sparse

black hair as the thin man bowed. "Who could mistake General von Grunn, or doubt that he would want this spacious, withdrawn structure for his new headquarters position?"

The mayor of Bistritz, officious ass, must have sent this fellow ahead to make fawning preparations—but even as von Grunn thought that, the man himself gave other information.

"I am in charge here, have been in charge for many years. We are so honored to have company. Will the general enter?"

He stepped back. Plesser entered, then von Grunn. The vestibule was warm. "This way, excellency," said the man with the lamp—the steward, von Grunn decided to classify him. He led the way along a stone-paved passage, von Grunn's escort tramping authoritatively after him. Then up a great winding stair, and into a room, a big hall of a place, with a fire of logs and a table set for supper.

All told, very inviting; but it was not von Grunn's way, to say as much. He only nodded, and allowed Captain Plesser to help him out of his greatcoat. Meanwhile, the steward was showing the luggage-laden Kranz into an octagonal bedroom beyond.

"Take these six men," said von Grunn to Plesser, indicating the soldiers of the escort. "Tour the castle. Make a plan of each floor. Then come back and report. *Heil Hitler.*"

"Heil Hitler," and Plesser led the party away. Von Grunn turned his broad back to the fire. Kranz was busy within the bedroom, arranging things. The steward returned. "May I serve the *Herr General?"* he asked silkily.

Von Grunn looked at the table, and with difficulty forebore to lick his fat lips. There were great slices of roast beef, a fowl, cheese, salad, and two bottles of wine—Kranz himself could not have guessed better what would be good. Von Grunn almost started forward to the table, then paused. This was Transylvania. The natives, for all their supple courtesy, disliked and feared soldiers of the Reich. Might these good things not be poisoned?

"Remove these things," he said bleakly. "I have brought my own provisions. You may eat that supper yourself."

Another bow. "The *Herr General* is too good, but I will sup at midnight—it is not long. Now, I will clear the things away. Your man will fetch what you want."

He began to gather up dishes. Watching him stoop over the table, von Grunn thought that he had seldom seen anyone so narrow in the shoulders—they were humped high, like the shoulders of a hyena, suggesting a power that crouched and lurked. Von Grunn was obliged to tell himself that he was not repelled or nervous. The steward was a stranger, a Slav of some kind. It was von Grunn's business to be scornful of all such.

"Now," he said, when all was cleared, "go to the bedroom and tell my orderly—" He broke off. "What was that?"

The other listened. Von Grunn could have sworn that the man's ears—pale and pointed—lifted voluntarily, like the ears of a cat or a fox. The sound came again, a prolonged howl in the distance.

"The wolves," came the quiet reply. "They speak to the full moon."

"Wolves?" The general was intrigued at once. He was a sportsman—that is, he liked to corner and kill beasts almost as much as he liked to corner and kill men. As a guest of Hermann Goering he had shot two very expensive wild bulls, and he yearned for the day when the Fuehrer would graciously invite him to the Black Forest for pigsticking. "Are there many?" he asked. "It sounds like many. If they were not so far—"

"They come nearer," his companion said, and indeed the howl was repeated more strongly and clearly. "But you gave an order, general?"

"Oh, yes." Von Grunn remembered his hunger. "My man will bring me supper from among the things we have with us."

A bow, and the slender black figure moved noiselessly into the bedroom. Von Grunn crossed the floor and seated himself in an armchair before the table. The steward returned, and stood at his elbow.

"Pardon. Your orderly helped me carry the other food to the castle kitchen. He has not returned, and so I took the liberty of serving you."

He had a tray. Upon it were delicacies from von Grunn's mess chest—slices of smoked turkey, buttered bread, preserved fruits, bottled beer. The fellow had arranged them himself, had had every opportunity to . . . to—

Von Grunn scowled and took the monocle from his eye.

The danger of poison again stirred in his mind, and he had difficulty scorning it. He must eat and drink, in defiance of fear.

Poison or no poison, the food was splendid, and the steward an excellent waiter. The general drank beer, and deigned to say, "You are an experienced servant?"

The pale, sharp face twitched sidewise in negation. "I serve very few guests. The last was years ago—Jonathan Harker, an Englishman—"

Von Grunn snorted away mention of that unwelcome people, and finished his repast. Then he rose, and stared around. The wolves howled again, in several directions and close to the castle.

"I seem to be deserted," he said grimly. "The captain is late, my orderly late. My men make no report." He stepped to the door, opened it. "Plesser!" he called. "Captain Plesser!"

No reply.

"Shall I bring you to him?" asked the steward gently. Once again, he had come up close. Von Grunn started violently, and wheeled.

The eyes of the steward were on a level with his, and very close. For the first time von Grunn saw that they were filled with green light. The steward was smiling, too, and von Grunn saw his teeth—white, spaced widely, pointed—

As if signaled by the thought, the howling of the beasts outside broke out afresh. It was deafeningly close. To von Grunn it sounded like hundreds. Then, in reply, came a shout, the voice of the *unteroffizer* uttering a quick, startled command.

At once a shot. Several shots.

The men he had encamped in the courtyard were shooting at something.

With ponderous haste, von Grunn hurried from the room, down the stairs. As he reached the passageway below, he heard more shots, and a wild air-rending chorus of howls, growls, spotting scuffles. Von Grunn gained the door by which he had entered. Something moved in the gloom at his very feet.

A chalky face turned up, the face of Captain Plesser. A hand lifted shakily to clutch at the general's boot top.

"Back in there, the dark rooms—" It was half a choke,

half a sigh. "They're devils—hungry—they got the others, got me— I could come no farther than this—"

Plesser collapsed. Light came from behind von Grunn, and he could see the captain's head sagging backward on the stone. The side of the slender neck had been torn open, but blood did not come. For there was no blood left in Captain Plesser's body.

Outside, there was sudden silence. Stepping across Plesser's body, the general seized the latch and pushed the door open.

The courtyard was full of wolves, feeding. One glance was enough to show what they fed on. As von Grunn stared, the wolves lifted their heads and stared back. He saw many green-glowing eyes, level, hard, hungry, many grinning mouths with pointed teeth—the eyes and the teeth of the steward.

He got the door shut again, and sagged upon it, breathing hard.

"I am sorry, general," came a soft, teasing apology. "Sorry —my servants were too eager within and without. Wolves and vampires are hard to restrain. After all, it is midnight —our moment of all moments."

"What are you raving about?" gasped von Grunn, feeling his jaw sag.

"I do not rave. I tell simple truth. My castle has vampires within, wolves without, all my followers and friends—"

Von Grunn felt for a weapon. His great coat was upstairs, the pistol in its pocket.

"Who are you?" he screamed.

"I am Count Dracula of Transylvania," replied the gaunt man in black.

He set down the lamp carefully before moving forward.

BONES

Donald A. Wollheim

I am forever badgering you young people out there to delve into the past and revive the lost arts of the ancients . . . . This poor fellow took my advice . . . and succeeded . . . . Well, confound it, he almost succeeded. . . .

THE MUSEUM of Natural Sciences was not very far from the place where he was staying, so Severus found himself striding briskly through the dim, winding streets that night. He had come to Boston on a visit, renewed acquaintances with learned men with whom he had exchanged knowledge in years past; thus the letter he had received in this morning's mail inviting him to a private demonstration this night.

It was not a pleasant walk; already he was beginning to regret not having taken some other means of transportation. The buildings were old and loomed darkly over the narrow streets. Lights were few; for the most part, they came from flickering, dust encrusted lamp posts of last century's design. Large moths and other nocturnal insects fluttered over their surfaces, added their moving shadows to the air of desolation which hung about these ways.

The moon was behind clouds that had streaked across the autumn skies all day and now blocked out the stars. The night about him was warm with that touch of unexpected chill which comes in autumn. Severus shuddered more than once as a wandering breeze slithered across his face unexpectedly around some dreary corner. He increased his pace, looked more suspiciously about him.

Boston, the oldest section of the city. Antique brick buildings dating back to the revolution, some much farther.

Dwelling places of the best families of two centuries ago. Now steadily advancing progress and life had left them derelict as upon deserted shores. Old, three or four story structures, narrow tottering dirty red bricked houses with yawning black windows that now looked out through filth-encrusted panes upon streets and by-ways that served to shelter only the poorest and most alien section of the city's people. Forgotten, the district imparted its despair and overhanging doom to the man who walked its ways that night.

Half conquered by the smell of the antique houses, the subtle vibrations of past generations still pervading his spirit, Severus came at last out of the narrow streets into the open square where stood the museum.

The change surprised him. Here all was open. The dark, cloud streaked sky loomed down overhead with a closeness that appalled him for a moment. The white marble façade of the structure glistened oddly in his view. It stood out, the cleanliness of it, as something exceedingly out of place, as something too new, too recent to have any right here. Its Neo-Grecian designs were horribly modern and crude for the Eighteenth Century blocks that surrounded it.

He walked swiftly across the open square, up the wide stone steps to the entrance of the building. Quickly he thrust open the small side door, hurried through as if to escape the thoughts of forgotten streets outside.

How futile such hopes in a museum! He realized that, the instant the door was closed. He stood in a dark hall, lit dimly by one bulb above the entrance, another one at the opposite end of the main passage. And at once his nostrils were assailed by the inescapable odor of all such institutions —age!

The musty air rushed over his body, took him into its folds. The silence assailed his ears with a suddenness that all but took his breath away. He looked about, trying to catch his bearings. Then he ventured a step, walked rapidly across the large chamber, down a wide corridor opening off it. Not a glance did he cast from side to side. The looming shadows of indescribable things were enough for him. His imagination supplied the rest. Unavoidable glimpses of shadowy sarcophagi and grotesquely carven idols sent great cold chills thrilling down his spine, stirring up his heart.

Up a narrow staircase, a turn to the right. At last he was

at the room set aside for the night's demonstration. He stood a moment trying to catch his breath and regain composure. Then he pushed the door open, stepped inside.

A bare room with scarcely any furnishings. About seven or eight other men were there. In low tones they greeted him, drew him over to their circle. All were standing; there were no chairs in the room. A couple of small instrument-racks and the main object was all.

The room was dominated by a long, low table upon which rested a six-foot bundle of dull grey cloth like a giant cocoon. Severus stared at it a moment, then recognized it as an Egyptian mummy removed from its coffin case. It obviously awaited unwinding.

So this was what he'd been invited to, he thought, wishing he hadn't been so friendly to the Egyptologists attached to this particular museum.

Glancing around, Severus took note of the others present. He was surprised to recognize one as a Medical Doctor highly esteemed at a city hospital. The doctor indeed seemed to be one of the active participants in what was about to take place for he wore a white smock that indicated action.

Bantling, the Egyptologist, held up a hand for silence.

"Most of you know what is about to take place tonight, therefore I will merely outline it for your convenience and for the one or two who know nothing about it." He nodded to Severus and smiled.

"This object, as you have all surmised, is an Egyptian mummy. But it is, we hope, different from all other such mummies previously examined.

"According to our painstaking translation of the hieroglyphics of the sarcophagus whence this body came, this marks an attempt of the priesthood of the IVth Dynasty to send one of their number alive into the lands to come. The unique part of it, and that which occupies us tonight, is that this priest did not die, nor was his body in any way mutilated. Instead, according to the inscriptions, he was fed and bathed in certain compounds that would suspend, indefinitely, the action's of his body cells; he was then put to sleep and prepared for a slumber very like death, yet not true death. In this state he could remain for years, yet still be re-awakened to walk again, a living man.

"In brief, and using modern terminology, these people of

what we call ancient times, claim to have solved the secret of suspended animation. Whether or not they did is for us to determine."

Severus felt himself grow cold as this knowledge penetrated his being. The past had indeed reached out to the present. He would witness this night the end of an experiment started thousands of years before. Perhaps he himself would yet speak to and hear speak an inhabitant of this lost age. Egypt, buried these hundreds of centuries, Egypt aged beyond belief—yet, a man of that time-lost empire lay here in this very room, in the North American city of Boston.

"3700 B. C." he heard someone remark in answer to an unheard question.

Severus raised his eyes from the object on the table, let his gaze fall upon the window and what was revealed through it. Some of the clouds had cleared away and the cold, bright stars shone through. Far-off flickering spots of light, that must surely have shone upon Ancient Egypt as coldly. The very light just passing through his cornea may have originated in the time when this thing upon the table was about to be plunged into Life-in-Death.

Far off, the dull clanging of a church bell drifted into the room.

"Buck up, old man." A hand patted Severus' shoulder as an acquaintance came over to him. "It isn't as bad as it looks. Why that fellow will be as hale as any of us before the night is out. You'll think he's just a new immigrant."

Bantling and an assistant were even now engaged in unwrapping the mummy. Rolls and rolls of old, crumbling cloth were carefully being unwound from the figure on the table. Dust of death and ages now filled the air. Several coughs were heard; the door was opened on the dark passage outside to let the air change.

A gasp as at last the windings fell away. The body now lay entirely uncovered. Quickly, quietly, the wrappings were gathered together and piled in a receptacle while all crowded about to observe the Egyptian.

All in all, it was in a fine state of preservation. The skin was not brownish; it had not hardened. The arms and legs were still movable, had never stiffened in rigor mortis. Bantling seemed much pleased.

With horror Severus noted the several greyish-blue patches on parts of the face and body which he recognized without asking as a kind of mold.

Dr. Zweig, the physician, bent over and carefully scraped off the fungoid growths. They left nasty reddish pitted scars in the body that made Severus feel sick. He wanted to rush out of the room, out of the building into the clean night air. But the fascination of the horrible kept his glance fixed in hypnosis on the gruesome object before him.

"We are ready," Dr. Zweig said in a low voice.

They began to bathe the body with a sharp-smelling antiseptic, taking off all remaining traces of the preservatives used.

"Remarkable how perfect this thing is," breathed the physician. "Remarkable!"

Now at last the way was open for the work of revival. Large electric pads were brought out, laid all over the body, face and legs. Current was switched into them; the body surface was slowly brought up to normal warmth.

Then arteries and veins were opened, tubes clamped to them running from apparatus under the table. Severus understood that warm artificial blood was being pumped into the body to warm up the internal organs and open up the flow of blood again.

Shortly Dr. Zweig announced himself ready to attempt the final work toward actually bringing the now pliant and vibrant corpse to life. Already the body seemed like that of a living man, the flush of red tinging its skin and cheeks. Severus was in a cold sweat.

"Blood flows again through his veins and arteries," whispered the Egyptologist. "It is time to turn off the mechanical heart and attempt to revive his own."

A needle was plunged into the chest, a substance injected into the dormant, thousands-year old cardiac apparatus of the body. Adrenalin, Severus assumed.

Over the mouth and nostrils of the former mummy a bellows was placed, air forced into the lungs at regular periods. For a while there was no result. Severus began fervently to hope that there would be no result. The air was supercharged with tension, horror mixed with scientific zeal. Through the chamber, the wheeze of the bellows was the only sound.

"Look!"

Someone cried out the word, electrifying all in the room of resurrection. A hand pointed shakily at the chest of the thing on the table. There was more action now; the chest rose and fell more vigorously. Quietly the doctor reached over and pulled away the face mask and stopped the pumps.

And the chest of the Egyptian still moved. Up and down in a ghastly rhythm of its own. Now to their ears became noticeable an odd sound, a rattling soft wheezing sound as of air being sucked in and out of a sleeping man.

"He breathes." The doctor reached out and laid a finger on the body's wrist. "The heart beats."

"He lives again!"

Their eyes stared at what had been done. There, on the table, lay a man, a light brown-skinned, sharp Semitic-featured man, appearing to be in early middle age. He lay there as one quietly asleep.

"Who will waken him?" whispered Severus above the pounding of his heart.

"He will awaken soon," was the answer. "He will rise and walk as if nothing had happened."

Severus shook his head, disbelievingly. Then—

The Egyptian moved. His hand shook slightly; the eyes opened with a jerk.

Spellbound they stood, the eyes of Americans fixed upon the eyes of the Ancient. In shocked silence they watched one another.

The Egyptian sat up slowly, as if painfully. His features moved not a bit; his body moved slowly and jerkily.

The Ancient's eyes roved over the assembly. They caught Severus full in the face. For an instant they gazed at one another, the Vermont man looking into pain-swept ages, into grim depths of agony and sorrow, into the Aeons of old Past Time itself.

The Egyptian suddenly wrinkled up his features, swept up an arm and opened his mouth to speak.

And Severus fled from the room in frightful terror, the others closely following. Behind them rang out a terrible, hoarse bellow, cut off by a gurgling which they barely heard. The entire company, to a man, fought each other like terrified animals, each struggling to be the first out of that Museum, out the doors into the black streets and away.

For there are parts of the human body which, never hav-

ing been alive, cannot be preserved in suspended life. They are the bones, the teeth—strong in death, but unable to defy the crushing millenia.

And when the Egyptian had moved his body and opened his mouth to speak, his face had fallen in like termite-infested wood, the splinters of fragile, age-crumbled bones tearing through the flesh. His whole body had shaken, and, with the swing of the arm, smashed itself into a shapeless mass of heaving flesh and blood through which projected innumerable jagged fragments of dark grey, pitted bones.

OUT OF THE JAR

Charles A. Tanner

We all have friends we would like to see stuffed into a jar . . . don't deny it . . . it has been that way since time began . . . . So be a little careful next time you pick up a little jar at the knickknack counter at your hospital bazaar . . . make sure it's empty. . . .

I AM PRESENTING here, at the insistence of my friend, James Francis Denning, an account of an event or series of events which, he says, occurred to him during the late summer and early fall of 1940. I do so, not because I concur in the hope which Denning has that it may arouse serious investigation of the phenomena he claims took place, but merely that a statement of those phenomena may be placed on record, as a case history for future students of occult phenomena or—psychology. Personally, I am still unpersuaded under which head this narration should be placed.

Were my mind one of those which accepts witches, vampires and werewolves in the general scheme of things, I would not doubt for a moment the truth of Denning's tale, for certainly the man believes it himself; and his lack of imagination and matter-of-fact mode of living up until the time of the occurrence speak strongly in his favor. And then too, there is the mental breakdown of the brilliant young Edward Barnes Halpin, as added evidence. This young student of occult history and the vague lesser known cults and religions was a fairly close acquaintance of Denning's for years, and it was at Denning's home that he suffered the stroke which made him the listless, stricken thing that he is today.

That much is fact and can be attested to by any number of people. As to Denning's explanation, I can only say that it deserves a thorough investigation. If there is any truth in it at all, the truth should certainly be verified and recorded. And so, to the story.

It began, Denning says, in the summer of last year, when he attended a sale disposing of the stock of one of those little secondhand stores that call themselves antique shops and are known to most people as junk shops. There was the usual hodge-podge of Indian curios, glassware, Victorian furniture and old books; and Denning attended it as he did every event of this kind, allowing himself to indulge in the single vice which he had—that of filling his home with a stock of cheap and useless curios from all parts of the world.

At this particular sale he emerged triumphantly with a carved elephant tusk, an Alaskan medicine man's mask and —an earthenware jar. This jar was a rather ordinary thing, round-bodied, with a very short cylindrical neck and with a glazed band around its center, blue glaze, with curious angular characters in yellow that even the rather illiterate Denning could see bore a certain relation to Greek characters. The auctioneer called it very old, said it was Syraic or Samaritan and called attention to the seal which was affixed to the lid. This lid was of earthenware similar to the jar and was set in the mouth after the manner of a cork and a filling of what seemed to be hard-baked clay sealed it in. And on this baked clay, or whatever it was, had been stamped a peculiar design—two triangles interwoven to form a six-pointed star, with three unknown characters in the center. Although the auctioneer was as ignorant as Denning as to the real significance of this seal, he made a mystery of it and Denning was hooked. He bought the thing and brought it home, where it found a place, in spite of his wife's objections, on the mantle in the living room.

And there it rested, in a questionable obscurity, for a matter of four or five months. I say questionable obscurity, for as near as I can gather it was the bone of contention, during most of that time, between Denning and his wife. It was but natural, I think, that this estimable lady should object to having the best room in their little home filled with what were to her a mass of useless objects. Yet nothing was done about it. In the light of Denning's story of subse-

quent events, it seems almost incredible that that frightful thing could sit there, day after day, in that commonplace living room, being taken down and dusted now and then, and carelessly placed back.

Yet such was the case, and such remained the case until the first visit of young Halpin. This young man was an acquaintance of Denning's of long standing, and their friendship had been slowly ripening during the last year, owing to the fact that Halpin was able to add much to Denning's knowledge of the curios which he accumulated. Both of them worked for the same company and seeing each other every day, it was not unusual that they had become quite friendly in spite of the fact that neither had ever visited the other's home. But Denning's description of certain carvings on the elephant's tusk which he had bought interested young Halpin sufficiently to cause him to pay a visit to Denning's home to make a personal examination of the tusk.

Halpin, at this time, was still under thirty, yet he had become already a recognized authority in this country of that queer borderland of mystic occult study that Churchward, Fort, Lovecraft and the Miskatonic school represent. His articles on some of the obscure chapters of d'Erlette's "Cultes des Goules" has been accepted favorably by American occult students, as well as his translation of the hitherto expurgated sections of the Gaelic "Leabhar Mor Dubh." In all, he was a most promising student and one in whom the traits of what now seem to have been incipient dementia præcox were conspicuous by their absence. Indeed, one of his strongest characteristics, Denning tells me, was a pronounced interest in almost everything about him.

"He was like that, the night that he first visited me," says Denning. "He looked over the tusk, explained all the curious carvings that he could and made little sketches of the remaining figures, to take away and study. Then his eyes began roving about the room and pretty soon they noticed some other little thing, I don't remember just what, and he began talking about that. I had a couple of Folsom points—those curious flints that are supposed to be much older than any other American artifacts—and he spoke about them for nearly twenty minutes.

"Then he laid them down and was up and around the room again; and presently he picked up something else and

was talking about that. I used to learn an awful lot from Ed Halpin, but I think I learned more that night than I ever did at any other one time. And at last his eyes lit on that jar."

Yes, his eyes lit on the jar, and started the series of happenings that at last made this story necessary. For Halpin was stricken with a sudden curiosity, picked up the jar and glanced over it, and then suddenly became wildly excited. "Why, it's old!" he ejaculated. "It's ancient Hebrew, Jim. Where in the world did you get it?"

Denning told him, but his curiosity was unappeased. He spent several minutes trying to extract from Denning a knowledge which it became obvious that the latter did not possess. It was easy to see that Halpin already knew more concerning the jar than did Denning, and so his questions ceased.

"But surely you know what it is supposed to be, don't you?" quizzed Halpin. "Didn't the auctioneer tell you anything about it? Didn't you see the previous owner? Lord, Denning! How can you find interest in these things, if you don't learn all you can of them?"

Denning was rendered apologetic by his evident exasperation, and Halpin suddenly relented, laughed and started to explain.

"That six-pointed star, Jim, is known as Solomon's seal. It has been a potent sign used in Hebraic cabala for thousands of years. What has me interested is its use in connection with Phoenician characters around the body of the vase. That seems to indicate a real antiquity. It might just be possible that this is actually the seal of Solomon himself! Jim," his attitude suddenly changed, "Jim, sell me this thing, will you?"

Now, it seems incredible that Denning saw no slightest gleam of light in this guarded explanation of Halpin's. The young student certainly was aware of much of the importance of the jar, but Denning insists that the explanation meant nothing whatever to him. To be sure, Denning was no student, he had probably never heard of the Cabala, nor of Abdul Alhazred or Joachim of Cordoba, but surely, in his youth he had read the "Arabian Nights." Even that should have given him a clue. Apparently not—he tells me that he refused Halpin's offer to buy the vase, simply because of a

collector's vagary. He felt that, well, to use his own words: "If it was worth ten dollars to him, it was worth ten dollars to me."

And so, though Halpin increased the offer which he first made, Denning was obdurate. Halpin left with merely an invitation to come back at any time and examine the vase to his heart's content.

During the next three weeks, Halpin did return, several times. He copied down the inscription on the blue band, made a wax impression of the seal, photographed the vase and even went so far as to measure it and weigh it. And all the time his interest increased and his bids for the thing rose higher. At last, unable to raise his offer further, he was reduced to pleading with Denning that he sell it, and at this, Denning grew angry.

"I told him," says Denning, "I told him that I was getting sick and tired of his begging. I said I wasn't going to sell it to him and that, even if it cost me our friendship, that vase was going to stay mine. Then he started on another line. He wanted to open it and see what was inside.

"But I had a good excuse for not complying with that plea. He himself had told me of the interest that attached to the seal on the clay and I wasn't going to have that broken if I knew myself. I was so positive on this score that he gave in and apologized again. At least, I thought he gave in. I know different now, of course."

We all know different now. Halpin had decided to open the vase at any cost, and so had merely given up the idea of trying to buy it. We must not think, however, that he had been reduced to the status of a common thief in spite of his later actions. The young man's attitude was explainable to any one who can understand the viewpoint of a student of science. Here was an opportunity to study one of the most perplexing problems of occult art, and obstinancy, combined with ignorance, was trying to prevent it. He determined to circumvent Denning, no matter to what depths he had to stoop.

Thus it was that several nights later Jim Denning was awakened, sometime during the early morning hours, by a slight, unusual noise on the lower floor of his home. At first but half awake, he lay and listlessly pondered the situa-

tion. Had his wife awakened and gone downstairs for a midnight snack? Or had he heard, perhaps, a mouse in the kitchen? Could it be a sleeping sigh from his wife's bed made him realize that it wasn't she and at the same moment came a repetition of the sound—a dull "clunk" as of metal striking muffled metal. Instantly alert, he rose from his pillow, stepped out of bed, fumbled for robe and slippers and was tiptoeing down the steps, stopping only long enough to get his revolver from the drawer in which he kept it.

From the landing he could see a dim light in the living room, and again he heard the "clunk" that he had heard before. By leaning far over the banister, he was able to look into the living room, where he could see, by the light of a flashlight lying on the floor, the dark form of a man; his long overcoat and hat effectively concealing all his features. He was stooping over a round object, and as Denning looked, he raised a hammer and brought it down sharply but carefully on a chisel which he held in his hand. The hammer's head was wrapped in rags and again Denning heard the dull noise which had awakened him.

Of course, Denning knew at once who the dark form was. He knew that the round object was his vase. But he hesitated to make an outcry or even to interrupt the other for several seconds. He seemed a little uncertain as to the reason for this, but I am convinced, from what I know of Denning's character, that curiosity had gotten the better of him. Half consciously, he was determined to find out just why Halpin was so interested in the vase. So he remained silent, and it was only after several seconds that some slight noise he made caused Halpin to turn in a panic. As he did so, the last bit of seal crumbled from the jar, and rising, he still clung unconsciously to the lid. The jar turned over on its side and lay there for a moment unnoticed. Halpin was almost horror-stricken at the realization that he had been caught, as the lawyers say, in *flagrante delicto*. He burst into chattering, pleading speech.

"Don't call the police, Jim! Listen to me. I wasn't going to steal it, Jim. I'd have been gone with it long ago if I had intended to steal it. Honest! Let me tell you, Jim. It's one of Solomon's jars, all right. I was only going to open it. Good Lord, man, haven't you ever read about them? Listen. Jim, haven't you ever heard those old Arabian legends? Let me tell you about them, Jim—"

As he spoke, Denning had descended the stairs. He stepped into the room and seized Halpin by the shoulders and angrily shook him.

"Quit babbling, Halpin. Don't act like a damned fool. I guess the jar and its contents are still mine. Come on, snap out of it and tell me what this is all about."

Halpin swallowed his panic and sighed.

"There are old Arabian and Hebrew legends, Jim, that speak of a group or class of beings called Jinn. A lot of the stuff about them is claptrap, of course, but as near as we can make out, they were a kind of super-being from some other plane of existence. Probably they were the same things that other legends have called the Elder Ones, or the Pre-Adamites. Perhaps there are a dozen names for them if they are the same beings that appear in myths of other countries. Before the time of man, they ruled the world; but fighting among themselves and certain conditions during the Glacial Period caused them to become almost extinct, here on this earth. But the few that were left caused damage enough among men until the time of King Solomon.

"Arabian legend says that Solomon was the greatest of all kings, and from an occult standing I guess he was, in spite of the fact that the kingdom he ruled over was little more than a jerk-water principality, even in that age. But Solomon's occult knowledge was great enough to enable him to war on the Jinn and to conquer them. And then, because it was impossible to kill them (their metabolism is entirely different from ours), he sealed them up into jars and cast the jars into the depths of the sea!"

Denning was still dense.

"Halpin, you're not trying to tell me that you expect to find a Jinn in that jar, are you? You're not such a superstitious fool as to believe—"

"Jim, I don't know what I believe. There's no record of such a jar as this having ever been found before. But I know that the Elder Ones once existed, and from an examination of the jar an occult might learn much concerning—"

While Halpin had been speaking, Denning's eye had fallen on the jar, lying where it had tumbled at Halpin's sudden rising. And the hair on Denning's neck quivered with a wave of horripilation, as he stammered suddenly: "For the love of God, Halpin, look at that jar!"

Halpin's eyes turned at Denning's first words and he, too, stared, unable to take his eyes off the thing that was taking place. From the mouth of the jar was flowing, slowly, sluggishly, a thick, viscous mass of bluish, faintly luminous stuff. The mass was spreading, oozing across the floor, reaching curious curdly pseudopods out in all directions, acting, not like an inert viscous body should, but like—like an amoeba under a microscope. And from it, as though it were highly volatile, curled little streamers of heavy smoke or vapor. To their ears came, almost inaudibly at first, and then more loudly, a slow deliberate "cluck—cluck—c-lu-uck" from the mass, as it spread.

The two had forgotten their differences. Denning stepped toward Halpin and clasped his shoulder fearfully. Halpin stood like a stone statue but his breath was like that of a winded runner. And they stood there and looked and looked as that incredible jelly spread and steamed across the floor.

I think it was the luminous quality of the mass that horrified the men the most. It had a dull bluish glow, a light of a shade that made it absolutely certain that it was not merely a reflection from the light of the flashlight which still threw its beam in a comet's-tail across the floor. And too, it was certain properties, in the mist, for that behaved not like a normal mist, but with a sentience of its own. It floated about the room, seeking, seeking, and yet it avoided the presence of the two men as though it feared their touch. And it was increasing. It was quite apparent that the mass on the floor was evaporating, passing into the mist, and it was evident that it would soon be gone.

"Is it—is it one of those things, Halpin?" whispered Denning, hoarsely; but Halpin answered him not at all, but only gripped his hand, tighter and tighter and tighter. Then the mist began a slow twirling motion and a deep sigh came from Halpin. It seemed that he was assured of something by this, for he leaned over and whispered to Denning with what seemed a certain amount of confidence: "It's one of them, all right. Stand back by the door and let me handle it. I know a little something from the books I've read."

Denning backed away, more than a little fearful of Halpin now, seeing that the young man seemed to know something of this terrible thing, but nevertheless grateful for the suggestion. Standing there by the doorway, hoping vaguely that

his traitorous legs would obey him if it became necessary to flee, he watched the dread process of materialization take place. And I think he has never quite recovered from the effects of it; for surely, at that moment, the entire philosophy of his life was changed. Denning, I have noticed, goes to church quite regularly now.

However, as I say, he stood there and watched. Watched the smoke, or vapor, or whatever it was, whirl and whirl, faster and faster, snatching up the vagrant wisps and streamers that had strayed to the far corners of the room, sucking them in, incorporating them into the central column, until at last that column, swirling there, seemed almost solid.

It was solid. It had ceased its whirling and stood there quivering, jelly-like, plastic, but nevertheless, solid. And, as though molded in the hands of an invisible sculptor, that column was changing. Indentations appeared here, proturberances there. The character of the surface altered subtly; presently it was no longer smooth and lustrous, but rough and scaly. It lost most of its luminosity and became an uncertain, lichenous green. Until at last it was a—thing.

That moment, Denning thinks, was the most horrible in all the adventure. Not because of the horror of the thing that stood before him, but because at that very moment an automobile, driven by some belated citizen passed by outside, the light from its headlights casting eerie gleams across the walls and the ceiling; and the thought of the difference between the commonplace world in which that citizen was living, and the frightful things taking place in this room almost overcame the cowering man by the doorway. And, too, the light made just that much plainer the disgusting details of the creature that towered above them.

For tower it did. It was, apparently about nine feet tall, for its head quite reached the ceiling of Denning's little room. It was roughly man-like, for it had an erect body and four limbs, two upper and two lower. It had a head and a sort of a face on it. But there its similarity to man ceased. Its head had a high ridge running from the forehead to the nape of the neck—and it had no eyes and no nose. In the place of these organs was a curious thing that looked not unlike the blossom of a sea-anemone, and beneath that was a mouth with an upper lip that was like a protruding fleshy beak, making the whole mouth take on the semblance of a sardonic letter V.

The front of its body had the flat, undetailed plainness of a lizard's belly, and the legs were long, scaly and terribly scrawny. The same might be said of the arms, which terminated in surprisingly delicate, surprisingly human hands.

Halpin had been watching the materialization with the eagerness of a hawk, and no sooner was it complete, no sooner did he notice that tautening of the creature's muscles that indicated conscious control, then he burst out with a jumble of strange words. Now, it happens that Denning was so keyed up that his mind was tense and observant of every detail, and he clearly remembers the exact words that Halpin uttered. They are in some little-known tongue and I have failed to find a translation, so I repeat them here for any student who may care to look them up:

"Ia, Psuchawrl!" he cried. "'Ng topuothikl Shelemoh, ma'kthoqui h'nirl!"

At the cry, the horror moved. It stooped and took a short step toward the uncowering Halpin, its facial rosette rose just as a man lifts his eyebrows in surprise, and then—speech came from its lips. Halpin, strangely, answered it in English.

"I claim the forfeit," he cried boldly. "Never has one of your kind been released that it did not grant to whoever released it one wish, were it in its power to grant it."

The thing bowed, actually bowed. In deep—inhumanly deep—tones it gave what was manifestly an assent. It clasped its hands over what should have been its breast and bowed, in what even the paralyzed Denning could tell was certainly mock humility.

"Very well, then!" the heedless Halpin went on. "I want to know! That is my wish—to know. All my life I have been a student, seeking, seeking—and learning nothing. And now—I want to know the why of things, the cause, the reason, and the end to which we travel. Tell me the place of man in this universe, and the place of this universe in the cosmos!"

The thing, the Jinni, or whatever it was, bowed again. Why was it that Halpin could not see its mockery! It clasped those amazingly human hands together, it drew them apart, and from fingertips to fingertips leaped a maze of sparks. In that maze of brilliant filaments a form began to take shape, became rectangular, took on solidity and became a little window. A silvery, latticed window whose panes were seemingly transparent, but which looked out upon—from where

Denning stood, it seemed nothing but blackness. The creature's head made a gesture and it spoke a single word—the only word which it spoke that Denning recognized.

"Look!" it said, and obeying, Halpin stepped forward and looked through that window.

Denning says that Halpin stared while you might have counted ten. Then he drew back a step or two, stumbled against the couch and sat down. "Oh!" he said softly—very softly, and then: "Oh, I see!" Denning says he said it like a little child that had just had some problem explained by a doting parent. And he made no attempt to rise, no comment, nor any further word of any kind.

And the Jinni, the Elder One, demon or angel or whatever it was, bowed again and turned around—and was gone! Then, suddenly, somehow or other, Denning's trance of fright was over, and he rushed to the light switch and flooded the room with light. An empty jar lay upon the floor, and upon the couch sat one who stared and stared into vacancy with a look of unutterable despair on his face.

Little more need be said. Denning called his wife, gave her a brief and distorted tale which he later amplified for the police, and spent the rest of the night trying to rouse Halpin. When morning came, he sent for a doctor and had Halpin removed to his own home. From there Halpin was taken to the state asylum for the insane where he still is. He sits constantly in meditation, unless one tries to arouse him, and then he turns on them a sad, pitying smile and returns to his musings.

And except for that sad, pitying smile, his only look is one of unutterable despair.

THE WITCH

A. E. van Vogt

The witch . . . I married one you know . . . at least she is part witch . . . nine parts vampire, thank heaven . . . . But witches are such lovely things and so rare in this day and age that I thank it only right to include this account while the stew is at a rolling boil. . . .

FROM WHERE he sat, half hidden by the scraggly line of bushes, Marson watched the old woman. It was minutes now since he had stopped reading. The afternoon air hung breathless around him. Even here, a cliff's depth away from the sparkling tongue of sea that curled among the rocks below, the heat was a material thing, crushing at his strength.

But it was the letter in his pocket, not the blazing sunlight, that weighed on Marson's mind. Two days now since that startling letter had arrived; and he still hadn't the beginning of the courage necessary to ask for an explanation.

Frowning uncertainly—unsuspected—unsuspecting—he watched.

The old woman basked in the sun. Her long, thin, pale head drooped in sleep. On and on she sat, moveless, an almost shapeless form in her black sack of a dress.

The strain of looking hurt his eyes; his gaze wandered; embraced the long, low, tree-protected cottage with its neat, white garage and its aloneness there on that high, green hill overlooking the great spread of city. Marson had a brief, cozy sense of privacy—then he turned back to the old woman.

For a long moment, he stared unshaken at the spot where she had been. He was conscious of a dim, intellectual sur-

prise, but there was not a real thought in his head. After a brief period, he grew aware of the blank, and he thought:

Thirty feet to the front door from where she had been sitting; and she would have had to cross his line of vision to get there.

An old woman, perhaps ninety, perhaps a hundred or more, an incredible old woman, capable of moving—well thirty feet a minute.

Marson stood up. There was a searing pain where an edge of the sun had cut into his shoulders. But that passed. From his upright position, he saw that not a solitary figure was visible on the steeply mounting sidewalk. And only the sound of the sea on the rocks below broke the silence of that hot Saturday afternoon.

Where had the old wretch disappeared to?

The front door opened; and Joanna came out. She called to him:

"Oh, there you are, Craig. Mother Quigley was just asking where you were."

Marson came silently down from the cliff's edge. Almost meticulously, he took his wife's words, figuratively rolled them over in his mind, and found them utterly inadequate. The old woman couldn't had been *just* asking for him, because the old woman had NOT gone through that door and therefore hadn't asked anyone anything for the last twenty minutes.

At last as idea came. He said: "Where's Mother Quigley now?"

"Inside." He saw that Joanna was intent on the flower box of the window beside the door. "She's been knitting in the living room for the last half hour."

Amazement in him yielded to sharp annoyance. There was too damn much old woman in his mind since that letter had come less than forty-eight hours before. He drew it out, and stared bleakly at the scrawl of his name on the envelope.

It was simple enough, really, that this incredible letter had come to him. After the old woman's arrival nearly a year before, an unexpected nightmare, he had mentally explored all the possible reverberations that might accrue from her presence in his home. And the thought had come that, if she had left any debts in the small village where she had lived, he'd better pay them.

A young man, whose appointment to the technical school principalship had been severely criticized on the grounds of his youth, couldn't afford to have *anything* come back on him. And so a month before he had leisurely written the letter to which this was the answer.

Slowly, he drew the note from its envelope and once more re-read the mind-staggering words in it:

> Dear Mr. Marson:
>
> As I am the only debtor, the postmaster handed me your letter; and I wish to state that, when your great grandmother died last year, I buried her myself and in my capacity as gravestone maker, I carved a stone for her grave. I did this at my own expense, being a God-fearing man, but if there is a relative, I feel you should bear cost of same, which is eighteen (18) dollars. I hope to hear from you, as I need the money just now.
>
> Pete Cole.

Marson stood for a long moment; then he turned to speak to Joanna—just in time to see her disappearing into the house. Once more undecided, he climbed to the cliff's edge, thinking:

The old scoundrel! The nerve of a perfect stranger of an old woman walking into a private home and pulling a deception like that.

His public situation being what it was, his only solution was to pay her way into an institution; and even that would require careful thought—

Frowning blackly, he hunched himself deeper into his chair there on the cliff's edge, and deliberately buried himself in his book. It was not until much later that memory came of the way the old woman had disappeared from the lawn. Funny, he thought then, it really was damned funny.

The memory faded—

Blankly sat the old woman.

Supper was over; and, because for years there had been no reserves of strength in that ancient body, digestion was an almost incredible process, an all-out affair.

She sat as one dead, without visible body movement, without thought in her brain; even the grim creature purpose that

had brought her here to this house lay like a stone at the bottom of the black pool that was her mind.

It was as if she had always sat there in that chair by the window overlooking the sea, like an inanimate object, like some horrible mummy, like a wheel that, having settled into position, seemed now immovable.

After an hour, awareness began to creep into her bones. The creature mind of her, the strange, inhuman creature mind behind the parchmentlike, sharp-nosed mask of human flesh, stirred into life.

It studied Marson at the living room table, his head bent thoughtfully over the next term curriculum he was preparing. Toothless lips curled finally into a contemptuous sneer.

The sneer faded, as Joanna slipped softly into the room. Half-closed, letching eyes peered then, with an abruptly ravenous, beastlike lust at the slim, lithe, strong body. Pretty, pretty body, soon now to be taken over.

In the three-day period of the first moon after the summer solstice . . . in nine days exactly—

Nine days! The ancient carcass shuddered and wriggled ecstatically with the glee of the creature. Nine short days, and once again the age-long cycle of dynamic existence would begin. Such a pretty young body, too, capable of vibrant, world-ranging life—

Thought faded, as Joanna went back into the kitchen. Slowly, for the first time, awareness came of the sea.

Contentedly sat the old woman. Soon now, the sea would hold no terrors, and the blinds wouldn't have to be down, nor the windows shut; she would even be able to walk along the shore at midnight as of old; and *they*, whom she had deserted so long ago, would once more shrink from the irresistable energy aura of her new, young body.

The sound of the sea came to her, where she sat so quietly; calm sound at first, almost gentle in the soft sibilation of each wave thrust. Farther out, the voices of the water were louder, more raucous, blatantly confident, but the meaning of what they said was blurred by the distance, a dim, clamorous confusion that rustled discordantly out of the gathering night.

Night!

She shouldn't be aware of night falling, when the blinds were drawn.

With a little gasp, she twisted toward the window beside

which she sat. Instantly, a blare of hideous fear exploded from her lips.

The ugly sound bellowed into Marson's ears, and brought him lurching to his feet. It raged through the door into the kitchen, and Joanna came running as if it was a rope pulling at her.

The old woman screeched on; and it was Marson who finally penetrated to the desire behind that mad terror.

"Good Lord!" he shrugged. "It's the windows and the blinds. I forgot to put them down when dusk fell."

He stopped, irritated, then: "Damned nonsense! I've a good mind to—"

"For Heaven's sake!" his wife urged. "We've got to stop that noise. I'll take this side of the room, you take the windows next to her."

Marson shrugged again, acquiescently. But he was thinking: They wouldn't have this to put up with much longer. As soon as the summer holidays arrived, he'd make arrangements to put her in the Old Folks Home. And that would be that. Less than two weeks now.

His wife's voice broke almost sharply the silence that came, as Mother Quigley settled back into her chair: "I'm surprised at you forgetting a thing like that. You're usually so thoughtful."

"It was so damned hot!" Marson complained.

Joanna said no more; and he went back to his chair. But he was thinking suddenly: Old woman who fears the sea and the night, why did you come to this house by the sea, where the street lamps are far apart and the nights are almost primevally dark?

The gray thought passed; his mind returned with conscientious intentness to the preparation of the curriculum.

Startled sat the old woman!

All the swift rage of the creature burned within her. That wretched man, daring to forget. And yet—*"You're usually so thoughtful!"* his wife had said.

It was true. Not once in eleven months had he forgotten to look after the blinds—until today.

Was it possible that he suspected? That somehow, now that the time for the change was so near, an inkling of her purpose had dripped from her straining brain?

It had happened before. In the past, she had had to fight

for her bodies against terrible, hostile men who had nothing but dreadful suspicion.

Jet-black eyes narrowed to pin points. With this man, there would have to be more than suspicion. Being what he was, practical, skeptical, cold-brained, not all the telepathic vibrations, nor the queer mind storms with their abnormal implications—if he had yet had any—would touch him or remain with him of themselves. Nothing but facts would rouse this man.

What facts? Was it possible that, in her intense concentrations of thought, she had unwittingly permitted images to show? Or had he made inquiries?

Her body shook, and then slowly purpose formed: She must take no chances.

Tomorrow was Sunday, and the man would be home. So nothing was possible. But Monday—

That was it. Monday morning while Joanna slept—and Joanna always went back to bed for an hour's nap after her husband had gone to work—on Monday morning she would slip in and prepare the sleeping body so that, seven days later, entry would be easy.

No more wasting time trying to persuade Joanna to take the stuff voluntarily. The silly fool with her refusal of home remedies, her prating of taking only doctors' prescriptions.

Forcible feeding would be risky—but not half so risky as expecting this wretched, doting wreck of a body to survive another year.

Implacable sat the old woman.

In spite of herself, she felt the toll of the hours of anticipation. At Monday breakfast, she drooled with the inner excitement of her purpose. The cereal fell from her misshaped mouth, milk and saliva splattered over the tablecloth —and she couldn't help it. Old hands shook, mouth quivered; in everything her being yielded to that dreadful anility of body. Better get to her room before—

With a terrible start, she saw that the man was pushing clear of the table, and there was such a white look on his face that she scarcely needed his words, as he said:

"There's something I've been intending to say to Mother Quigley"—his voice took on a rasping note—"and right now, when I'm feeling thoroughly disgusted, is a darned good time to say it."

"For Heaven's sake, Craig"—Joanna cut in, sharply; and the old woman snatched at the interruption, and began queasily to get to her feet—"what's made you so irritable these last few days? Now, be a good lover and go to school. Personally, I'm not going to clean up this mess till I've had my nap, and I'm certainly not going to let it get me down. 'By."

A kiss; and she was gone into the hallway that led to the bedrooms. Almost instantly, she vanished into the master bedroom; and then, even as the old woman struggled desperately to get farther out of her chair, Marson was turning to her, eyes bleak and determined.

Cornered, she stared up at him like a trapped animal, dismayed by the way this devilish body had betrayed her in an emergency, distorted her will. Marson said:

"Mother Quigley—I shall continue to call you that yet for the moment—I have received a letter from a man who claims to have carved a stone for the body he himself buried in your grave. What I would like to know is this: Who is occupying that grave? I—"

It was his own phrasing that brought Marson to startled silence. He stood strangely taut, struck rigid by a curious, alien horror, unlike anything he had ever known. For a long, terrible moment, his mind seemed to lie naked and exposed to the blast of an icy inner wind that whirled at him out of some nether darkness.

Thoughts came, a blare of obscene mental vaporings, unwholesome, black with ancient, incredibly ancient evil, a very seething mass of unsuspected horrors.

With a start he came out of that grisly world of his own imagination, and grew aware that the old crone was pouring forth harsh, almost eager words:

"It wasn't me that was buried. There were two of us old ones in the village; and when she died, I made her face to look like mine, and mine to look like hers, and I took her money and . . . I used to be an actress, you know, and I could use make-up. That's how it was, yes, yes, make-up; that's the whole explanation, and I'm not what you think at all, but just an old woman who was poor. That's all, just an old woman to be pitied—"

She would have gone on endlessly if the creature-logic in her had not, with dreadful effort, forced her quiet. She stood, then, breathing heavily, conscious that her voice had been too swift, too excited, her tongue loose with the looseness of

old age, and her words had damned her at every syllable.

It was the man who brought surcease to her desperate fear; the man saying explosively:

"Good heavens, woman, do you mean to stand there and tell me you did a thing like that—"

Marson stopped, overwhelmed. Every word the old woman had spoken had drawn him further back from the strange, unsettling morass of thoughts that had briefly flooded his mind, back into the practical world of his own reason—and his own ethics. He felt almost physically shocked, and it was only after a long moment that he was able to go on. He said finally, slowly:

"You actually confess to the ghoulish deed of disfiguring a dead body for the purpose of stealing its money. Why, that's—"

His voice collapsed before that abyss of unsuspected moral degradation. Here was a crime of the baser sort, an unclean, revolting thing that, if it was ever found out, would draw the censure of an entire nation, and ruin any school principal alive.

He shuddered; he said hastily: "I haven't the time to go into this now but—"

With a start, he saw that she was heading toward the hallway that led to her bedroom. More firmly, he called: "And there's another thing. Saturday afternoon, you were sitting out on the lawn—"

A door closed softly. Behind it, the old woman stood, gasping from her exertions, but with a growing conviction of triumph. The silly stupid man still didn't suspect. What did she care what he thought of her. Only seven days remained; and if she could last them, nothing else mattered.

The danger was that her position would become more difficult every day. That meant—when the time came, a quick entry would be absolutely necessary. That meant—the woman's body must be prepared *now!*

Joanna, healthy Joanna, would already be asleep. So it was only a matter of waiting for that miserable husband to get out. She waited—

The sweet sound came at last from the near distance—the front door opening and then shutting. Like a stag at bay, the old woman quivered; her very bones shook with the sudden,

sickish thrill of imminent action. If she failed, if she was discovered—

Some preparation she had made to offset such a disaster but—

The spasm of fear passed. With a final, reassuring fumble into the flat, black bosom of her dress, where the little bag of powder hung open, she glided forth.

For the tiniest instant, she paused in the open doorway of Joanna's bedroom. Her gimlet eyes dwelt with a glitter of satisfaction on the sleeping figure. And then—

Then she was into the room.

The morning wind from the sea struck Marson like a blow, as he opened the door. He shut it with a swift burst of strength, and stood in the dully lighted hallway, indecisive.

It wasn't that he wasn't going out—there were too many things to do before the end of the school year; it was just that the abrupt resistance of the wind had crystalized a thought:

Ought he to go out without telling Joanna about the letter from the gravestone maker?

After all, the old woman now knew that he knew. In her cunning eagerness to defend herself and the security she must consider threatened, she might mention the subject to Joanna —and Joanna would know nothing.

Still undecided, Marson took several slow steps, then paused again just inside the living room. Damn it, the thing could probably wait till noon, especially as Joanna would be asleep by now. Even as it was, he'd have to go by car or streetcar if he hoped to reach the school at his usual early hour.

His thought twisted crazily, as the black form of the old woman glided ghostlike across the bedroom hallway straight into Joanna's room.

Senselessly, a yell quivered on Marson's lips—senselessly, because there was in him no reasoned realization of alienness. The sound froze unuttered because abruptly that icy, unnatural wind out of blackness was blowing again in his mind. Abnormal, primordial things echoed and raged—

He had no consciousness of running, but, suddenly, there was the open bedroom door, and there was the old woman—and at that last instant, though he had come with noiseless speed, the creature woman sensed him.

She jumped with a sheer physical dismay that was horrible to see. Her fingers that had been hovering over Joanna's mouth jerked spasmodically, and a greenish powder in them sprayed partly on the bed, mostly on the little rug beside the bed.

And then, Marson was on top of her. That loathesome mindwind was blowing stronger, colder; and in him was an utter, deadly conviction that demonic muscles would resist his strength to the limit. For a moment, that certainly prevailed even over reality.

For there was nothing.

Thin, bony arms yielded instantly to his devastatingly hard thrust; a body that was like old, rotten paper crumbled to the floor from his murderous rush.

For the barest moment, the incredibly easy victory gave Marson pause. But no astonishment could genuinely restrain the violence of his purpose or cancel that unnatural sense of unhuman things; no totality of doubt at this instant could begin to counterbalance his fury at what he had seen.

The old woman lay at his feet in a shapeless, curled-up blob. With a pitiless ferocity, a savage intent beyond any emotion he had ever known, Marson snatched her from the floor.

Light as long-decayed wood, she came up in his fingers, a dangling, inhuman, black-clothed thing. He shook it, as he would have shaken a monster; and it was then, when his destoying purpose was a very blaze of unreasoning intensity that the incredible thing happened.

Images of the old woman flooded the room. Seven old women, all in a row, complete in every detail, from black, sack-like dress to semi-bald head, raced for the door. Three exact duplicates of the old woman were clawing frantically at the nearest window. The eleventh replica was on her knees desperately trying to squeeze under the bed.

With an astounded gasp, brain whirling madly, Marson dropped the thing in his hands. It fell squalling, and abruptly the eleven images of the old woman vanished like figments out of a nightmare.

"Craig!"

In a dim way, he recognized Joanna's voice. But still he stood, like a log of wood; unheeding. He was thinking piercingly: That was what had happened Saturday on the lawn —an image of the old woman unwittingly projected by her

furiously working mind, as she sat in the living room knitting.

Unwitting images had they been now, of a certainty. The old woman's desperately fearful mind seeking ways of escape.

God, what was he thinking? There was—there *could* be nothing here but his own disordered imagination.

The thing was impossible.

"Craig, what is all this anyway? What's happened?"

He scarcely heard; for suddenly, quite clearly, almost calmly, his mind was co-ordinating around a single thought, simple, basic and terrible:

What did a man do with a witch in A. D. 1942?

The hard thought collapsed as he saw, for the first time, that Joanna was half-sitting, half-kneeling in the taut position she had jerked herself into when she wakened. She was swaying the slightest bit, as if her muscle control was incomplete. Her face was creased with the shock of her rude awakening.

Her eyes, he saw, were wide and almost blank; and they were staring at the old woman. With one swift glance, he followed that rigid gaze—and alarm struck through him.

Joanna had not wakened till the old woman screamed. She *hadn't* seen the images at all.

She would have only the picture of a powerful, brutal young man standing menacingly over the moaning form of an old woman—and by Heaven he'd have to act fast.

"Look!" Marson began curtly. "I caught her putting a green powder on your lips and—"

It was putting the thing in words that struck him dumb. His mind reeled before the tremendous fact that a witch had tried to feed dope to Joanna—*his* Joanna! In some incomprehensible way, Joanna was to be a victim—and he must convince her now of the action they must take.

Before that purpose, rage fled. Hastily, he sank down on the bed beside Joanna. Swiftly, he launched into his story. He made no mention of the images or of his own monstrous suspicions. Joanna was even more practical than he. It would only confuse the issue to let her get the impression that he was mad. He finished finally:

"I don't want any arguments. The facts speak for themselves. The powder alone damns her; the letter serves to throw enough doubt on her identity to relieve us of any further sense of obligation.

"Here's what we're going to do. First, I shall phone my secretary that I may not be in till late. Then I'll ring up the Old Folks Home. I have no doubt under normal conditions there are preliminaries to entry, but money ought to eliminate all red tape. We're getting rid of her today and—"

Amazingly, Joanna's laughter interruped him, a wave of laughter that ended in a sharp, unnormal, hysterical note. Marson shook her.

"Darling," he began anxiously.

She pushed him away, scrambled off the bed, and knelt with a curious excitement beside the old woman.

"Mother Quigley," she started, and her voice was so high-pitched that Marson half-climbed to his feet. He sank down again, as she went on: "Mother Quigley, answer one question: That powder you were placing in my mouth—was it that ground seaweed remedy of yours that you've been trying to feed me for my headaches?"

The flare of hope that came to the old woman nearly wrecked her brain. How could she have forgotten her long efforts to make Joanna take the powder voluntarily? She whispered:

"Help me to my bed, dearie. I don't think anything is broken, but I'll have to lie down . . . yes, yes, my dear, that was the powder. I was so sure it would help you. We women, you know, with our headaches, have to stick together. I shouldn't have done it of course but—"

A thought, a blaze of anxiety, struck her. She whimpered: "You won't let him send me away, will you? I know I've been a lot of trouble and—"

She stopped, because there was a queer look on Joanna's face; and enough was enough. Victory could be overplayed. She listened with ill-suppressed content as Joanna said swiftly:

"Craig, hadn't you better go? You'll be late."

Marson said sharply: "I want the rest of that weed powder. I'm going to have that stuff analyzed."

But he evaded his wife's gaze; and he was thinking, stunned: "I'm crazy. I was so dizzy with rage that I had a nightmare of hallucinations."

Wasn't it Dr. Lycoming who had said that the human mind must have racial memory that extended back to the nameless seas that spawned man's ancestors? And that under proper and violent stress, these memories of terror would return?

His shame grew, as the old woman's shaking fingers produced a little canvas bag. Without a word, he took the container, and left the room.

Minutes later, with the soft pur of his car throbbing in his ears, eyes intent on the traffic, the whole affair seemed as remote and unreal as any dream.

He thought: "Well, what next? I still don't want her around but—"

It struck him with a curious, sharp dismay that there was not a plan in his head.

Tuesday—the old woman wakened with a start, and lay very still. Hunger came, but her mind was made up. She would not dress or eat till after the man was gone to work, and she would not come out at noon, or after school hours, but would remain in this room, with the door shut whenever he was around.

Six days before she could act, six days of dragging minutes, of doubts and fears.

Wednesday at 4:30 p.m., Marson's fingers relaxed on the shining knob of the front door, as the laughter of women tinkled from inside; and memory came that he had been warned of an impending tea.

Like an unwelcome intruder, he slipped off down the street, and it was seven o'clock before he emerged from the "talkie" and headed silently homewards.

He was thinking for the hundredth time: "I saw those old woman images. I know I saw them. It's my civilized instinct that makes me want to doubt, and so keeps me inactive."

The evening paper was lying on the doorstep. He picked it up; and later, after a supper of left-over sandwiches and hot coffee, at least two hours later, a paragraph from a war editorial caught first his eyes, and then his mind.

> The enemy has not really fooled us. We know that all his acts, directly or indirectly, have been anti-*us*. The incredible and fantastic thing is this knowing all we know and doing nothing.
>
> If an individual had as much suspicion, as much evidence, that someone was going to murder him at the first opportunity, he would try to prevent the act from

being committed; he would not wait for the full, bloody consummation.

The greater fact is that there will come a time when everything possible is too little, even all-out effort too late.

With a start, Marson allowed the paper to fall. The war angle was already out of his mind. Twice he had voted "no opinion" on public-opinion war polls, and that had been strictly true. A young man in the first throes of the responsibility of running a great school had no time for war or politics. Later perhaps—

But the theme, the inmost meaning of that editorial, was for him, for his problem. *Knowing what he knew and doing nothing.*

Uneasily, but with sudden determination, he climbed to his feet. "Joanna," he began—and realized he was talking to an empty room.

He peered into the bedroom. Joanna lay on the bed, fully dressed, sound asleep. Marson's grimness faded into an understanding smile. Preparing that afternoon tea had taken its toll.

After an hour, she was still asleep, and so very quietly, very gently, he undressed her and put her to bed. She did not waken even when he kissed her good night.

Thursday: By noon, his mind was involved with a petty-larceny case, a sordid, miserable affair of a pretty girl caught stealing. He saw Kemp, the chemistry assistant, come in; and then withdraw quietly.

In abrupt fever of excitement, he postponed the unwelcome case, and hastened after Kemp. He found the man putting on his hat to go to lunch.

The young chemistry instructor's eyes lighted as they saw Marson, then he frowned.

"That green powder you gave me to analyze, Mr. Marson, it's been a tough assignment. I like to be thorough, you know."

Marson nodded. He knew the mettle of this man, which was why he had chosen him rather than his equally obliging chief. Kemp was young, eager; and he knew his subject.

"Go on," said Marson.

"As you suggested," Kemp continued, "it was ground

weed. I took it up to Biology Bill . . . pardon me, I mean Mr. Grainger."

In spite of himself, Marson smiled. There was a time when he had said "Biology Bill" as a matter of course.

"Go on," was all he said now.

"Grainger identified it as a species of seaweed, known as *Hydrodendon Barelia.*"

"Any special effects if taken into the human system?" Marson was all casualness.

"No-o! It's not dangerous, if that's what you mean. Naturally, I tried it on the dog, meaning myself, and it's rather unpleasant, not exactly bitter but sharp."

Marson was silent. He wondered whether he ought to feel disappointed or relieved. Or what? Kemp was speaking again:

"I looked up its history, and, surprisingly, it has quite a history. You know how in Europe they make you study a lot of stuff about the old alchemists and all that kind of stuff, to give you an historical grounding."

"Yes?"

Kemp laughed. "You haven't got a witch around your place by any chance?"

"Eh!" The exclamation almost burned Marson's lips. He fought hard to hide the tremendousness of that shock.

Kemp laughed again. "According to *'Die Geschichte der Zauberinnen'* by the Austrian, Karl Gloeck, *Hydrodendon Barelia* is the modern name for the sinister witch's weed of antiquity. I'm not talking about the special witches of our Christian lore, with their childish attributes, but the old tribe of devil's creatures that came out of prehistory, regular full-blooded sea witches. It seems when each successive body gets old, they choose a young woman's body, attune themselves to it by living with the victim, and take possession any time after midnight of the first full moon period following the 21st of June. Witch's weed is supposed to make the entry easier. Gloeck says . . . why, what's the matter, sir?"

His impulse, his wild and terrible impulse, was to babble the whole story to Kemp. With a gigantic effort, he stopped himself; for Kemp, though he might talk easily of witches, was a scientist to the depths of his soul.

And what he—Marson—might have to do, must not be endangered by a knowledge that some practical, doubting person—anyone—suspected the truth. The mere existence of

suspicion would corrode his will, and, in the final issue, undermine his decision to act.

He heard himself muttering words of thanks; minutes later, on his way, he was thinking miserably: What could he say, how could he convince Joanna that the old woman must be gotten rid off?

And there was one more thing that he *had* to clear up before he would dare risk everything in the only, unilateral action that remained. One more thing—

All Saturday morning, the sun shone brilliantly, but by afternoon black clouds rode above his racing car. At six in the evening it rained bitterly for ten minutes; and then, slowly, the sky cleared.

His first view of the village was from a hill, and that, he thought, relieved, should make it easier. From a group of trees, he surveyed the little sprawl of houses and buildings. It was the church that confused him at first.

He kept searching in its vicinity with his field glasses. And it was nearly half an hour before he was convinced that what he sought was not there. Twilight was thick over the world now, and that brought surging panic. He couldn't possibly dare to go down to the village, and inquire where the graveyard was. Yet—hurry, hurry!

Genuinely unsettled physically, he walked deeper into the woods along the edge of the hill. There was a jutting point of ground farther along, from where he would be able to sweep the countryside. These villages sometimes had their graveyards a considerable distance away and—

The little roadway burst upon him abruptly, and he emerged from the brush; and there a few scant feet away was a trellised gate. Beyond it, in the gathering shadows, simple crosses gleamed; an angel stood whitely, stiffly, poised for flight; and several great, shining granite stones reared rigidly from a dark, quiet earth.

Night lay black and still on the graveyard when his cautiously used flashlight at last picked out the headstone he craved. The inscription was simple:

MRS. QUIGLEY
DIED JULY 7, 1941
OVER 90 YEARS OLD

He went back to the car, and got the shovel; and then he began to dig. The earth was strong; and he was not accustomed to digging. After an hour, he had penetrated about a foot and a half.

Breathless, he sank down on the ground, and for a while he lay there under the night sky with its shifting panoply of clouds. A queer, intellectual remembrance came that the average weight of university presidents and high school principals was around one hundred eighty pounds, according to Young.

But the devil it was, he thought grimly, it was all weight and no endurance. Nevertheless, he had to go on, if it took all night.

At least, he was sure of one thing—Joanna wasn't home. It had been a tough job persuading her to accept that weekend invitation alone, tougher still to lie about the duties that would take him out of the city until Sunday morning; and he had had to promise faithfully that he would drive out Sunday to get her.

The simplest thing of all had been getting the young girl to look after the old woman over the week end and—

The sound of a car passing brought him to his feet in one jerky movement. He frowned. It wasn't that he was worried, or even basically alarmed. His mind felt rock-steady; his determination was an unshaken thing. Here in this dark, peaceful setting, disturbance was as unlikely as his own ghoullike incursion. People simply didn't come to graveyards at night.

The night sped, as he dug on and on, deeper, nearer to that secret he must have before he could take the deadly action that logic dictated even now. And he didn't feel like a ghoul—

There was no feeling at all, only his purpose, his grim unalterable purpose; and there was the dark night, and the quietness, broken only by the swish of dirt flung upward and outward. His life, his strength flowed on here in this little, tree-grown field of death; and his watch showed twenty-five minutes to two when at last the spade struck wood.

It was after two when his flashlight peered eerily into the empty wooden box.

For long seconds, he stared; and now that the reality was here, he didn't know what he had expected. Obviously, only too obviously, an image had been buried here—and vanished gleefully as the dirt began to thud in the filling of the grave.

But why a burial at all? Who was she trying to fool? What?

His mind grew taut. Reasons didn't matter now. He *knew;* that was what counted. And his actions must be as cold and deadly, as was the purpose of the creature that had fastened itself on his household.

His car glided onto the deserted early morning highway. The gray dawn came out of the east to meet him, as he drove; and only his dark purpose, firmer, icier each minute, an intellectualized thing as unquenchable as sun fire, kept him companion.

It was deep into the afternoon when his machine, in its iron-throated second gear, whirred up the steep hill, and twisted into the runway that led to the garage.

He went into the house, and for a while he sat down. The girl whom Joanna had left in charge was a pretty, red-haired thing named Helen. She was quite fragilely built, he noted with grim approval; he had suggested her for the week end with that very smallness in mind. And yes, she wouldn't mind staying another night, if they didn't come home. And when was he leaving to get his wife?

"Oh, I'm going to have a nap first," Marson replied. "Had rather a hard drive. And you . . . what are you going to do while I sleep?"

"I've found some magazines," the girl said. "I'm going to sit here and read. I'll keep very quiet, I assure you."

"Thank you," Marson said. "It's just for a couple of hours, you know."

He smiled bleakly to himself, as he went into the bedroom, and closed the door. Men with desperate plans had to be bold, had to rely on the simplest, most straightforward realities of life—such as the fact that people normally stayed away from cemeteries at night. And that young women didn't make a nuisance of themselves by prowling around when they had promised not to.

He took off his shoes, put on his slippers, and then—

Five long minutes he waited to give her time to settle down. Finally, softly, he went through the bathroom door that led to the hallway that connected the kitchen and the bedrooms. The kitchen door creaked as he went out, but he allowed himself no qualms; not a trace of fear entered into the ice-cold region that was his brain.

Why should a girl, comfortably seated, reading an absorbing story, tied by a promise to be silent—why should such a girl investigate an ordinary sound? Even new houses were notoriously full of special noises.

The car was parked at the side of the house, where there was only one window. He took the five gallon tin of gasoline out of the back seat, carried it through the kitchen, down into the basement. He covered it swiftly with some old cloth, then he was up again, through the kitchen—

He reached the bedroom, thinking tensely: It was these details that must paralyze most people planning murder. Tonight when he came back, he wouldn't be able to drive the car up the hill, because it was to be a very special, unseen, ghostly trip. The car would be parked at least a mile away; and, obviously, it would be fantastically risky, and tiring, to lug a five gallon tin of gas a whole mile through back alleys.

And what a nightmare it would be to blunder with such a tin through the kitchen and into the basement at midnight. Impossible too, he had found, to get it past Joanna without her seeing.

Murder had its difficulties; and quite simply of course, murder it must be. And by fire. All that he ever remembered about witches showed the overwhelming importance of fire. And just let lightly built Helen try to break down the old woman's door after the fire had started and he had locked that door from the outside—

He lay for a while quietly on the bed; and the thought came that no man would seem a greater scoundrel than he if all that he had done and all that he intended was ever found out.

For a moment, then, a fear came black as pitch; and as if the picture was there before his eyes, he saw the great school slipping from him, the greater college beyond fading like the dream it was, fading into the mists that surrounded a prison cell.

He thought: It would be so easy to take half measures that would rid him and Joanna of the terrible problem. All he needed to do next day was to take her to the Old Folks Home, while Joanna was still away—and ruthlessly face down all subsequent objections.

She would escape perhaps, but never back to them.

He could retreat, then, into his world of school and Joanna; existence would flow on in its immense American way

—and somewhere soon there would be a young woman witch, glowing with the strength of ancient, evil life renewed; and somewhere too there would be a human soul shattered out of its lawful body, a home where an old woman had blatantly, skillfully, intruded.

Knowing what he did, and doing nothing short of—everything!

He must have slept on that thought, the demanding sleep of utterly weary nerves, unaccustomed to being denied their rest. He wakened with a shock. It was pitch dark, he saw, and—

The bedroom door opened softly. Joanna came tiptoeing in. She saw him by the light that streamed from the hall. She stopped and smiled. Then she came over and kissed him.

"Darling," she said, "I'm so glad you hadn't started out to get me. A delightful couple offered to drive me home, and I thought if we met you on the way, at least it would have saved you that much anyway, after your long, tiring week end. I've sent Helen home; it's after eleven, so just undress and go straight to bed. I'm going to have a cup of tea myself; perhaps you'd like one too."

Her voice barely penetrated through the great sounds that clanged in his brain, the pure agony of realization.

After eleven—less than an hour to the midnight that, once a year, began the fatal period of the witch's moon. The whole world of his plans was crashing about his ears.

He hovered about her, while she put the kettle on. It was half past eleven when they finished the tea; and still he couldn't speak, couldn't begin to find the beginning that would cover all the things that had to be said. Wretchedly, he grew aware of her eyes watching him, as she puffed at her cigarette.

He got up, and started to pace the floor; and now there was dark puzzlement in her fine brown eyes. Twice, she started to speak, but each time cut herself off.

And waited. He could almost feel her waiting in that quiet, earnest way of hers, waiting for him to speak first.

The impossibility, he thought then, the utter impossibility of convincing this calm, practical, tender-hearted wife of his. And yet, it *had* to be done, now before it was too late, before even all-out effort would be too little.

The recurrence of that phrase from the editorial started a

streak of cold perspiration down his face. He stopped short, stopped in front of her; and his eyes must have been glaring pools, his rigid posture terrifying; for she shrank the faintest bit.

"Craig—"

"Joanna, I want you to take your hat and coat and go to a hotel."

It needed no imagination to realize that his words must sound insane. He plunged on with the volubility of a child telling an exciting story. And that was the way he felt—like a child talking to a tolerant grown-up. But he couldn't stop. He omitted only his grim murder purpose. She would have to absorb the shock of that later when it was all over. When he had finished, he saw that her gaze was tender.

"Your poor darling," she said, "so that's what's been bothering you. You were worried about me. I can just see how everything would work on your mind. I'd have felt the same, if it was you apparently in danger."

Marson groaned. So that was the angle she was taking—sweet understanding; humoring his natural alarm; believing not a word. He caught his mind into a measure of calm; he said in a queer, shaky voice:

"Joanna, think of Kemp's definite analysis of it as witch's weed, and the fact the body is not in the grave—"

Still there was no fire in her eyes, no flame of basic fear. She was frowning; she said:

"But why would she have to go to all that trouble of burying one of her images, when all she had to do was get on the train and come here? Physically, that is what she did; why that enormous farce of a burial?"

Marson flared: "Why the lie she told me about having put make-up on someone else, who was buried there? Oh, darling, don't you see—"

Slowly, reasonably, Joanna spoke again: "There may have been some connivance, Craig, perhaps between the man, Pete Cole, who wrote you the letter, and Mother Quigley. Have you thought of that?"

If she had been with him, he thought, when he opened that dark grave. If she had seen the incredible image—If, if, if—

He stole a glance at the clock on the wall. It was seventeen minutes to twelve, and that nearly twisted his brain. He

shuddered—and fought for control of his voice. There were arguments he could think of, but the time for talk was past —far past. Only one thing mattered.

"Joanna," he said, and his voice was so intense that it shocked him, "you'll go to the hotel for three days, for my sake?"

"Why, of course, darling." She looked serene, as she stood up. "My night bag is still packed. I'll just take the car and—"

A thought seemed to strike her. Her fine, clear brow creased. "What about you?"

"I'll stay here of course," he said, "to see that she stays here. You can phone me up at the school tomorrow. Hurry, for Heaven's sake."

He felt chilled by the way her gaze was appraising him. "Just a minute," she said, and her voice was slow, taut. "Originally, you planned to have me out of the way only till tomorrow. What—are you—planning to do—tonight?"

His mind was abruptly sullen, rebellious; his mouth awkward, as if only the truth could come easily from it. Lies had always been hard for him. But he tried now, pitifully:

"All I wanted was to get you out of the way, while I visited the grave. I didn't really figure beyond that."

Her eyes didn't believe him; her voice said so, but just what words she used somehow didn't penetrate; for an odd steadiness was coming to him, realization that the time must be only minutes away, and that all this talk was worthless. Only his relentless purpose mattered. He said simply, almost as if he were talking to himself:

"I intended to lock her door from the outside, and burn the house, but I can see now that isn't necessary. You'd better get going, darling, because this is going to be messy; and you mustn't see it. You see, I'm going to take her out to the cliff's edge, and throw her to the night sea she fears so violently."

He stopped because the clock, incredibly, said eight minutes to twelve. Without a sound, without waiting for the words that seemed to quiver on her lips, he whirled and raced into the bedroom corridor. He tried the old woman's door. It was locked. A very fury of frustration caught at his throat.

"Open up!" he roared.

There was silence within; he felt Joanna's fingers tugging futilely at his sleeve. And then he was flinging the full weight

of his one hundred eighty pounds at that door. Two bone-wrenching thrusts—and it went down with an ear-splitting crash.

His fingers fumbled for the light switch. There was a click, and then—

He stopped, chilled, half paralyzed by what the light revealed: Twelve old women, twelve creatures snarling at him from every part of the room.

The witch was out in the open—and ready.

The queerest thing of all in that tremendous moment was the sheer, genuine glow of triumph that swept him—the triumph of a man who has indisputable won an argument with his wife. He felt a crazy, incredible joy; he wanted to shout: "See! see! wasn't I right? Wasn't it exactly as I told you?"

With an effort, he caught his whirling mind; and the shaky realization came that actually he was on the verge of madness. He said unsteadily:

"This is going to take a little time. I'll have to carry them one by one to the cliff; and the law of averages says that I'll strike the right one sooner or later. We won't have to worry about her slipping away in between, because we know her horrible fear of the night. It's only a matter of perserverance—"

His voice faltered the faintest bit; for suddenly the ghastly reality of what was here struck his inner consciousness. Some of the creatures sat on the bed, some on the floor; two stood, their arms around each other; and half of them were gibbering now in a fantastic caricature of terror. With a start, he grew aware of Joanna behind him.

She was pale, incredibly pale, for Joanna; and her voice, when she spoke, quavered; she said:

"The trouble with you, Craig, is that you're not practical. You want to do physical things like throwing her onto the rocks at the bottom of the cliff, or burning her. It proves that even yet your basic intellect doesn't believe in her. Or you'd know what to do."

She had been pressing against him, staring wide-eyed over his shoulder at that whimpering, terrified crew. Now, before he could realize her intention, she slipped under his arm, and was into the room.

Her shoulder bumped him slightly as she passed, and threw him off balance. It was only for a moment, but when he could look again, eight squalling crones had Joanna surrounded.

He had a brief glimpse of her distorted face. Six gnarled hands were clawing to open her mouth; a tangle of desperate old women's hands were clutching at her arms and her legs, trying to hold her flailing, furious body.

And they were succeeding! That was the terrifying reality that drove him into the midst of that brew of old women with battering fists—and pulled Joanna clear.

Immense anger grew out of his fear. "You silly fool!" he raged. "Don't you realize it must be after midnight?"

Then, with an abrupt, fuller realization that she had actually been attacked, piercingly:

"Are you all right?"

"Yes." Shakily. "Yes."

But *she* would have said that too. He glared at her with mad eyes, as if by the sheer intensity of his gaze, he would see through her face into her brain. She must have seen his terrible thought in his straining countenance, for she cried:

"Don't you see, darling? The blinds, the windows—pull them up. That's what I intended to do. Let in the night; let in the things she fears. If she exists, then so must they. Don't you see?"

He took Joanna with him, kicking at the creatures with his fists and his feet, with a grim, merciless ferocity. He tore the blind from its hooks; one thrust of his foot smashed the whole lower pane of the window. And then, back at the door, they waited.

Waited!

There was a whisper of water splattering on the window sill. A shape without shape silhoutted abnormally against the blue-black sky beyond the window. And then, the water was on the floor, trickling from a misty shape that seemed to walk. A voice sighed, or was it a thought:

"You nearly fooled us, Niyasha, with that false burial. We lost sight of you for months. But we knew that only by the sea and from the sea could your old body draw the strength for the change. We watched, as we have so long for so many of the traitors; and so at last you answer the justice of the ancient waters."

There was no sound but the sibilation of water trickling. The old women were silent as stones; and they sat like birds fascinated by snakes. And suddenly, the images were gone, snuffed out. One fragile, lonely-looking old woman sat on the

floor directly in the path of the mist-thing. Almost primly, she gathered her skirts about her.

The mist enveloped her form. She was lifted into it, then instantly dropped. Swiftly, the mist retreated to the window. It was gone. The old woman lay flat on her back, eyes open and staring; her mouth open, too, unprettily.

That was the over-all effect—the utter lack of anything beautiful.

THEY BITE

Anthony Boucher

A lesson to all you unbelievers out there! . . . there are those little green people from Ireland . . . and there are little brown hungry people that we grow in Transylvania (for export only) . . . . Look out for them . . . they bite . . . we make them that way. . . .

THERE WAS no path, only the almost vertical ascent. Crumbled rock for a few yards, with the roots of sage finding their scanty life in the dry soil. Then jagged outcroppings of crude crags, sometimes with accidental footholds, sometimes with overhanging and untrustworthy branches of greasewood, sometimes with no aid to climbing but the leverage of your muscles and the ingenuity of your balance.

The sage was as drably green as the rock was drably brown. The only color was the occasional rosy spikes of a barrel cactus. The earth was dry, and the wind was dry and cold. Hugh Tallant swung himself up on to the last pinnacle. It had a deliberate, shaped look about it—a petrified fortress of Lilliputians, a Gibraltar of pygmies. Tallant perched on its battlements and unslung his field glasses.

The desert valley spread below him. The tiny cluster of buildings that was Oasis, the exiguous cluster of palms that gave name to the town and shelter to his own tent and to the shack he was building, the dead-ended highway leading straightforwardly to nothing, the oiled roads diagramming the vacant blocks of an optimistic subdivision.

Tallant saw none of these. His glasses were fixed beyond the oasis and the town of Oasis on the dry lake. The gliders were clear and vivid to him, and the uniformed men busy

with them were as sharply and minutely visible as a nest of ants under glass. The training school was more than usually active. One glider in particular, strange to Tallant, seemed the focus of attention. Men would come and examine it and glance back at the older models in comparison.

Only the corner of Tallant's left eye was not preoccupied with the new glider. In that corner something moved, something little and thin and brown as the earth. Too large for a rabbit, much too small for a man. It darted across that corner of vision, and Tallant found gliders oddly hard to concentrate on.

He set down the bifocals and deliberately looked about him. His pinnacle surveyed the narrow, flat area of the crest. Nothing stirred. Nothing stood out against the sage and rock but one barrel of rosy spikes. He took up the glasses again and resumed his observations. When he was done, he methodically entered the results in the little black notebook.

His hand was still white. The desert is cold and often sunless in winter. But it was a firm hand, and as well trained as his eyes, fully capable of recording faithfully the designs and dimensions which they had registered so accurately.

Once his hand slipped, and he had to erase and redraw, leaving a smudge that displeased him. The lean, brown thing had slipped across the edge of his vision again. Going toward the east edge, he would swear, where that set of rocks jutted like the spines on the back of a stegosaur.

Only when his notes were completed did he yield to curiosity, and even then with cynical self-reproach. He was physically tired, for him an unusual state, from this daily climbing and from clearing the ground for his shack-to-be. The eye muscles play odd nervous tricks. There could be nothing behind the stegosaur's armor.

There was nothing. Nothing alive and moving. Only the torn and half-plucked carcass of a bird, which looked as though it had been gnawed by some small animal.

It was halfway down the hill—hill in Western terminology, though anywhere east of the Rockies it would have been considered a sizable mountain—that Tallant again had a glimpse of a moving figure.

But this was no trick of a nervous eye. It was not little nor thin nor brown. It was tall and broad and wore a loud

red-and-black lumberjack. It bellowed "Tallant!" in a cheerful and lusty voice.

Tallant drew near the man and said "Hello." He paused and added, "Your advantage, I think."

The man grinned broadly. "Don't know me? Well, I daresay ten years is a long time, and the California desert ain't exactly the Chinese rice fields. How's stuff? Still loaded down with Secrets for Sale?"

Tallant tried desperately not to react to that shot, but he stiffened a little. "Sorry. The prospector getup had me fooled. Good to see you again, Morgan."

The man's eyes had narrowed. "Just having my little joke," he smiled. "Of course you wouldn't have no serious reason for mountain-climbing around a glider school, now would you? And you'd kind of need field glasses to keep an eye on the pretty birdies."

"I'm out here for my health." Tallant's voice sounded unnatual even to himself.

"Sure, sure. You were always in it for your health. And come to think of it, my own health ain't been none too good lately. I've got me a little cabin way to hell-and-gone around here, and I do me a little prospecting now and then. And somehow it just strikes me, Tallant, like maybe I hit a pretty good lode today."

"Nonsense, old man. You can see—"

"I'd sure hate to tell any of them Army men out at the field some of the stories I know about China and the kind of men I used to know out there. Wouldn't cotton to them stories a bit, the Army wouldn't. But if I was to have a drink too many and get talkative-like—"

"Tell you what," Tallant suggested brusquely. "It's getting near sunset now, and my tent's chilly for evening visits. But drop around in the morning and we'll talk over old times. Is rum still your tipple?"

"Sure is. Kind of expensive now, you understand—"

"I'll lay some in. You can find the place easily—over by the oasis. And we . . . we might be able to talk about your prospecting, too."

Tallant's thin lips were set firm as he walked away.

The bartender opened a bottle of beer and plunged it on the damp-circled counter. "That'll be twenty cents," he said,

then added as an afterthought, "Want a glass? Sometimes tourists do."

Tallant looked at the others sitting at the counter—the red-eyed and unshaven old man, the flight sergeant unhappily drinking a coke—it was after Army hours for beer—the young man with the long, dirty trench coat and the pipe and the new-looking brown beard—and saw no glasses. "I guess I won't be a tourist," he decided.

This was the first time Tallant had had a chance to visit the Desert Sport Spot. It was as well to be seen around in a community. Otherwise people begin to wonder and say, "Who is that man out by the oasis? Why don't you ever see him any place?"

The Sport Spot was quiet that night. The four of them at the counter, two Army boys shooting pool, and a half dozen of the local men gathered about a round poker table, soberly and wordlessly cleaning a construction worker whose mind seemed more on his beer than on his cards.

"You just passing through?" the bartender asked sociably.

Tallant shook his head. "I'm moving in. When the Army turned me down for my lungs I decided I better do something about it. Heard so much about your climate here I thought I might as well try it."

"Sure thing," the bartender nodded. "You take up until they started this glider school, just about every other guy you meet in the desert is here for his health. Me, I had sinus, and look at me now. It's the air."

Tallant breathed the atmosphere of smoke and beer suds, but did not smile. "I'm looking forward to miracles."

"You'll get 'em. Whereabouts you staying?"

"Over that way a bit. The agent called it 'the old Carker place.'"

Tallant felt the curious listening silence and frowned. The bartender had started to speak and then thought better of it. The young man with the beard looked at him oddly. The old man fixed him with red and watery eyes that had a faded glint of pity in them. For a moment Tallant felt a chill that had nothing to do with the night air of the desert. Then the construction worker in the poker game brandished an empty bottle and yelled "Hi!" The bartender turned to fill the order, and the cold instant melted.

The old man drank his beer in quick gulps, and frowned as though trying to formulate a sentence. At last he wiped

beer from his bristly lips and said, "You wasn't aiming to stay in the adobe, was you?"

"No. It's pretty much gone to pieces. Easier to rig me up a little shack than try to make the adobe livable. Meanwhile, I've got a tent."

"That's all right, then, mebbe. But mind you don't go poking around that there adobe."

"I don't think I'm apt to. But why not? Want another beer?"

The old man shook his head reluctantly and slid from his stool to the ground. "No thanks. I don't rightly know as I—"

"Yes?"

"Nothing. Thanks all the same." He turned and shuffled to the door.

Tallant smiled. "But why should I stay clear of the adobe?" he called after him.

The old man mumbled.

"What?"

"They bite," said the old man, and went out shivering into the night.

The bartender was back at his post. "I'm glad he didn't take that beer you offered him," he said. "Along about this time in the evening I have to stop serving him. For once he had the sense to quit."

Tallant pushed his own empty bottle forward. "I hope I didn't frighten him away?"

"Frighten? Well, mister, I think maybe that's just what you did do. He didn't want beer that sort of came, like you might say, from the old Carker place. Some of the old-timers here, they're funny that way."

Tallant grinned. "Is it haunted?"

"Not what you'd call haunted, no. No ghosts there that I ever heard of." He wiped the counter with a cloth, and seemed to wipe the subject away with it.

The flight sergeant pushed his coke bottle away, hunted his pocket for nickles, and went over to the pin-ball machine. The young man with the beard slid onto his vacant stool. "Hope old Jake didn't worry you," he said.

Tallant laughed. "I suppose every town has its deserted homestead with a grisly tradition. But this sounds a little different. No ghosts, and they bite. Do you know anything about it?"

"A little," the young man said seriously. "A little. Just enough to—"

Tallant was curious. "Have one on me and tell me about it."

The flight sergeant swore bitterly at the machine.

Beer gurgled through the beard. "You see," the young man began, "the desert's so big you can't be alone in it. Ever notice that? It's all empty and there's nothing in sight, but there's always something moving over there where you can't quite see it. It's something very dry and thin and brown, only when you look around it isn't there. Ever see it?"

"Optical fatigue—" Tallant began.

"Sure. I know. Every man to his own legend. There isn't a tribe of Indians hasn't got some way of accounting for it. You've heard of the Watchers? And the twentieth-century white man comes along, and it's optical fatigue. Only in the nineteenth century things weren't quite the same, and there were the Carkers."

"You've got a special localized legend?"

"Call it that. You glimpse things out of the corner of your mind, same like you glimpse lean, dry things out of the corner of your eye. You incase 'em in solid circumstance and they're not so bad. That is known as the Growth of Legend. The Folk Mind in Action. You take the Carkers and the things you don't quite see and put 'em together. And they bite."

Tallant wondered how long that beard had been absorbing beer. "And what were the Carkers?" he prompted politely.

"Ever hear of Sawney Bean? Scotland—reign of James the First or maybe the Sixth, though I think Roughead's wrong on that for once. Or let's be more modern—ever hear of the Benders? Kansas in the 1870's? No? Ever hear of Procrustes? Or Polyphemus? Or Fee-fi-fo-fum?

"There are ogres, you know. They're no legend. They're fact, they are. The inn where nine guests left for every ten that arrived, the mountain cabin that sheltered travelers from the snow, sheltered them all winter till the melting spring uncovered their bones, the lonely stretches of road that so many passengers traveled halfway—you'll find 'em everywhere. All over Europe and pretty much in this country too before communications became what they are. Profitable business. And it wasn't just the profit. The Benders made money, sure; but that wasn't why they killed all their vic-

tims as carefully as a kosher butcher. Sawney Bean got so he didn't give a damn about the profit; he just needed to lay in more meat for the winter.

"And think of the chances you'd have at an oasis."

"So these Carkers of yours were, as you call them, ogres?"

"Carkers, ogres—maybe they were Benders. The Benders were never seen alive, you know, after the townspeople found those curiously butchered bodies. There's a rumor they got this far West. And the time checks pretty well. There wasn't any town here in the 80s. Just a couple of Indian families—last of a dying tribe living on at the oasis. They vanished after the Carkers moved in. That's not so surprising. The white race is a sort of super-ogre, anyway. Nobody worried about them. But they used to worry about why so many travelers never got across this stretch of desert. The travelers used to stop over at the Carkers, you see, and somehow they often never got any further. Their wagons'd be found maybe fifteen miles beyond in the desert. Sometimes they found the bones, too, parched and white. Gnawed-looking, they said sometimes."

"And nobody ever did anything about these Carkers?"

"Oh, sure. We didn't have King James the Sixth—only I still think it was the First—to ride up on a great white horse for a gesture, but twice there were Army detachments came here and wiped them all out."

"Twice? One wiping-out would do for most families." Tallant smiled at the beery confusion of the young man's speech.

"Uh-huh. That was no slip. They wiped out the Carkers twice because you see once didn't do any good. They wiped 'em out and still travelers vanished and still there were white gnawed bones. So they wiped 'em out again. After that they gave up, and people detoured the oasis. It made a longer, harder trip, but after all—"

Tallant laughed. "You mean these Carkers of yours were immortal?"

"I don't know about immortal. They somehow just didn't die very easy. Maybe, if they were the Benders—and I sort of like to think they were—they learned a little more about what they were doing out here on the desert. Maybe they put together what the Indians knew and what they knew, and it worked. Maybe whatever they made their sacrifices to, understood them better out here than in Kansas."

"And what's become of them—aside from seeing them out of the corner of the eye?"

"There's forty years between the last of the Carker history and this new settlement at the oasis. And people won't talk much about what they learned here in the first year or so. Only that they stay away from that old Carker adobe. They tell some stories— The priest says he was sitting in the confessional one hot Saturday afternoon and thought he heard a penitent come in. He waited a long time and finally lifted the gauze to see was anybody there. Something was there, and it bit. He's got three fingers on his right hand now, which looks funny as hell when he gives a benediction."

Tallant pushed their two bottles toward the bartender. "That yarn, my young friend, has earned another beer. How about it, bartender? Is he always cheerful like this, or is this just something he's improvised for my benefit?"

The bartender set out the fresh bottles with great solemnity. "Me, I wouldn't've told you all that myself; but then he's a stranger, too, and maybe don't feel the same way we do here. For him it's just a story."

"It's more comfortable that way," said the young man with the beard, and took a firm hold on his beer bottle.

"But as long as you've heard that much," said the bartender, "you might as well— It was last winter, when we had that cold spell. You heard funny stories that winter. Wolves coming into prospector's cabins just to warm up. Well, business wasn't so good. We don't have a license for hard liquor and the boys don't drink much beer when it's that cold. But they used to come in anyway because we've got that big oil burner.

"So one night there's a bunch of 'em in here—old Jake was here, that you was talking to, and his dog Jigger—and I think I hear somebody else come in. The door creaks a little. But I don't see nobody and the poker game's going and we're talking just like we're talking now, and all of a sudden I hear a kind of a noise like *crack!* over there in that corner behind the juke box near the burner.

"I go over to see what goes and it gets away before I can see it very good. But it was little and thin and it didn't have no clothes on. It must've been damned cold that winter."

"And what was the cracking noise?" Tallant asked dutifully.

"That? That was a bone. It must've strangled Jigger with-

out any noise. He was a little dog. It ate most of the flesh, and if it hadn't cracked the bone for the marrow it could've finished. You can still see the spots over there. That blood never did come out."

There had been silence all through the story. Now suddenly all hell broke loose. The flight sergeant let out a splendid yell and began pointing excitedly at the pin-ball machine and yelling for his payoff. The construction worker dramatically deserted the poker game, knocking his chair over in the process, and announced lugubriously that these guys here had their own rules, see?

Any atmosphere of Carker-inspired horror was dissipated. Tallant whistled as he walked over to put a nickel in the juke box. He glanced casually at the floor. Yes, there was a stain, for what that was worth.

He smiled cheerfully and felt rather grateful to the Carkers. They were going to solve his blackmail problem very neatly.

Tallant dreamed of power that night. It was a common dream with him. He was a ruler of the new American Corporate State that should follow the war; and he said to this man "Come!" and he came, and to that man "Go!" and he went, and to his servants "Do this!" and they did it.

Then the young man with the beard was standing before him, and the dirty trench coat was like the robes of an ancient prophet. And the young man said, "You see yourself riding high, don't you? Riding the crest of the wave—the Wave of the Future, you call it. But there's a deep, dark undertow that you don't see, and that's a part of the Past. And the Present and even your Future. There is evil in mankind that is blacker even than your evil, and infinitely more ancient."

And there was something in the shadows behind the young man, something little and lean and brown.

Tallant's dream did not disturb him the following morning. Nor did the thought of the approaching interview with Morgan. He fried his bacon and eggs and devoured them cheerfully. The wind had died down for a change, and the sun was warm enough so that he could strip to the waist while he cleared land for his shack. His machete glinted

brilliantly as it swung through the air and struck at the roots of the sagebrush.

Morgan's full face was red and sweating when he arrived.

"It's cool over there in the shade of the adobe," Tallant suggested. "We'll be more comfortable."

And in the comfortable shade of the adobe he swung the machete once and clove Morgan's full red sweating face in two.

It was so simple. It took less effort than uprooting a clump of sage. And it was so safe. Morgan lived in a cabin way to hell-and-gone and was often away on prospecting trips. No one would notice his absence for months, if then. No one had any reason to connect him with Tallant. And no one in Oasis would hunt for him in the Carker-haunted adobe.

The body was heavy, and the blood dripped warm on Tallant's bare skin. With relief he dumped what had been Morgan on the floor of the adobe. There were no boards, no flooring. Just the earth. Hard, but not too hard to dig a grave in. And no one was likely to come poking around in this taboo territory to notice the grave. Let a year or so go by, and the grave and the bones it contained would simply be attributed to the Carkers.

The corner of Tallant's eye bothered him again. Deliberately he looked about the interior of the adobe.

The little furniture was crude and heavy, with no attempt to smooth down the strokes of the ax. It was held together with wooden pegs or half-rotted thongs. There were age-old cinders in the fireplace, and the dusty shards of a cooking jar among them.

And there was a deeply hollowed stone, covered with stains that might have been rust, if stone rusted. Behind it was a tiny figure, clumsily fashioned of clay and sticks. It was something like a man and something like a lizard, and something like the things that flit across the corner of the eye.

Curious now, Tallant peered about further. He penetrated to the corner that the one unglassed window lighted but dimly. And there he let out a little choking gasp. For a moment he was rigid with horror. Then he smiled and all but laughed aloud.

This explained everything. Some curious individual had seen this, and from his account burgeoned the whole legend.

The Carkers had indeed learned something from the Indians, but that secret was the art of embalming.

It was a perfect mummy. Either the Indian art had shrunk bodies, or this was that of a ten-year-old boy. There was no flesh. Only skin and bone and taut dry stretches of tendon between. The eyelids were closed; the sockets looked hollow under them. The nose was sunken and almost lost. The scant lips were tightly curled back from the long and very white teeth, which stood forth all the more brilliantly against the deep-brown skin.

It was a curious little trove, this mummy. Tallant was already calculating the chances for raising a decent sum of money from an interested anthropologist—murder can produce such delightfully profitable chance by-products—when he noticed the infinitesimal rise and fall of the chest.

The Carker was not dead. It was sleeping.

Tallant did not dare stop to thing beyond the instant. This was no time to pause to consider if such things were possible in a well-ordered world. It was no time to reflect on the disposal of the body of Morgan. It was a time to snatch up your machete and get out of there.

But in the doorway he halted. There coming across the desert, heading for the adobe, clearly seen this time in the center of the eye, was another—a female.

He made an involuntary gesture of indecision. The blade of the machete clanged ringingly against the adobe wall. He heard the dry shuffling of a roused sleeper behind him.

He turned fully now, the machete raised. Dispose of this nearer one first, then face the female. There was no room even for terror in this thoughts, only for action.

The lean brown shape darted at him avidly. He moved lightly away and stood poised for its second charge. It shot forward again. He took one step back, machete-arm raised, and fell head-long over the corpse of Morgan. Before he could rise, the thin thing was upon him. Its sharp teeth had met through the palm of his left hand.

The machete moved swiftly. The thin dry body fell headless to the floor. There was no blood.

The grip of the teeth did not relax. Pain coursed up Tallant's left arm—a sharper, more bitter pain than you would expect from the bite. Almost as though venom—

He dropped the machete, and his strong white hand plucked and twisted at the dry brown lips. The teeth stayed

clenched, unrelaxing. He sat bracing his back against the wall and gripped the head between his knees. He pulled. His flesh ripped, and blood formed dusty clots on the dirt floor. But the bite was firm.

His world had become reduced now to that hand and that head. Nothing outside mattered. He must free himself. He raised his aching arm to his face, and with his own teeth he tore at that unrelenting grip. The dry flesh crumbled away in desert dust, but the teeth were locked fast. He tore his lip against their white keenness, and tasted in his mouth the sweetness of blood and something else.

He staggered to his feet again. He knew what he must do. Later he could use cautery, a tourniquet, see a doctor with a story about a Gila monster—their heads grips, too, don't they?—but he knew what he must do now.

He raised the machete and struck again.

His white hand lay on the brown floor, gripped by the white teeth in the brown face. He propped himself against the adobe wall, momentarily unable to move. His open wrist hung over the deeply hollowed stone. His blood and his strength and his life poured out before the little figure of sticks and clay.

The female stood in the doorway now, the sun bright on her thin brownness. She did not move. He knew that she was waiting for the hollow stone to fill.

THE SHED

E. Everett Evans

This is indeed a grand tale . . . of things that lurk in the dark . . . . You know of course that so many of my friends spend their lives avoiding the sunlight . . . is it any wonder that I find this story so entertaining? . . . . Three young boys who had one of my shadow friends to play with and who made a complete mess of the opportunity of a lifetime . . . .

THE THREE BOYS stood in the dim, dust-moted corner of The Shed, gazing curiously at that mysterious Shadow.

There seemed a tinge of color in it now, a faint yet malignant iridescent shimmering. It seemed much more solid, too, as though it was now beginning to take on substance.

They sensed movement there, as though there was a sort of an . . . an *aliveness.*

All at once their minds shrank back before a horrifying thought.

Had Sam had a part in making this change? And Kitty? *Was Heck a part of it?*

The cow was forgotten for the moment, in their puzzled wondering . . . and in their remembering.

Cuddy Howland had just done a knee-to-ankle drop on the high trapeze, and was strutting about, justifiably proud of his exploit, as any eleven-year-old boy would be. He popped another piece of gum into his mouth, to be added to the already-large cud there.

"I see that Ole Shadow's still here," he turned nonchalantly towards the other two boys.

Hutch glanced over towards the corner as he slid down the long rope that was suspended from an iron ring in the skylight forty or so feet above.

"My papa says there probably really isn't any Shadow there at all." He giggled as he came over to where Cuddy was standing.: "Papa's kinda blind, sometimes."

"Aw, all grown-ups is blind about some things," short, heavy-set Stub Aiken announced from the low trapeze where, after vigorous swinging, he was now "letting the ole cat die."

He jumped down and joined the other two, close to that corner of the big, drafty shed which the railroad people occasionally used for the storing of excess freight, but which was generally empty, and had been preempted by the town boys as a playhouse and gymnasium.

Now, as the three boys came closer to the dimly lighted, dusty corner, their footsteps involuntarily slowed, although they were not conscious of any fear.

But the Unknown is always reason for caution, even if it is not feared. And this Shadow, or whatever it was, was a most peculiar and unusual thing. It seemed circular in shape; tubelike; about five feet through. As near as they could tell, it extended from the dirt floor of The Shed clear to the roof. It couldn't be seen outside, above the roof, and up beyond the rafters inside it was too dim to see clearly.

The thing was of a nondescript color, mostly gray. It did nothing spectacular—merely seemed to *be* there, that was all anyone knew about it. It had appeared one day about a fortnight before. At least, it had never been noticed before that day.

Hutch cocked his head on one side. "Chuck Bernard brought his papa down here, too, the other day, and after looking at it for a long time his papa said he couldn't even see anything. But Chuck and I could see it just as plain. Later on, after his papa went home, it started raining, and that Ole Shadow done got brighter, there in the dark."

"I was here last Sat'day when we had that thunder-and-lightning storm," Cuddy observed. "Just like you say, the darker it got the brighter it got. Seemed to kinda glimmer, something like swamp-fire, or like rotten wood-punk does in the dark."

Stub looked questioningly at them. "What do you 'spose it *is*, anyhow?"

The others were dumbly silent. It was something none of

them understood. But that only made it the more interesting.

"It sure ain't nothing to be scairt of," Hutch snorted. "Grown folks is so silly, sometimes. Always 'fraid of things."

Yet none of the boys had ever ventured too close, in spite of this generally held feeling. Even Heck Osbun, the town daredevil, had never walked into or through it, or even very far into its corner. Yet Heck would dive off the top string-piece of the Cemetery Bridge into only ten feet of water, or run through a huge bonfire of autumn leaves.

No, this strange visitor was just one of those things small children take so casually for granted, as a part of the big world they do not, as yet, know all about. But there certainly was no reason for giving it any *special* notice or attention ... nor did they.

The hot midday August sun shone blisteringly. Few adults were to be seen, even along the three blocks of Chicago Street where the stores were. Those who did find it necessary to be out carried an umbrella or parasol in one hand to keep off the burning rays of Old Sol. The other hand usually carried a palm-leaf or folding fan, with which they vainly tried to stir up a little cooling air.

Over on Pearl Street a chunky, freckled boy of almost-twelve was disconsolately ambling along the unpaved street, scuffing his bare feet through the thick dust, which was much cooler a half-inch down than it was on top. He liked to walk thus in the dust. It gave him such an "ookey" feeling as the dry, powdery dust squilched up around and between his toes.

But today Hutch was not thinking much of that. He was vastly worried.

He turned into Marshall Street, under the huge maples and elms whose branches, interlacing above the street, made it a trifle cooler. He relaxed a bit.

Coming toward him, but on the other side of the street, he saw another shuffling figure, dressed as he was in blouse and knee pants, a somewhat frowsy, wide-brimmed straw hat settled well down over his forehead, shading his eyes. Hutch crossed over.

"Hey, Cuddy!" The other looked up, then hurried his steps a wee mite.

"Lo, Hutch. Didja find Sam?"

"Nope. Nobody's saw him at all today. I been all over town, and I can't find hide nor hair of him. You seen him?"

"Unh-uh. Wonder what become of him?"

"Dunno. He never run off before."

They stood digging their toes in the soft dust, grieving for their lost friend.

This Sam, of whom they spoke, was a Coolwater institution. A large, friendly black spaniel that everyone knew and loved, he was chiefly known for his devotion to the big white horses that pulled the Fire Engine Pumper. No fire in Coolwater was complete nor official unless Sam was running and leaping about those horses on their run.

Nominally Sam belonged to Von Hutchinson, driver of the Pumper, and father of Hutch. Actually, Sam belonged to—or no, rather one should say that everyone in Coolwater belonged to Sam.

Now he was missing, although so far only a few of the boys knew it. And they were very, very worried about their pal.

"Let's go find Stub, and hunt some more."

"Yeh, let's."

They trotted across the street and across the corner of Old Lady Greene's lawn, disregarding the yell of exasperation that came from the big rocker on the porch where she was sitting, fanning herself. Around the fence and into the coal yard they started, for that way they could climb the back fence onto the low roof of the shed of Aiken's Livery, where they were quite likely to find Stub.

But hardly had they entered the yard when they were jerked short by the sudden ululating, sliding scream of the Water Works' siren, followed almost immediately by the first notes of the fire bell. As one, they wheeled and ran for the fire house, down the alley between Hutch's house and the old billboard surrounded hole where the junkyard had once been.

They dashed through the back door of the firehouse just as the horses were released from their stalls, and used this short cut to the bell rope. Hutch grabbed it first and started ringing it, while the fireman who relinquished it ran for his place on the running board, calling back over his shoulder, "Third Ward."

Cuddy took the clapper rope and, as Hutch let up a moment on the tolling, struck the bell three times—the Third Ward signal.

Then, as they resumed pulling the bell cord, they watched

the completion of the harnessing. This was always interesting. The harnesses were always hung carefully on ropes and hooks just above the horses' positions on either side of the pole. A single jerk on a small rope dropped the complete harnesses on the horses' backs, a few quick snaps of buckles, and they were ready to roll.

"By golly, that's a neat trick!" Cuddy's voice was all admiration.

Men, women and children were pouring onto the streets now, the heat forgotten. Men who were members of the fire company were running up, or dashing up on the bicycles, to leap onto their places on Pumper or Hook-and-Ladder.

Von Hutchinson gathered the reins and the horses bore the engine, on which Bill Taylor was vigorously stoking the fire, out onto the streets. The Hook-and-Ladder swung out right after them.

As soon as the trucks had left, Hutch and Cuddy abandoned the bell rope, and took out after them. Racing up Monroe Street, they cut across to Clay and up that to Waterman Avenue, using every available short-cut. They reached the scene of the fire almost as soon as the apparatus.

It wasn't much of a fire, luckily for the owners of the small framehouse, but the boys were not interested in that.

Sam hadn't appeared in his accustomed place, running with the engine horses.

There were excited comments from everyone present about this. It was a nine-days' wonder.

Where *was* Sam? What'd happened to him? It was absolutely unthinkable! Sam *never* missed a fire.

Hutch grinned briefly and ruefully, remembering that day last Christmas vacation. He and Babe Vance had made a harness for the dog, and Sam was pulling them on their sled. They were down near the High School, heading east, when the fire bell rang.

Sam had whirled, throwing them both into a snowbank, and had run to the fire, dragging that leaping, bouncing sled behind him, nearly tripping the racing horses time and again.

Back again at the firehouse, the horses returned to their stalls and wiped down, the harnesses again carefully hooked up ready for the next alarm, Hutch tapped the single note that told the townfolk the fire was out.

Von Hutchinson turned to the boys.

"Where's Sam?"

"Dunno," they looked at him sadly, and Hutch added slowly, "Haven't seen him all day. Been looking for him all over, too."

Von Hutchinson slowly shook his head and made his way to the big, cushioned, wire-reinforced chair he habitually occupied. He sat down and tipped it into a comfortable position against the shady side of the open firehouse door.

"You better keep looking."

"I'm going to, Papa," and the two boys, now joined by several others, moved slowly away.

They couldn't imagine life without Sam, was their excited comment. The town would never be the same if he was really, truly lost.

"What'll we do now?" someone asked.

"Let's go down by the tracks and look for him," Stub Aiken suggested, and started off down Monroe Street towards the depot. Hutch and Cuddy Howland elected to follow him; others said they would look in other directions.

The three boys spent an hour looking all around the railroad yards, the Mill, the Foundry, the Stove Works, and the dump. Nowhere could they find a trace of Sam, nor had anyone they asked seen him.

Discouraged, they drifted finally into The Shed, and desultorily played for awhile on the rope and trapezes. But they found no pleasure in it.

After about ten minutes Hutch slid down the long rope and wandered over to look at the Shadow, which he thought seemed much plainer than usual. As he came nearer, he gave a sudden start, then went as close as he dared. He squatted down, peering at the ground beneath the thing.

Suddenly he jumped up, wheeled about and raced over to a pile of long, slender poles. Picking one up, he carried it back. Stub dropped off the low trap, and Cuddy from the high one, and came running up.

"What you found?"

"Something under there looks familiar," Hutch was tight-lipped. He began poking at two shiny objects, working them across the close-packed dirt floor, ignoring the Shadow, which was rippling and twisting as though annoyed by this intrusion.

The other two were already squatting down and examining the objects when Hutch, having poked them far outside

the Shadow's range, dropped the pole and came over.

"By Golly, it's the buckle and plate from Sam's collar," Stub's voice was small, awed.

"How d'ya 'spose they ever got here?" Cuddy, too, was very quiet.

Hutch took the two pieces tenderly in his hands, turning them over and over. The dog's collar had been an ordinary leather strap, but that was gone now. All that remained was the silver buckle and the silver name plate. These had been solemnly presented by the businessmen of the little town, one evening during a band concert in Library Park. The plate was engraved, "Sam, First Citizen of Coolwater, Michigan, 1901."

Suddenly Hutch began to cry, great racking sobs, with huge tears rolling unashamed down his cheeks.

"That damned Shadow done et him!"

The other two noticed neither the "swear-word" nor the tears. They were too close to both themselves.

"SAM'S MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE," the *Coolwater Moon* called it in the half-column, headlined article on the front page. Every one of the 4,957 inhabitants of the town felt an unaccountable shiver of fear as they heard about, read and discussed this unusual happening.

Life was ordinarily a placid thing in small towns of this type back in the 1900's. Such uncanny occurrences were so rare as to be a tremendous shock.

There was what amounted almost to a pilgrimage out to that old dilapidated railroad shed that evening after supper. Chief of Police Paine showed how important he felt the occasion to be by wearing his seldom-donned uniform.

It was noticeable that the milling throng did not venture very close to that enigmatic corner of The Shed, though the Shadow could be plainly seen even in the dusk. Indeed, the front ranks of the shifting crowd that did venture inside were invariably the youngsters, not their elders.

"You come back away from there!" was the frequent cry of distracted and bewildered parents, as one child after another would press closer for a look.

It was apparent that the *Shadow-thing* was very real to the children, but only an unexplainable mistiness in the air to the materialistic, stolid minds and eyes of the grown-ups. Yet it was the elders, not the children, who felt vague, un-

easy and semifrightened chills before the eeriness of the *thing*.

Yet none could tell why they felt so. It was such an ordinary, prosaic place here—this old, dusty, seldom-used shed. How could there possibly be any mystery, any fantastic happening, in such a place?

School Superintendent McLeroy, with several of his teachers, came. They peered about learnedly—from a respectful distance—discussed the matter *sotto voce* among themselves. Finally Mr. McLeroy faced the crowd, cleared his throat, and assumed a dignified stance.

"We have reached the unanimous conclusion that this so-called Shadow is merely that, a shadow. It could not possibly have been the cause of Sam's disappearance. You will note that there are several places in the roof where shingles are either gone entirely or spread far apart. It is the manner in which the light shines down through these and reflects from the dust-particles in suspension in the air, accentuated by the dimness already inherent here inside the building, that makes this peculiar effect. We are positive there is absolutely nothing mysterious nor dangerous here. Merely an aberrative effect of light-rays."

"But there's no sunlight now, and the Moon and stars aren't bright enough to make a shadow," Ernie Wall piped up.

"Tut, tut, young man, you don't understand."

Two or three of the boys giggled among themselves.

"Neither does he, Ole Windbag."

But one thing was clear before the hour was up in spite of this clean bill of health given by the noted educators—no child would be allowed to play there again with his parents' consent.

"Oughta tear the place down," more than one man muttered.

"Be better to burn it," another somewhat sheepishly argued.

"Have to get the railroad's permission, first," Chief Paine spoke in his best official voice. "It's railroad property, and we can't just take such matters into our own hands."

"Anybody talked to Nachbauer about it?" Nachbauer (everyone in Coolwater pronounced the name the same as the word "Neighbor") was the Station Agent for the Railroad.

"Let's make up a committee and go see him."

Several important men grouped themselves together and departed for the Depot.

In the dusk the weird shadow seemed to have a very slight but noticeable glow about it, which became slightly brighter, and far more eerie, as the darkness increased.

It grew noticeable, and so malevolent in appearance that soon there was a hurried and general exodus. By eight-thirty no one was left in The Shed, or even very close to it.

"You're *never* to go in there again!" Stub Aiken's parents told him when they got home. And Stub knew, as well as though he was present in every home, that the other youngsters were being given the same orders.

"But where'll we play?"

"Anywhere but *there*! You can find some other place as good or better. That old shed is about to fall down, anyway. It's no fit place to play in any case. Especially not now."

"Aw, you're scairt of that ole Shadow. It's nothing to be 'fraid of—you heard Ole McLeroy say that."

"None of your smartness, now. You get for bed, and no back talk, either!"

The next morning shortly after breakfast there was quite a crowd of the children milling about the open doorways of The Shed. All were excitedly conjecturing the possibilities and probabilities of this exciting, unheard-of happenstance.

Yet none of them were brazen enough to defy those strict parental rulings, to the extent of going inside to play.

"Can't see why there's so much fuss," was the general cry.

"Nothing there to worry about," Cuddy Howland was disgusted. "Just a trick Shadow. We been playing there every day, and it never hurted us none."

"Old folks always getting scairt of nothing," Stub was equally in revolt.

"Shadow done et Sam, though, didn't it?"

That brought up sharply the tragedy of the disappearance of their beloved canine friend, and a pall of sadness dropped over the group.

"Anybody seen my kittie?" little eight-year-old Christine Swanson, who lived just across the tracks a couple of hundred yards away, came crying into the crowd.

Quick questioning disclosed that her Maltese cat had been missing since the evening before.

Hutch turned to his cronies. "Bet Ole Shadow done et her, too."

"Wonder how it eats things?" Ernie Wall was one of those youngsters who always want to know "How" and "Why" about everything.

"Didn't see no bones ner hide ner anything like that when we found Sam's collar," Cuddy Howland considered the matter gravely.

"Naw, just the metal parts, nothing else," Hutch added.

"Did you look real close?" Iva Goudy asked from among the group of interested girls.

"Sure I looked close," Hutch answered in an annoyed tone. "Think I ain't got sense enough to do that?"

"I just wondered," meekly, as the giggling girls moved a little farther away from those lordly, supercilious males.

Stub called to Heck Osbun, who had just come up. "Chris Swanson's cat's missing. We think Ole Shadow et her. Dast ya to go in and see!"

Fourteen-year-old Heck swaggered toward the open doorway. "Heck, nothing in there to be scairt of."

"Only you're 'fraid to go in and look," a voice back in the group taunted.

"Who said that?" Heck whirled. No one answered. Everyone looked guiltless.

"I ain't scairt of nothing like that there Shadow," Heck announced, plangently. "Heck, I'd go in in a minute only my Mom and Pop tole me they'd skin me if I did."

Little Christine started to cry anew. "My kittie's been et up by that mean old thing in there."

Heck stepped further into the open doorway, peering about.

"Shadow's still there."

"Yeh, and it looks solider and brighter, too," Stub Aiken was peering around Heck's body. The others crowded closer.

"Looks like something bright, there on the floor under it." Hutch, too, was scanning the Shed, Shadow, and floor.

"Aw, I can't see nothing."

"Me neither."

"I do. Something little ... something golden shiny."

Christine set up a louder wail. "My kittie had a gold bell on a ribbon on her neck."

Heck looked searchingly back at the group. "If you'll all promise not to peach on me, I'll go in and look."

"Dast ya, Heck?"

"Heck, yes. I dast anything. But I'd catch it if my folks ever found out."

"All right, we'll all promise not to peach."

A great nodding of heads in agreement.

"Cross yer hearts?"

They all swore the time-honored oath, to cross their hearts and hope to die, that if they lied he could spit in their eye.

"All right, you keep watch and yell if anyone comes, and I'll go in."

He slipped inside the doorway, ran swiftly across to the farther wall. They could see him cautiously sidling along, inching his way slowly yet courageously ever closer . . . closer to that now-dread Shadow.

The little group held their collective breaths as he advanced nearer and nearer to that *thing.*

A querulous voice from the distance began calling.

"Christine! Christ-TEEEENE!" Nearer and nearer it came.

Hutch called into the semidarkness of The Shed. "Somebody's coming, Heck!"

Then he, with the rest, faded from sight with that uncanny quickness known only to creatures of the wild and young children who are, after all, also creatures of the wild.

By common but wordless consent most of the boys who'd been at The Shed reassembled at the swimming hole near the Waterworks. But after a few dives and splashings they began to worry because Heck Osbun hadn't shown up.

"Prob'ly didn't know we was coming here."

"Could be."

Dives and paddling grew increasingly lackadaisical, showing a noticeable lack of interest and enthusiasm for their sport.

Hutch climbed out, started dressing. "I'm going back and find Heck." Stub and Cuddy splashed to shore. "Wait for us."

In silence they dressed. Their pace at the start was a mere amble, but before they'd gone halfway they were running.

Somehow . . . they could not tell why . . . they were frightened now. . . .

But loyally determined to find their friend.

Across the tracks they raced, dodging expertly the slow-moving switch engine and shunted cars. Past the freight

docks and Milner's Slaughter House, they arrived, largely panting, out of breath, at The Shed.

They slowed abruptly, then crept silently toward the nearest open doorway in that end of the building where that strange and now terrifying Shadow held forth.

Stealthily they peeked in. It took some time for their eyes to become accustomed to the dust-laden dimness of the interior after the bright blindingness of the summer sun.

"He ain't here!" Stub exploded in relief after a long, close look.

"Musta gone home," Hutch suggested.

"Naw, he wouldn't go home. 'Tain't dinner time yet," Stub snorted derisively.

"Maybe he went over to the Slaughter House."

"Let's go see."

They walked gingerly across the junk-filled vacant lots to the local abattoir—a place of infinite fascination, with its strange sights and stranger smells.

It was a *thrill*—because it outraged their every sense of animal love—to watch the killings. To see calm, innocent cattle led one by one into that room with the fetid smells and the stained, concrete floor always a'swish with running water. To see brawny, heavy-set Gus Milner and his equally big son, Charley, slip the snubbing rope through the ring in the cow's nose, and relentlessly draw its head down and down until its nose touched the heavy ring set in the floor, then fasten it.

Their hearts did strange nip-ups just back of their mouths as one of the men would pick up the heavy sledge, and with one great, perfectly aimed blow, strike the animal just between and a bit above the eyes. They always jumped at the sudden slump as the carcass dropped, spraddled and lifeless, to the floor.

They watched two cows killed, then remembered their errand.

"Seen Heck Osbun today?" Hutch asked Charley.

"Heck? Nooo, don't seem to remember seeing him," Charley grunted as he started toward the pens for the next bovine victim.

Just as they were turning dejectedly away, they heard Gus call to his son. "How many more, Charley?"

"Two more of Strong's, then that sick cow of Purdy's."

"Sick cow?" Cuddy was all interest. "What's wrong with it?"

"Dunno," Charley grunted in his usual laconic manner. "Just pretty sick. Got running sores all over it."

"They don't make meat outta cows like that, do they?" Stub's horrified voice squeaked.

" 'Course not," contemptuously. "A guy'd die if he et meat like that. That's why we kill 'em and burn 'em, so nobody will."

The boys weren't a hundred feet on their way back towards town when a sudden thought struck them all at once. They went into a huddle.

"Golly, 'spose it'd work?"

A shrugging of collective shoulders. Who knew?

"It'll be fun trying," Hutch grinned and giggled.

Indian-stealthy they crept back. Stub was lookout, while Hutch and Cuddy led the dazed, almost-dead and unresisting animal across lots and into The Shed, closer to that dread Shadow than they'd ever been before except when Hutch retrieved Sam's collar parts.

Suddenly they stopped short, for the Shadow now seemed subtly different. More colorful, more solid, and a movement to it that was sort of an . . . an *aliveness*!

They quailed before this changed growth. What could it mean? What could have caused it?

A sudden thought panicked them. Could Sam have had a part in this horrifying growth? And Kitty?

Was Heck a part of it?

"There's something under there," Stub pointed a shaking finger.

"Where at? I don't see nothing."

"Clear over, 'bout a yard from the wall."

"I see the gold bell there."

"I see the other now, too." Cuddy was leaning forward in excitement. "It's a knife!" he suddenly blurted.

"Yeh, a three-blader stag-horn," Stub added hollowly.

Hutch's whisper cut the silence. "Heck had a knife like that."

Stub wheeled suddenly and was sick on the dirt floor. Cuddy turned and threw himself face down on the floor, wracked by sobs.

Hutch stood there stolidly, seemingly hypnotized into a

sort of trance. His face was white, strained, his eyes staring unseeingly.

Dimly, at last, he sensed streamers of the Shadow pushing out, pulsing, reaching ... reaching toward him.

One almost touched him before he seemed to awaken enough to jump back. He bumped into the cow.

That reminded him. He yanked off his cap and slapped it sharply against the cow's flank. The animal lumbered farward, straight into that Shadow. Well within, it stopped suddenly. Hutch could see the Shadow begin to wind and twist about the cow, which began a piteous lowing.

He could see that the now-terrified animal was straining to move, but could not. He yelled to the others, "Lookout!"

They came to his side and watched in awed wonder. The strange and evil mistiness wah curling and entwining itself all about and around the cow. Thicker and thicker grew the folds of Shadow-substance. The body of the cow was growing dimmer to their sight.

The colors of the *thing* were more pronounced, now. Flaming, angry reds, flashing blues, sickly greens and yellows.

Suddenly a wild animal scream tumbled the boys backward . . . an agonizing, unhuman scream such as animals sometimes make in moments of stressed peril or anguished pain.

When they looked again, the cow was gone.

That hair-raising scream would ordinarily have sent them racing pell-mell far from that maddening sight and sound. But now they were horror-bound, held helpless, without power of movement, by this vastly unusual and nonunderstandable happening.

And as they stood there, watching, that Shadow seemed to begin a new and entirely different kind of writhing. Its colors pulsated with bright, unearthly shades and tints.

They sensed that it had gone mad with some sort of agony. It was whirling, roiling convoluting, seeming to turn inside out and back again. It boiled and frothed. It churned and writhed jerkily, insanely, degenerately. It shot out streamers of viscous substance that turned back onto themselves in fantastic and unfathomable knots.

As it looped and twisted about itself, its colors waxed and waned, running the gamut of shades. It was a kaleidoscope gone crazy.

To the eyes of the fascinated boys it gradually grew more and more tenuous. The colors faded until their eyes ached with trying to see them at all.

Suddenly, not with their ears, but deep inside their minds, they heard or sensed a high, excruciating keening that persisted momentarily, then trailed off as though it was retreating into a far, unknown nothingness.

The Shadow was gone.

For long, long minutes the boys could not move. Finally Hutch shuddered, a long, rippling movement that ran through his entire body.

Slowly he straightened. His eyes seemed to refocus sanely. Then he grinned.

"Dibs on the high trap!" He raced towards the center of The Shed.

"Dibs on the long rope!" Cuddy was only momentarily behind him.

Stub scuffed disgustedly after them.

"Darn, I *always* get stuck with that baby trap!"

THERE SHALL BE NO DARKNESS

James Blish

We have tossed in a few stray cats . . . some exotic greens . . . a few tansy leaves . . . odds and ends . . . . A good cook never forgets to add a well barbecued werewolf . . . and several hairs from the head of a witch . . . a recipe from Grandma Zacherley's famous book for the newly wed vampire . . . vulture stew a la mode. . . .

IT WAS about 10:00 p.m. when Paul Foote decided that there was a monster at Newcliffe's houseparty.

Foote was tight at the time—tighter than he liked to be ever. He sprawled in a too-easy chair in the front room, slanted on the end of his spine, his forearms resting on the high arms of the chair. A half-empty glass depended laxly from his right hand. A darker spot on one gray trouser-leg showed where some of the drink had gone. Through half-shut eyes he watched Jarmoskowski at the piano.

The pianist was playing, finally, his transcription of the Wolf's-Glen scene from von Weber's *Der Freischuetz*. Though it was a tremendous technical showpiece, Jarmoskowski never used it in concert, but only at social gatherings. He played it with an odd, detached amusement which only made more astounding the way the notes came swarming out of Newcliffe's big Baldwin; the rest of the gathering had been waiting for it all evening.

For Foote, who was a painter with a tin ear, it wasn't music at all. It was an enormous, ominous noise, muted occasionally to allow the repetition of a cantrap whose implications were secret.

The room was stuffy and was only half as large as it had

been during the afternoon, and Foote was afraid that he was the only living man in it except for Jan Jarmoskowski. The rest of the party were wax figures, pretending to be humans in an aesthetic trance.

Of Jarmoskowski's vitality there could be no question. He was not handsome, but there was in him a pure brute force that had its own beauty—that and the beauty of precision with which the force was controlled. When his big hairy hands came down it seemed that the piano should fall into flinders. But the impact of fingers upon keys was calculated to the single dyne.

It was odd to see such delicacy behind such a face. Jarmoskowski's hair grew too long on his rounded head, despite the fact that he had avoided carefully any suggestion of Musician's Haircut. His brows were straight, rectangular, so shaggy that they seemed to meet over his high-bridged nose.

From where Foote sat he noticed for the first time the odd way the Pole's ears were placed—tilted forward as if in animal attention, so that the vestigial "point" really was in the uppermost position. They were cocked directly toward the keyboard, reminding Foote irresistibly of the dog on the His Master's Voice trademark.

Where had he seen that head before? In Matthias Gruenewald, perhaps—in that panel on the Isenheim Altar that showed the Temptation of St. Anthony. Or had it been in one of the illustrations in the *Red Grimoire*, those dingy, primitive woodcuts which Chris Lundgren called "Rorschak tests of the medieval mind?"

On a side-table next to the chair the painter's cigarette burned in an onyx ashtray which bore also a tiny dancer frozen in twisted metal. From the unlit end of the cigarette a small tendril of white smoke flowed downward and oozed out into a clinging pool, an amoeboid blur against the dark mahogany. The river of sound subsided suddenly and the cantrap was spoken, the three even, stony syllables and the answering wail. The pool of smoke leapt up in the middle exactly as if something had been dropped into it. Then the piano was howling again under Jarmoskowski's fingers, and the tiny smoke-spout twisted in the corner of Foote's vision, becoming more and more something like the metal dancer. His mouth dry, Foote shifted to the outer edge of the chair.

The transcription ended with three sharp chords, a "concert ending" contrived to suggest the three plucked notes of the

cantrap. The smoke-figurine toppled and slumped as if stabbed; it poured over the edge of the table and disintegrated swiftly on the air. Jarmoskowski paused, touched his fingertips together reflectively, and then began a work more purely his own: the *Galliard Fantasque*.

The wax figures did not stir, but a soft eerie sigh of recognition came from their frozen lips. Through the window behind the pianist a newly risen moon showed another petrified vista, the snowy expanse of Newcliffe's Scottish estate.

There was another person in the room, but Foote could not tell who it was. When he turned his unfocused eyes to count, his mind went back on him and he never managed to reach a total; but somehow there was the impression of another presence that had not been of the party before. Someone Tom and Caroline hadn't invited was sitting in. Not Doris, nor the Laborite Palmer, either; they were too simple. By the same token, Bennington, the American critic, was much too tubbily comfortable to have standing as a menace. The visiting psychiatrist, Lundgren, Foote had known well in Sweden, and Hermann Ehrenberg was only another refugee novelist and didn't count; for that matter, no novelist was worth a snap in a painter's universe, so that crossed out Alec James, too.

His glance moved of itself back to the composer. Jarmoskowski was not the presence. He had been there before. But he had something to do with it. There was an eleventh presence now, and it had something to do with Jarmoskowski.

What was it?

For it was there—there was no doubt about that. The energy which the rest of Foote's senses ordinarily would have consumed was flowing into his instincts now, because his senses were numbed. Acutely, poignantly, his instincts told him of the monster. It hovered around the piano, sat next to Jarmoskowski as he caressed the musical beast's teeth, blended with the long body and the serpentine fingers.

Foote had never had the horrors from drinking before, and he knew he did not have them now. A part of his mind which was not drunk and could never be drunk had recognized real horror somewhere in the room; and the whole of his mind, its barriers of skepticism tumbled, believed and trembled within itself.

The batlike circling of the frantic notes was stilled abruptly. Foote blinked, startled.

"Already?" he said stupidly.

"Already?" Jarmoskowski echoed. "But that's a long piece, Paul. Your fascination speaks well for my writing."

His eyes turned directly upon the painter; they were almost competely suffused, though Jarmoskowski never drank. Foote tried frantically to remember whether or not his eyes had been red during the afternoon, and whether it was possible for any man's eyes to be as red at any time as this man's were now.

"The writing?" he said, condensing the far-flung diffusion of his brain. Newcliffe's highballs were damn strong. "Hardly the writing, Jan. Such fingers as those could put fascination into 'Three Blind Mice.' "

He snickered inside at the parade of emotions which marched across Jarmoskowski's face: startlement at a compliment from Foote—for the painter had a reputation for a savage tongue, and the inexplicable antagonism which had arisen between the two since the pianist had first arrived had given Foote plenty of opportunity to justify it—then puzzled reflection—and then at last veiled anger as the hidden slur bared its fangs in his mind. Nevertheless the man could laugh at it.

"They are long, aren't they?" he said to the rest of the group, unrolling the fingers like the party noisemakers which turn from snail to snake when blown through. "But it's a mistake to suppose that they assist my playing, I assure you. Mostly they stumble over each other. Especially over this one."

He held up his hands for inspection. On both, the index fingers and the middle fingers were exactly the same length.

"I suppose Lundgren would call me a mutation," Jarmoskowski said. "It's a nuisance at the piano. I have to work out my own fingerings for everything, even the simplest pieces."

Doris Gilmore, once a student of Jarmoskowski's in Prague, and still obviously, painfully in love with him, shook coppery hair back from her shoulders and held up her own hands.

"My fingers are so stubby," she said ruefully. "Hardly pianist's hands at all."

"On the contrary—the hands of a master pianist," Jarmoskowski said. He smiled, scratching his palms abstractedly, and Foote found himself in a universe of brilliant, perfectly even teeth. No, not perfectly even. The polished rows were bounded almost mathematically by slightly longer canines. They reminded him of that idiotic Poe story—was it *Berenice*? Obvi-

ously Jarmoskowski would not die a natural death. He would be killed by a dentist for possession of those teeth.

"Three fourths of the greatest pianists I know have hands like truck drivers," Jarmoskowski was saying, "Surgeons too, as Lundgren will tell you. Long fingers tend to be clumsy."

"You seem to manage to make tremendous music, all the same," Newcliffe said, getting up.

"Thank you, Tom." Jarmoskowski seemed to take his host's rising as a signal that he was not going to be required to play any more. He lifted his feet from the pedals and swung them around to the end of the bench. Several of the others rose also. Foote struggled up onto numb feet from the infernal depths of the armchair. Setting his glass on the side-table a good distance away from the onyx ashtray, he picked his way cautiously over to Christian Lundgren.

"Chris, I'm a fan of yours," he said, controlling his tongue with difficulty. "Now I'm sorry. I read your paper, the one you read to the Stockholm Endo-crin-ological Congress. Aren't Jarmoskowski's hands—"

"Yes, they are," the psychiatrist said, looking at Foote with sharp, troubled eyes. Suddenly Foote was aware of Lundgren's chain of thought; he knew the scientist very well. The grey, craggy man was assessing Foote's drunkenness, and wondering whether or not he would have forgotten the whole affair in the morning.

Lundgren made a gesture of dismissal. "I saw them too," he said, his tone flat. "A mutation, probably, as he himself suggested. Not every woman with a white streak through her hair is a witch; I give Jan the same reservation."

"That's not all, Chris."

"It is all I need to consider, since I live in the twentieth century. I am going to bed and forget all about it. Which you may take for advice as well as for information, Paul, if you will."

He stalked out of the room, leaving Foote standing alone, wondering whether to be reassured or more alarmed than before. Lundgren should know, and certainly the platinum path which parted Doris Gilmore's absurdly red hair indicated nothing about Doris but that her coiffure was too chic for her young, placid face. But Jarmoskowski was not so simple; if he was despite Lundgren just what he seemed—

The party appeared to be surviving quite nicely without Foote, or Lundgren either. Conversations were starting up

about the big room. Jarmoskowski and Doris shared the piano bench and were talking in low tones, punctuated now and then by brilliant bits of passage work; evidently the Pole was showing her better ways of handling the Hindemith sonata she had played before dinner. James and Ehrenberg were dissecting each other's most recent books with civilized savagery before a fascinated Newcliffe. Blandly innocent Caroline Newcliffe was talking animatedly to Bennington and Palmer about nothing at all. Nobody missed Lundgren, and it seemed even less likely that Foote would be missed.

He walked with wobbly nonchalance into the dining room, where the butler was still clearing the table.

" 'Scuse me," he said. "Little experiment, if y'don't mind. Return it in the morning." He snatched a knife from the table, looked for the door which led directly from the dining room into the foyer, propelled himself through it. The hallway was dim, but intelligible; so was the talk in the next room.

As he passed the French door, he saw Bennington's figure through the ninon marquisette, now standing by the piano watching the progress of the lesson. The critic's voice stopped him dead as he was sliding the knife into his jacket. Foote was an incurable eavesdropper.

"Hoofy's taken his head to bed," Bennington was remarking. "I'm rather relieved. I thought he was going to be more unpleasant than he was."

"What was the point of that fuss about the silverware, at dinner?" the girl said. "Is he noted for that sort of thing?"

"Somewhat. He's really quite a brilliant artist, but being years ahead of one's time is frequently hard on the temper."

"He had me worried," Jarmoskowski confessed. "He kept looking at me as if I had forgotten to play the repeats."

Bennington chuckled. "In the presence of another inarguable artist he seems to become very malignant. You were being flattered, Jan."

Foote's attention was attracted by a prodigious yawn from Palmer. The Laborite was showing his preliminary signals of boredom, and at any moment now would break unceremoniously for his bed. Reluctantly Foote resumed his arrested departure; still the conversations babbled on indifferently behind him. The corners of his mouth pulled down, he passed the stairway and on down the hall.

As he swung closed the door of his bedroom, he paused a moment to listen to Jarmoskowski's technical exhibition on

the keys, the only sound from the living room which was still audible at this distance. Then he shut the door all the way with a convulsive shrug. Let them say about Foote what they liked, even if it sometimes had to be the truth; but nevertheless it might be that at midnight Jarmoskowski would give another sort of exhibition.

If he did, Foote would be glad to have the knife.

2

At 11:30, Jarmoskowski stood alone on the terrace of Newcliffe's country house. Although there was no wind, the night was frozen with a piercing cold—but he did not seem to notice it. He stood motionless, like a black statue, with only the long streamers of his breathing, like twin jets of steam from the nostrils of a dragon, to show that he was alive.

Through the haze of watered silk which curtained Foote's window, Jarmoskowski was an heroic pillar of black stone—a pillar above a fumarole.

The front of the house was evidently entirely dark: there was no light on the pianist's back or shoulders. He was silhouetted against the snow, which gleamed dully in the moonlight. The shadow of the heavy tower which was the house's axis looked like a donjon-keep. Thin slits of embrasures, Foote remembered, watched the landscape with a dark vacuity, and each of the crowning merlons wore a helmet of snow.

He could feel the house huddling against the malice of the white Scottish night. A sense of age invested it. The curtains smelled of dust and spices. It seemed impossible that anyone but Foote and Jarmoskowski could be alive in it.

After a long moment, Foote moved the curtain very slightly and drew it back. His face was drenched in reflected moonlight and he stepped back into the dark again, leaving the curtains parted.

If Jarmoskowski saw the furtive movement he gave no sign. He remained engrossed in the acerb beauty of the night. Almost the whole of Newcliffe's estate was visible from where he stood. Even the black border of the forest, beyond the golf course to the right, could be seen through the dry frigid air. A few isolated trees stood nearer the house, casting sharply-etched shadows on the snow, shadows that flowed and changed shape with the slow movement of the moon.

Jarmoskowski sighed and scratched his left palm. His lips moved soundlessly.

A cloud floated across the moon, its shadow preceding it, gliding in a rush of ink athwart the house. The gentle ripples of the snow-field reared ahead of the wave, like breakers, falling back, engulfed, then surging again much closer. A thin singing of wind rose briefly, whirling crystalline showers of snow from the terrace flagstones.

The wind died as the umbra engulfed the house. For a long instant, the darkness and silence persisted. Then, from somewhere near the stables and greenhouses behind the house, a dog raised his voice in a faint sustained throbbing howl. Others joined in.

Jarmoskowski's teeth gleamed in the occluded moonlight. He stood a moment longer; then his head turned with a quick jerk and his eyes flashed a feral scarlet at the dark window where Foote hovered. Foote released the curtains hastily. Even through them he could see the pianist's phosphorescent smile.

The dog keened again. Jarmoskowski went back into the house. Foote scurried to his door and cocked one eye around the jamb.

Some men, as has somewhere been remarked, cannot pass a bar; some cannot pass a woman; some cannot pass a rare stamp or a good fire. Foote could not help spying, but in this one case he knew that one thing could be said for him: *this* time he wanted to be in the wrong.

There was a single small light burning in the corridor. Jarmoskowski's room was at the end of the hall, next to Foote's. As the pianist walked reflectively toward it, the door of the room directly across from Foote's swung open and Doris Gilmore came out, clad in a quilted sapphire housecoat with a high Russian collar. The effect was marred a little by the towel over her arm and the toothbrush in her hand, but nevertheless she looked startlingly pretty.

"Oh!" she said. Jarmoskowski turned toward her, and then neither of them said anything for a while.

Foote ground his teeth. Was the girl, too, to be a witness to the thing he expected from Jarmoskowski? That would be beyond all decency. And it must be nearly midnight now.

The two still had not moved. Trembling, Foote edged out into the hall and slid behind Jarmoskowski's back along the wall to Jarmoskowski's room. By the grace of God, the door was open.

In a quieter voice, Doris said, "Oh, it's you, Jan. You startled me."

"So I see. I'm most sorry," Jarmoskowski's voice said. Foote again canted his head until he could see them both. "It appears that we are the night-owls of the party."

"I think the rest are tight. Especially that horrible painter. I've been reading the magazines Tom left by my bed, and I finally decided I'd better try to sleep too. What have you been up to?"

"I was out on the terrace, getting a breath. I like the winter night—it bites."

"The dogs are restless, too," she said. "Did you hear them? I suppose Brucey started them off."

Jarmoskowski smiled. "Very likely. Why does a full moon make a dog feel so sorry for himself?"

"Maybe there's a banshee about."

"I doubt it," Jarmoskowski said. "This house isn't old enough to have any family psychopomps; it's massive, but largely imitation. And as far as I know, none of Tom's or Caroline's relatives have had the privilege of dying in it."

"Don't. You talk as if you believed it." She wrapped the housecoat tighter about her waist; Foote guessed that she was repressing a shiver.

"I came from a country where belief in such things is common. In Poland most skeptics are imported."

"I wish you'd pretend to be an exception," she said. "You're giving me the creeps, Jan."

He nodded seriously. "That's—fair enough," he said gently.

There was another silence, while they looked at each other anew in the same dim light. Then Jarmoskowski stepped forward and took her hands in his.

Foote felt a long-belated flicker of embarrassment. Nothing could be more normal than this, and nothing interested him less. He was an eavesdropper, not a voyeur. If he were wrong after all, he'd speedily find himself in a position for which no apology would be possible.

The girl was looking up at Jarmoskowski, smiling uncertainly. Her smile was so touching as to make Foote writhe inside his skin. "Jan," she said.

"No . . . Doris, wait," Jarmoskowski said indistinctly. "Wait just a moment. It has been a long time since Prague."

"I see," she said. She tried to release her hands.

Jarmoskowski said sharply: "You don't see. I was eighteen

then. You were—what was it?—eleven, I think. In those days I was proud of your school-girl crush, but of course infinitely too old for you. I am not so old any more, and when I saw this afternoon how lovely you have become the years went away like dandelion-fluff—no, no, hear me out, please! There is much more. I love you now, Doris, as I can see you love me; but—"

In the brief pause Foote could hear the sharp indrawn breaths that Doris was trying to control. He felt like crawling. He had no business—

"But we must wait a little, Doris. I know something that concerns you that you do not know yourself. And I must warn you of something in Jan Jarmoskowski that neither of us could even have dreamed in the old days."

"Warn—me?"

"Yes." Jarmoskowski paused again. Then he said: "You will find it hard to believe. But if you can, we may be happy. Doris, I cannot be a skeptic. I am—"

He stopped. He had looked down abstractedly at her hands, as if searching for precisely the right English words. Then, slowly, he turned her hands over until they rested palms up on his. An expression of absolute shock transformed his face, and Foote saw his grip tighten spasmodically.

In that tetanic silence Foote heard his judgment of Jarmoskowski confirmed. It gave him no pleasure. He was frightened.

For an instant Jarmoskowski shut his eyes. The muscles along his jaw stood out with the violence with which he was clenching his teeth. Then, deliberately, he folded Doris' hands together, and his curious fingers made a fist about them. When his eyes opened again they were as red as flame in the weak light.

Doris jerked her hands free and crossed them over her breasts. "Jan—Jan, what is it? What's the matter?"

His face, that should have been flying into flinders under the force of the knowledge behind it, came under control muscle by muscle.

"Nothing," he said. "There's really no point in what I was going to say. I have been foolish; please pardon me. Nice to have seen you again, Doris. Goodnight."

He brushed past her and stalked on down the corridor. Doris turned to look after him, her cheeks beginning to glisten, one freed hand clutching her toothbrush.

Jarmoskowski wrenched the unresisting doorknob of his

room and threw the door shut behind him. Foote only barely managed to dodge out of his way.

Behind the house, a dog howled and went silent again.

3

In Jarmoskowski's room the moonlight played in through the open window upon a carefully turned-down bed. The cold air had penetrated every cranny. He ran both hands through his hair and went directly across the carpet to the table beside his bed. As he crossed the path of colorless light his shadow was oddly foreshortened, so that it looked as if he were walking on all fours. There was a lamp on the side table and he reached for it.

Then he stopped dead still, his hand halfway to the switch. He seemed to be listening. Finally, he turned and looked back across the room, directly at the spot behind the door where Foote was standing.

It was the blackest spot of all, for it had its back to the moon; but Jarmoskowski said immediately, "Hello, Paul. Aren't you up rather late?"

Foote did not reply for a while. His senses were still alcohol-numbed, and he was further poisoned by the sheer outrageous impossibility of the thing he knew to be true. He stood silently in the darkness, watching the Pole's barely-visible figure beside the fresh bed, and the sound of his own breathing was loud in his ears. The broad flat streamer of moonlight lay between them like a metallic river.

"I'm going to bed shortly," he said at last. His voice sounded flat and dead and faraway, as if it belonged to someone else entirely. "I just came to issue a little warning."

"Well, well," said Jarmoskowski pleasantly. "Warnings seem to be all the vogue this evening. Do you customarily pay your social calls with a knife in your hand?"

"That's the warning, Jarmoskowski. The knife. I'm sleeping with it. It's made of silver."

"You must be drunker than usual," said the composer. "Why don't you just go to bed—with the knife, if you fancy it? We can talk again in the morning."

"Don't give me that," Foote snapped savagely. "You can't fool me. I know you for what you are."

"All right, you know me. Is it a riddle? I'll bite, as Bennington would say."

"Yes, you'd bite," Foote said, and his voice shook a little despite himself. "Should I really give it a name, Jarmoskowski? Where you were born it was *vrolok*, wasn't it? And in France it was *loup-garou*. In the Carpathians it was *stregoica* or *strega*, or sometimes *vlkoslak*. In—"

"Your command of languages is greater than your common sense," Jarmoskowski said. "And *stregoica* and *strega* are different in sex, and neither of them is equivalent to *loup-garou*. But all the same you interest me. Isn't it a little out of season for all such things? Wolfbane does not bloom in the dead of winter. And perhaps the things you give so many fluent names are also out of season in 1952."

"The dogs hate you," Foote said softly. "That was a fine display Brucey put on this afternoon, when Tom brought him in from his run and he found you here. I doubt that you've forgotten it. I think you've seen a dog behave like that before, walking sidewise through a room where you were, growling, watching you with every step until Tom or some other owner dragged him out. He's howling now.

"And that shock you got from the table silverware at dinner—and your excuse about rubber-soled shoes. I looked under the table, if you recall, and your shoes turned out to be leather-soled. But it was a pretty feeble excuse anyhow, for anybody knows that you can't get an electric shock from an ungrounded piece of tableware, no matter how long you've been scuffing rubber. Silver's deadly, isn't it, Jarmoskowski?

"And those fingers—the index fingers as long as the middle ones—you were clever about those. You were careful to call everybody's attention to them. It's supposed to be the obvious that everybody misses. But Jarmoskowski, that 'Purloined Letter' mechanism has been ground through too often already in detective stories. It didn't fool Lundgren, it didn't fool me."

"Ah, so," Jarmoskowski said. "Quite a catalogue."

"There's more. How does it happen that your eyes were grey all afternoon, and turned red as soon as the moon rose? And the palms of your hands—there was some hair growing there, but you shaved it off, didn't you, Jarmoskowski? I've been watching you scratch them. Everything about you, the way you look, the way you talk, every move you make—it all screams out your nature in a dozen languages to anyone who knows the signs."

After a long silence, Jarmoskowski said, "I see. You've

been most attentive, Paul—I see you are what people call the suspicious drunk. But I appreciate your warning, Paul. Let us suppose that what you say of me is true. What then? Are you prepared to broadcast it to the rest of the house? Would you like to be known until the day you die as 'The Boy Who Cried—' "

"I don't intend to say anything unless you make it necessary. I want you to know that I know, in case you've seen a pentagram on anyone's palm tonight."

Jarmoskowski smiled. "Have you thought that, knowing that you know, I could have no further choice? That the first word you said to me about it all might brand *your* palm with the pentagram?"

Foote had not thought about it. He had spent far too much time convincing himself that it had all come out of the bottle. He heard the silver knife clatter against the floor before he was aware that he had dropped it; his eyes throbbed with the effort to see through the dimness the hands he was holding before them.

From the other side of his moonlit room, Jarmoskowski's voice drifted, dry, distant, and amused. "So—you hadn't thought. That's too bad. *Better never* than late, Paul."

The dim figure of Jarmoskowski began to sink down, rippling a little in the reflected moonlight. At first it seemed only as if he were sitting down upon the bed; but the foreshortening proceeded without any real movement, and the pianist's body was twisting, too, and his clothing with it, his shirt-bosom dimming to an indistinct blaze upon his broadening chest, his shoulders hunching, his pointed jaw already squared into a blunt muzzle, his curled pads ticking as they struck the bare floor and moved deliberately toward Foote. His tail was thrust straight out behind him, and the ruff of coarse hair along his back stirred gently. He sniffed.

Somehow Foote got his legs to move. He found the doorknob and threw himself out of Jarmoskowski's room into the corridor.

A bare second after he had slammed the door, something struck it a massive blow from inside. The paneling split sharply. He held it shut by the knob with all the strength in his body. He could see almost nothing; his eyes seemed to have rolled all the way back into his head.

A dim white shape drifted down upon him through the dark corridor, and a fresh spasm of fear sent rivers of sweat

down his back, his sides, his cheeks. But it was only the girl.

"Paul! What on Earth! What's the *matter?*"

"Quick!" he said, choking. "Get something silver—something heavy made out of silver—quick, *quick!*"

Despite her astonishment, the frantic urgency in his voice drove her away. She darted back into her room. Kalpas of eternity went by after that while he listened for sounds inside Jarmoskowski's room. Once he thought he heard a low rumble, but he was not sure. The sea-like hissing and sighing of his blood, rushing through the channels of the middle ear, seemed very loud to him. He couldn't imagine why it was not arousing the whole countryside. He clung to the doorknob and panted.

Then the girl was back, bearing a silver candlestick nearly three feet in length—a weapon that was almost too good, for his fright-weakened muscles had some difficulty in lifting it. He shifted his grip on the knob to the left hand alone, and hefted the candlestick awkwardly with his right.

"All right," he said, in what he hoped was a grim voice. "Now let him come."

"What in heaven's name is this all about?" Doris said. "You're waking everybody in the house with this racket. Look—even the dog's come in to see—"

"The dog!"

He swung around, releasing the doorknob. Not ten paces from them, an enormous coal-black animal, nearly five feet in length, grinned at them with polished fangs. As soon as it saw Foote move it snarled. Its eyes gleamed red under the single bulb.

It sprang.

Foote heaved the candlestick high and brought it down—but the animal was not there. Somehow the leap was never completed. There was a brief flash of movement at the open end of the corridor, then darkness and silence.

"He saw the candlestick," Foote panted. "Must have jumped out the window and come around through the front door. Then he saw the silver and beat it."

"Paul!" Doris cried. "What—how did you know that thing would jump? It was so big! And what has silver—"

He chuckled, surprising even himself. He had a mental picture of what the truth was going to sound like to Doris. "That," he said, "was a wolf and a whopping one. Even the usual kind isn't very friendly and—"

Footsteps sounded on the floor above, and the voice of Newcliffe, grumbling loudly, came down the stairs. Newcliffe liked his evenings noisy and his nights quiet. The whole house now seemed to have heard the commotion, for in a moment a number of halfclad figures were elbowing out into the corridor, wanting to know what was up or plaintively requesting less noise.

Abruptly the lights went on, revealing blinking faces and pajama-clad forms struggling into robes. Newcliffe came down the stairs. Caroline was with him, impeccable even in disarray, her face openly and honestly ignorant and unashamedly beautiful. She was no lion-hunter but she loved parties. Evidently she was pleased that the party was starting again.

"What's all this?" Newcliffe demanded in a gravelly voice. "Foote, are you the center of this whirlpool? Why all the noise?"

"Werewolf," Foote said, as painfully conscious as he had expected to be of how meaningless the word would sound. "We've got a werewolf here. And somebody's marked out for him."

How else could you put it? Let it stand.

There was a chorus of "What's" as the group jostled about him. "Eh? What was it? . . . Werewolf, I thought he said . . . What's this all about? . . . Somebody's been a wolf . . . Is that new? . . . What an uproar!"

"Paul," Lundgren's voice cut through. "Details, please."

"Jarmoskowski's a werewolf," Foote said grimly, making his tone as emotionless and factual as he could. "I suspected it earlier tonight and went into his room and accused him of it. He changed shape, right on the spot while I was watching."

The sweat started out afresh at the recollection of that half-seen mutation. "He came around into the hall and went for us. I scared him off with a silver candlestick for a club." He realized that he still held the candlestick and brandished it as proof. "Doris saw the wolf—she'll vouch for that."

"I saw a big dog-like thing, all right," Doris admitted. "And it did jump at us. It was black and had a lot of teeth. But—Paul, was that supposed to be Jan? Why, that's ridiculous."

"It certainly is," Newcliffe said feelingly. "Getting us all up for a practical joke. Probably one of the dogs is loose."

"Do you have any all-black dogs five feet long?" Foote demanded desperately. "And where's Jarmoskowski now? Why isn't he here? Answer me that!"

Bennington gave a skeptical grunt from the background and opened Jarmoskowski's door. The party tried to jam itself as a unit into the room. Foote forced his way through the clot.

"See? He isn't here, either. And the bed's not been slept in. Doris—" He paused for an instant, realizing what he was about to admit, then plunged ahead. The stakes were now too big to hesitate over social conventions. "Doris, you saw him go in here. Did you see him come out again?"

The girl looked startled. "No, but I was in my room—"

"All right. Here. Look at this." Foote led the way over to the window and pointed out. "See?" The prints on the snow?"

One by one the others leaned out. There was no arguing it. A set of animal prints, like large dog-tracks, led away from a spot just beneath Jarmoskowski's window—a spot where the disturbed snow indicated the landing of some heavy body.

"Follow them around," Foote said. "They lead around to the front door, and away again—I hope."

"Have you traced them?" James asked.

"I didn't have to. I saw the thing, James."

"The tracks could be coincidence," Caroline suggested. "Maybe Jan just went for a walk."

"Barefoot? There are his shoes."

Bennington vaulted over the windowsill with an agility astonishing in so round a man, and plowed away with slippered feet along the line of tracks. A little while later he entered the room behind their backs.

"Paul's right," he said, above the hubbub of excited conversation. "The tracks go around to the terrace to the front door, then away again and around the side of the house toward the golf-course." He rolled up his wet pajama-cuffs awkwardly. A little of the weight came off Foote's heart; at least the beast was not still in the house, then—

"This is crazy," Newcliffe declared angrily. "We're like a lot of little children, panicked by darkness. There's no such thing as a werewolf."

"I wouldn't place any wagers on that," Ehrenberg said. "Millions of people have believed in the werewolf for hundreds of years. One multiplies the years by the people and the answer is a big figure, nicht wahr?"

Newcliffe turned sharply to Lundgren. "Chris, I can depend upon you at least to have your wits about you."

The psychiatrist smiled wanly. "You didn't read my Stock-

holm paper, did you, Tom? I mean my paper on psychoses of Middle Age populations. Much of it dealt with lycanthropy —werewolfism."

"You mean—you believe this idiot story?"

"I spotted Jarmoskowski early in the evening," Lundgren said. "He must have shaved the hair on his palms, but he has all the other signs—eyes bloodshot with moonrise, first and second fingers of equal length, pointed ears, merged eyebrows, domed prefrontal bones, elongated upper cuspids. In short, the typical hyperpineal type—a lycanthrope."

"Why didn't you say something?"

"I have a natural horror of being laughed at," Lundgren said drily. "And *I didn't want to draw Jarmoskowski's attention to me.* These endocrine-imbalance cases have a way of making enemies very easily."

Foote grinned ruefully. If he had thought of that part of it before he had confronted Jarmoskowski, he would have kept his big mouth shut. It was deflating to know how ignoble one's motives could be in the face of the most demanding situations.

"Lycanthropy is no longer common," Lundgren droned, "and so seldom mentioned except in out-of-the-way journals. It is the little-known aberration of a little-known ductless gland; beyond that we know only what we knew in 1400, and that is that it appears to enable the victim to control his shape."

"I'm still leery of this whole business," Bennington growled, from somewhere deep in his teddy-bear chest. "I've known Jan for years. Nice fella—helped me out of a bad hole once, without owing me any favors at all. And I think there's enough discord in this house so that I won't add to it much if I say I wouldn't trust Paul Foote as far as I could throw him. By God, Paul, if this does turn out to be some practical joke of yours—"

"Ask Lundgren," Foote said.

There was dead silence, disturbed only by heavy breathing. Lundgren was known to almost all of them as the world's ultimate authority on hormone-created insanity. Nobody seemed to want to ask him.

"Paul's right," Lundgren said at last. "You must take it or leave it. Jarmoskowski is a lycanthrope. A hyperpineal. No other gland could affect the blood-vessels of the eyes like that or make such a reorganization of the soma possible. Jarmoskowski is inarguably a werewolf."

Bennington sagged, the light of righteous incredulity dying from his eyes. "I'll be damned!" he muttered. "It can't be. It can't be."

"We've got to get him tonight," Foote said. "He's seen the pentagram on somebody's palm—somebody in the party."

"What's that?" asked James.

"It's a five-pointed star inscribed in a circle, a very old magical symbol. You find it in all the old mystical books, right back to the so-called fourth and fifth Books of Moses. The werewolf sees it on the palm of his next victim."

There was a gasping little scream from Doris. "So that's it!" she cried. "Dear God, I'm the one! He saw something on my hand tonight while we were talking in the hall. He was awfully startled and went away with hardly another word. He said he was going to warn me about something and then he—"

"Steady," Bennington said, in a soft voice that had all the penetrating power of a thunderclap. "There's safety in numbers. We're all here." Nevertheless, he could not keep himself from glancing surreptitiously over his shoulder.

"It's a common illusion in lycanthropic seizures," Lundgren agreed. "Or hallucination, I should say. But Paul, you're wrong about its significance to the lycanthrope; I believe you must have gotten that idea from some movie. The pentagram means something quite different. Doris, let me ask you a question."

"Why—certainly, Dr. Lundgren. What is it?"

"What were you doing with that piece of modelling clay this evening?"

To Foote, and evidently to the rest of the party, the question was meaningless. Doris, however, looked down at the floor and scuffed one slippered toe back and forth over the carpet.

"Answer me, please," Lundgren said patiently. "I watched you manipulating it while Jan was playing, and it seemed to me to be an odd thing for a woman to have in her handbag. What were you doing with it?"

"I—was trying to scare Paul Foote," she said, in so low a voice that she could scarcely be heard at all.

"How? Believe me, Doris, this is most important. How?"

"There was a little cloud of smoke coming out of his cigarette. I was—trying to make it take—"

"Yes. Go on."

"—Take the shape of a statuette : r it," Foote said flatly. He could feel droplets of ice on his forehead. The girl looked at him sideways; then she nodded and looked back at the floor. "The music helped," she murmured.

"Very good," Lundgren said. "Doris, I'm not trying to put you on the spot. Have you had much success at this sort of game?"

"Lately," she said, not quite so reluctantly. "It doesn't always work. But sometimes it does."

"Chris, what does this mean?" Foote demanded.

"It means that we have an important ally here, if only we can find out how to make use of her," Lundgren said. "This girl is what the Middle Ages would have called a witch. Nowadays we'd probably say she's been given a liberal helping of extra-sensory powers, but I must confess that never seems to me to explain much that the old term didn't explain.

"That is the significance of the pentagram, and Jarmoskowski knows it very well. The werewolf hunts best and ranges most widely when he has a witch for an accomplice, as a mate when they are both in human form, as a marker or stalker when the werewolf is in the animal form. The appearance of the pentagram identifies to the lycanthrope the witch he believes appointed for him."

"That's hardly good news," Doris said faintly.

"But it is. In all these ancient psychopathic relationships there is a natural—or, if you like, a supernatural—balance. The werewolf adopts such a partner with the belief—for him of course it is a certain foreknowledge—that the witch inevitably will betray him. That is what so shocked Jarmoskowski; but his changing to the wolf form shows that he has taken the gambit. He knows as well as we do, probably better, that as a witch Doris is only a beginner, unaware of most of her own powers. He is gambling very coolly on our being unable to use her against him. It is my belief that he is most wrong."

"So we still don't know who Jan's chosen as a victim," James said in earnest, squeaky tones. "That settles it. We've got to trail the—the beast and kill him. We must kill him before he kills one of us—if not Doris, then somebody else. Even if he misses us, it would be just as bad to have him roaming the countryside."

"What are you going to kill him with?" Lundgren asked matter-of-factly.

"Eh?"

"I said, what are you going to kill him with? With that pineal hormone in his blood he can laugh at any ordinary bullet. And since there are no chapels dedicated to St. Hubert around here, you won't be able to scare him to death with a church-blessed bullet."

"Silver will do," Foote said.

"Yes, silver will do. It poisons the pinearin-catalysis. But are you going to hunt a full-grown wolf armed with table silver and candlesticks? Or is somebody here metallurgist enough to cast a decent silver bullet?"

Foote sighed. With the burden of proof lifted from him, and completely sobered up by shock, he felt a little more like his old self, despite the pall which hung over him and the others.

"Like I always tell my friends," he said, "there's never a dull moment at a Newcliffe houseparty."

4

The clock struck 1:30. Foote picked up one of Newcliffe's rifles and hefted it. It felt—useless. He said, "How are you coming?"

The group by the kitchen range shook their heads in comical unison. One of the gas burners had been jury-rigged as a giant Bunsen burner, and they were trying to melt down over it some soft unalloyed silver articles, mostly of Mexican manufacture.

They were using a small earthenware bowl, also Mexican, for a crucible. It was lidded with the bottom of a flower pot, the hole in which had been plugged with shredded asbestos yanked forcibly out of the insulation of the garret; garden clay gave the stuff a dubious cohesiveness. The awkward flame leapt uncertainly and sent fantastic shadows flickering over their intent faces.

"We've got it melted, all right," Bennington said, lifting the lid cautiously with a pair of kitchen tongs and peering under it. "But what do we do with it now? Drop it from the top of the tower?"

"You can't kill a wolf with buckshot unless you're damned lucky," Newcliffe pointed out. Now that the problem had been reduced temporarily from a hypernatural one to a matter of ordinary hunting, he was in his element. "And I haven't

got a decent shotgun here anyhow. But we ought to be able to whack together a mold. The bullet should be soft enough so that it won't stick in the rifling of my guns."

He opened the door to the cellar stairs and disappeared down them, carrying in one hand several ordinary rifle cartridges. Faintly, the dogs renewed their howling. Doris began to tremble. Foote put his arm around her.

"It's all right," he said. "We'll get him. You're safe enough."

She swallowed. "I know," she agreed in a small voice. "But every time I think of the way he looked at my hands, and how red his eyes were— You don't suppose he's prowling around the house? That that's what the dogs are howling about?"

"I don't know," Foote said carefully. "But dogs are funny that way. They can sense things at great distances. I suppose a man with pinearin in his blood would have a strong odor to them. But he probably knows that we're after his scalp, so he won't be hanging around if he's smart."

She managed a tremulous smile. "All right," she said. "I'll try not to be hysterical." He gave her an awkward reassuring pat, feeling a little absurd.

"Do you suppose we can use the dogs?" Ehrenberg wanted to know.

"Certainly," said Lundren. "Dogs have always been our greatest allies against the abnormal. You saw what a rage Jarmoskowski's very presence put Brucey in this afternoon. He must have smelled the incipient seizure. Ah, Tom—what did you manage?"

Newcliffe set a wooden transplanting box on the kitchen table. "I pried the slug out of one shell for each gun," he said, "and used one of them to make impressions in the clay here. The cold has made the stuff pretty hard, so the impressions should be passable molds. Bring the silver over here."

Bennington lifted his improvised crucible from the burner, which immediately shot up a tall, ragged blue flame. James carefully turned it off.

"All right, pour," Newcliffe said. "Chris, you don't suppose it might help to chant a blessing or something?"

"Not unless Jarmoskowski overheard it—probably not even then, since we have no priest among us."

"Very well. Pour, Bennington, before the goo hardens."

Bennington decanted sluggishly molten silver into each depression in the clay, and Newcliffe cleaned away the oozy residue from the casts before it had time to thicken. At any

other time the whole scene would have been funny—now it was grotesque, as if it had been composed by a Holbein. Newcliffe picked up the box and carried it back down to the cellar, where the emasculated cartridges awaited their new slugs.

"Who's going to carry these things, now?" Foote asked. "There are six rifles. James, how about you?"

"I couldn't hit an elephant's rump at three paces. Tom's an expert shot. So is Bennington here, with a shotgun anyhow; he holds skeet-shooting medals.

"I can use a rifle," Benning said diffidently.

"So can I," said Palmer curtly. "Not that I've got much sympathy for this business. This is just the kind of thing you'd expect to happen in this place."

"You had better shelve your politics for a while," James said, turning an unexpectedly hard face to the Laborite. "Lycanthropy as a disease isn't going to limit its activities to the House of Lords. Suppose a werewolf got loose in the Welsh coal fields?"

"I've done some shooting," Foote said. "During the show at Dunkirk I even hit something."

"I," Lundgren said, "am an honorary member of the Swiss Militia."

Nobody laughed. Even Palmer was aware that Lundgren in his own oblique way was bragging, and that he had something to brag about. Newcliffe appeared abruptly from the cellar.

"I pried 'em loose, cooled 'em with snow and rolled 'em smooth with a file. They're probably badly crystallized, but we needn't let that worry us. At worst it'll just make 'em go dum-dum on us—no one here prepared to argue that that would be inhumane, I hope?"

He put one cartridge into the chamber of each rifle in turn and shot the bolts home. "There's no sense in loading these any more thoroughly—ordinary bullets are no good anyhow, Chris says. Just make your first shots count. Who's elected?"

Foote, Palmer, Lundgren and Bennington each took a rifle. Newcliffe took the fifth and handed the last one to his wife.

"I say, wait a minute," James objected. "Do you think that's wise, Tom? I mean, taking Caroline along?"

"Why, certainly," Newcliffe said, looking surprised. "She shoots like a fiend—she's snatched prizes away from me a

couple of times. I thought *everybody* was going along."

"That isn't right," Foote said. "Especially not Doris, since the wolf—that is, I don't think she ought to go."

"Are you going to subtract a marksman from the hunting party to protect her? Or are you going to leave her here by herself?"

"Oh no!" Doris cried. "Not here! I've got to go! I don't want to wait all alone in this house. He might come back, and there'd be nobody here. I couldn't stand it."

"There is no telling what Jarmoskowski might learn from such an encounter," Lundgren added, "or, worse, what he might teach Doris without her being aware of it. For the rest of us—forgive me, Doris, I must be brutal—it would go harder with us if he did not kill her than if he did. Let us keep our small store of magic with us, not leave it here for Jan."

"That would seem to settle the matter," Newcliffe said grimly. "Let's get under way. It's after two now."

He put on his heavy coat and went out with the heavy-eyed groom to rouse out the dogs. The rest of the company fetched their own heavy clothes. Doris and Caroline climbed into ski-suits. They assembled again, one by one, in the living room.

Lundgren's eyes swung on a vase of iris-like flowers on top of the closed piano. "Hello, what are these?" he said.

"Monkshood," Caroline informed him. "We grow it in the greenhouse. It's pretty, isn't it? Though the gardener says it's poisonous."

"Chris," Foote said. "That isn't—wolfbane, is it?"

The psychiatrist shook his head. "I'm no botanist. I can't tell one aconite from another. But it doesn't matter; hyperpineals are allergic to the whole group. The pollen, you see. As in hay fever, your hyperpineal case breathes the pollen, anaphylaxis sets in, and—"

"The last twist of the knife," James murmured.

A clamoring of dogs outside announced that Newcliffe was ready. With somber faces the party filed out onto the terrace. For some reason all of them avoided stepping on the wolf's prints in the snow. Their mien was that of condemned prisoners on the way to the tumbrels. Lundgren took one of the sprigs of flowers from the vase.

The moon had long ago passed its zenith and was almost halfway down the sky, projecting the Bastille-like shadow

of the house a long way out onto the grounds; but there was still plenty of light, and the house itself was glowing from cellar to tower room. Lundgren located Brucey in the milling, yapping pack and abruptly thrust the sprig of flowers under his muzzle. The animal sniffed once, then crouched back and snarled softly.

"Wolfbane," Lundgren said. "Dogs don't dislike the other aconites—basis of the legend, no doubt. Better fire your gardener, Caroline. In the end he may be the one to blame for all this happening in the dead of winter. Lycanthropy normally is an autumn affliction."

James said:

> "Even a man who says his prayers
> Before he sleeps each night
> May turn to a wolf when the wolfbane blooms
> And the moon is high and bright."

"Stop it, you give me the horrors," Foote snapped angrily.

"Well, the dog knows now," said Newcliffe. "Good. It would have been hard for them to pick up the trail from hard snow, but Brucey can lead them. Let's go."

The tracks of the wolf were clear and sharp in the ridged drifts. The snow had formed a hard crust from which fine, powdery showers of tiny ice-crystals were whipped by a fitful wind. The tracks led around the side of the house, as Bennington had reported, and out across the golf course. The little group plodded grimly along beside them. The spoor was cold for the dogs, but every so often they would pick up a faint trace and go bounding ahead, yanking their master after them. For the most part, however, the party had to depend upon its eyes.

A heavy mass of clouds had gathered in the west over the Firth of Lorne. The moon dipped lower. Foote's shadow, knobby and attenuated, marched on before him and the crusted snow crunched and crackled beneath his feet. The night seemed unnaturally still and watchful, and the party moved in tense silence except for an occasional growl or subdued bark from the dogs.

Once the marks of the werewolf doubled back a short distance, then doubled again, as if the monster had turned for a moment to look back at the house before resuming his

prowling. For the most part, however, the trail led directly toward the dark boundary of the woods.

As the brush began to rise around them they stopped by mutual consent and peered warily ahead, rifles lifted halfway, muzzles weaving nervously as the dogs' heads shifted this way and that. Far out across the countryside behind them, the great cloud-shadow continued its sailing. The brilliantly-lit house stood out against the gloom as if it were on fire.

"Should have turned those out," Newcliffe muttered, looking back at it." "Outlines us."

The dogs strained at their leashes. In the black west there was a barely audible muttering, as of winter thunder. Brucey pointed a quivering nose at the woods and snarled.

"He's in there, all right."

"We'd better step on it," Benning said, whispering. "Going to be plenty dark in about five minutes. Looks like a storm."

Still they hesitated, looking at the noncommittal darkness of the forest. Then Newcliffe waved his gun hand and his dog hand in the conventional deploy-as-skirmishers signal and plowed forward. The rest spread out in a loosely-spaced line and followed him. Foote's finger trembled over his trigger.

The forest was shrouded and very still. Occasionally a branch groaned as someone pushed against it, or twigs snapped with sharp, tiny musical explosions. Foote could see almost nothing. The underbrush tangled his legs; his feet broke jarringly through the crust of snow, or were supported by it when he least expected support. Each time his shoulder struck an unseen trunk gouts of snow fell on him.

After a while the twisted, leafless trees began to remind him of something; after a brief mental search he found it. It was a Doré engraving of the woods of Hell, from an illustrated Dante which had frightened him green as a child: the woods where each tree was a sinner in which harpies nested, and where the branches bled when they were broken off. The concept still frightened him a little—it made the forest by Newcliffe's golf-course seem almost cozy.

The dogs strained and panted, weaving, no longer growling, silent with a vicious intentness. A hand touched Foote's arm and he jumped; but it was only Doris.

"They've picked up something, all right," Bennington's whisper said. "Turn' em loose, Tom?"

Newcliffe pulled the animals to a taut halt and bent over them, snapping the leashes free. One by one, without a sound, they shot ahead and vanished.

Over the forest the oncoming storm-clouds cruised across the moon. Total blackness engulfed them. The beam of a powerful flashlight splashed from Newcliffe's free hand, flooding a path of tracks on the brush-littered snow. The rest of the night drew in closer about the blue-white glare.

"Hate to do this," Newcliffe said. "It gives us away. But he knows we're— Hello, it's snowing."

"Let's go then," Foote said. "The tracks will be blotted out shortly."

A many-voiced, clamorous baying, like tenor bugles, rang suddenly through the woods. It was a wild and beautiful sound! Foote, who had never heard it before, thought for an instant that his heart had stopped. Certainly he would never have associated so pure a choiring with anything as prosaic as dogs.

"That's it!" Newcliffe shouted. "Listen to them! That's the viewhalloo. Go get him, Brucey!"

They crashed ahead. The belling cry seemed to ring all around them.

"What a racket!" Bennington panted. "They'll raise the whole countryside."

They plowed blindly through the snow-filled woods. Then, without any interval, they broke through into a small clearing. Snowflakes flocculated the air. Something dashed between Foote's legs, snapping savagely, and he tripped and fell into a drift.

A voice shouted something indistinguishable. Foote's mouth was full of snow. He jerked his head up—and looked straight into the red rage-glowing eyes of the wolf.

It was standing on the other side of the clearing, facing him, the dogs leaping about it, snapping furiously at its legs. It made no sound at all, but stood with its forefeet planted, its head lowered below its enormous shoulders, its lips drawn back in a travesty of Jarmoskowski's smile. A white streamer of breath trailed horizontally from its long muzzle, like the tail of a malign comet.

It was more powerful than all of them, and it knew it. For an instant it hardly moved, except to stir lazily the heavy brush of tail across its haunches. Then one of the dogs came too close.

The heavy head lashed sidewise. The dog yelped and danced back. The dogs already had learned caution: one of them already lay writhing on the ground, a black pool spreading from it, staining the snow.

"Shoot, in God's name!" James screamed.

Newcliffe clapped his rifle to his shoulder with one hand, then lowered it indecisively. "I can't," he said. "The dogs are in the way—"

"To hell with the dogs—this is no foxhunt! Shoot, Tom, you're the only one of us that's clear—"

It was Palmer who shot first. He had no reason to be chary of Newcliffe's expensive dogs. Almost at the same time the dogs gave Foote a small hole to shoot through and he took it.

The double flat crack of the two rifles echoed through the woods and snow puffed up in a little explosion behind the wolf's left hind pad. The other shot—whose had come closest could never be known—struck a frozen tree-trunk and went squealing away. The wolf settled deliberately into a crouch.

A concerted groan had gone up from the party; above it Newcliffe's voice thundered, ordering his dogs back. Bennington aimed with inexorable care.

The werewolf did not wait. With a screaming snarl it launched itself through the ring of dogs and charged.

Foote jumped in front of Doris, throwing one arm across his own throat. The world dissolved into rolling pandemonium, filled with shouts, screams, snarls, and the frantic hatred of dogs. The snow flew thick. Newcliffe's flashlight fell and tumbled away, coming to rest at last on the snow on its base, regarding the tree-tops with an idiot stare.

Then there was the sound of a heavy body moving swiftly away. The noise died gradually.

"Anybody hurt?" James' voice asked. There was a general chorus of "no's."

"That's not good enough," Bennington puffed. "How does a dead man answer No? Let's have a nose-count."

Newcliffe retrieved his flashlight and played it about, but the snowstorm had reached blizzard proportions, and the light showed nothing but shadows and cold confetti. "Caroline?" he said anxiously.

"Yes, dear. Soaked, but here."

"Doris? Good. Paul, where are you—oh, I see you, I think. Ehrenberg? And Palmer? So; there you have it, Ben-

nington. We didn't invite anybody else to this party—except—"

"He got away," Bennington said ironically. "Didn't like the entertainment. And the snow will cover his tracks this time. Better call your dogs back, Tom."

"They're back," Newcliffe said. He sounded a little tired, for the first time since the beginning of the trouble. "When I call them off, they come off."

He walked heavily forward to the body of the injured animal, which was still twitching feebly, as if trying to answer his summons. He squatted down on his hams and bent his shoulders, stroking the restlessly rolling head.

"So—so," he said softly. "So, Brucey. Easy—easy. So, Brucey—so."

Still murmuring, he brought his rifle into position with one arm. The dog's tail beat once against the snow.

The rifle leapt noisily against Newcliffe's shoulder.

Newcliffe arose slowly, and looked away.

"It looks like we lose round one," he said tonelessly.

5

It seemed to become daylight very quickly. The butler went phlegmatically around the house, snapping off the lights. If he knew what was going on he gave no sign of it.

Newcliffe was on the phone to London. "Cappy? Tom here—listen and get this straight, it's damned important. Get Consolidated Warfare—no, no, not the Zurich office, they've offices in the City—and place an order for a case of .30 calibre rifle cartridges—listen to me, dammit, I'm not through yet—with *silver slugs.* Yes, that's right—silver—and it had better be the pure stuff, too. No, not sterling, that's too hard for my purposes. Tell them I want them flown up, and that they've got to arrive here tomorrow. . . . I don't care if it is impossible. Make it worth their while; I'll cover it. And I want it direct to the house here. On Loch Rannoch 20 kilometers due west of Blair Atholl. . . . Of course you know the house but how will CWS' pilot unless you tell them? Now read it back to me."

"Garlic," Lundgren was saying to Caroline. She wrote it dutifully on her marketing list. "How many windows does this house have? All right, buy one clove for each, and get a half dozen tins of ground rosemary, also."

He turned to Foote. "We must cover every possibility," he said somberly. "As soon as Tom gets off the line I will try to raise the local priest and get him out here with a drayload of silver crucifixes. Understand, Paul, there is a strong physiological basis beneath all that mediaeval mumbo-jumbo.

"The herbs, for example, are anti-spasmodics—they act rather as ephedrine does, in hay-fever, to reduce the violence of the seizure. It's possible that Jan may not be able to maintain the wolf shape if he gets a heavy enough sniff.

"As for the religious trappings, their effects are perhaps solely psychological—and perhaps not, I have no opinion in the matter. It's possible that they won't bother Jan if he happens to be a skeptic in such matters, but I suspect that he's—" Lundgren's usually excellent English abruptly gave out on him. The word he wanted obviously was not in his vocabulary. *"Aberglaeubig,"* he said. *"Criandre."*

"Superstitious?" Foote suggested, smiling grimly.

"Is that it? Yes. Yes, certainly. Who has better reason, may I ask?"

"But how does he maintain the wolf shape at all, Chris?"

"Oh, that's the easiest part. You know how water takes the shape of the vessel it sits in? Well, protoplasm is a liquid. This pineal hormone lowers the surface-tension of the cells; and at the same time it short-circuits the sympathetic nervous system directly through to the cerebral cortex, by increasing the efficiency of the cerebrospinal fluid as an electrolyte beyond the limits in which it's supposed to function—"

"Whoa there, I'm lost already."

"I'll go over it with you later, I have several books in my luggage which have bearing on the problem which I think you should see. In any event, the result is a plastic, malleable body, within limits. A wolf is the easiest form because the skeletons are so similar. Not much pinearin can do to bone, you see. An ape would be easier still, but lycanthropes don't assume shapes outside their own ecology. A were-ape would be logical in Africa, but not here. Also, of course, apes don't eat people; there is the really horrible part of this disease."

"And vampires?"

"Vampires," Lundgren said pontifically, "are people we put in padded cells. It's impossible to change the bony structure *that* much. They just think they are bats. But yes, that too is advanced hyperpinealism.

"In the last stages it is quite something to see. As the pinearin blood-level increases, the cellular surface tension is lowered so much that the cells literally begin to boil away. At the end there is just a—a mess. The process is arrested when the vascular systems no longer can circulate the hormone, but of course the victim dies long before that stage is reached."

Foote swallowed. "And there's no cure?"

"None yet. Palliatives only. Someday, perhaps, there will be a cure—but until then— Believe me, we will be doing Jan a favor."

"Also," Newcliffe was saying, "drive over and pick me up six automatic rifles. No, not Brownings, they're too hard to handle. Get American T-47's. All right, they're secret—what else are we paying CWS a retainer for? What? Well, you might call it a siege. All right, Cappy. No, I won't be in this week. Pay everybody off and send them home until further notice. No, that doesn't include you. All right. Yes, that sounds all right."

"It's a good thing," Foote said, "that Newcliffe has money."

"It's a good thing," Lundgren said, "that he has me—and you. We'll see how twentieth-century methods can cope with this Middle Ages madness."

Newcliffe hung up, and Lundgren took immediate possession of the phone.

"As soon as my man gets back from the village," Newcliffe said, "I'm going to set out traps. Jan may be able to detect hidden metal—I've known dogs that could do it by smell in wet weather—but it's worth a try."

"What's to prevent his just going away?" Doris asked hopefully. The shadows of exhaustion and fear around her eyes touched Foote obscurely; she looked totally unlike the blank-faced, eager youngster who had bounded into the party in ski-clothes so long ago.

"I'm afraid you are," he said gently. "As I understand it, he believes he's bound by the pentagram." At the telephone, where Lundgren evidently was listening to a different speaker with each ear, there was an energetic nod. "In the old books, the figure is supposed to be a sure trap for demons and such, if you can lure or conjure them into it. And once the werewolf has seen his appointed partner marked with it, he

feels compelled to remain until he has made the alliance good."

"Doesn't it—make you afraid of me?" Doris said, her voice trembling.

He touched her hand. "Don't be foolish. There's no need for us to swallow all of a myth just because we've found that part of it is so. The pentagram we have to accept; but I for one reserve judgment on the witchcraft."

Lundgren said "Excuse me" and put one hand over the mouthpiece. "Only lasts seven days," he said.

"The compulsion? Then we'll have to get him before then."

"Well, maybe we'll sleep tonight anyhow," Doris said dubiously.

"We're not going to do much sleeping until we get him, Newcliffe announced. "I could boil him in molten lead just for killing Brucey."

"Bruceyl" Palmer snorted. "Don't you think of anything but your damned prize dogs, even when all our lives are forfeit?" Newcliffe turned on him, but Bennington grasped his arm.

"That's enough," the American said evenly. "Both of you. We certainly don't dare quarrel among ourselves with this thing hanging over us. I know your nerves are shot. We're all in the same state. But dissension among us would make things just that much easier for Jan."

"Bravo," Lundgren said. He hung up the phone and rejoined them. "I didn't have much difficulty in selling the good Father the idea," he said. "He was stunned, but not at all incredulous. Unfortunately, he has only crucifixes enough for our groundfloor windows, at least in silver; gold, he says, is much more popular. By the way, he wants a picture of Jan, in case he should turn up in the village."

"There are no existing photographs of Jarmoskowski," Newcliffe said positively. "He never allowed any to be taken. It was a headache to his concert manager."

"That's understandable," Lundgren said. "With his cell radiogens under constant stimulation, any picture of him would turn out over-exposed anyhow—probably a total blank. And that in turn would expose Jan."

"Well, that's too bad, but it's not irreparable," Foote said. He was glad to be of some use again. He opened Caroline's secretary and took out a sheet of stationery and a pencil.

In ten minutes he had produced a head of Jarmoskowski in three-quarter profile, as he had seen him at the piano that last night so many centuries ago. Lundgren studied it.

"To the life," he said. "Tom can send this over by messenger. You draw well, Paul."

Bennington laughed. "You're not telling him anything he doesn't know," he said. Nevertheless, Foote thought, there was considerably less animosity in the critic's manner.

"What now?" James asked.

"We wait," Newcliffe said. "Palmer's gun was ruined by that one hand-made slug, and Foote's isn't in much better shape. The one thing we can't afford is to have our weapons taken out of action. If I know Consolidated, they'll have the machine-made bullets here tomorrow, and then we'll have some hope of getting him. Right now we'll just have to lie doggo and hope that our defenses are effective—he's shown that he's more than a match for us in open country."

The rest looked at each other uneasily. Some little understanding of what it would be like to wait through helpless, inactive days and dog-haunted nights already showed on their faces. But before the concurrence of both master hunters—Newcliffe and Lundgren—they were forced to yield.

The conference broke up in silence.

When Foote came into the small study with one of the books Lundgren had given him, he was surprised and somewhat disappointed to find that both Caroline and Doris had preceded him. Doris was sitting on a hassock near the grate, with the fire warming her face, and a great sheaf of red-gold hair pouring down her back. Caroline, seated just behind her, was brushing it out with even strokes.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't know you were in here. I had a little reading to do and this looked like the best place for it—"

"Why, of course, Paul," Caroline said. "Don't let us distract you in the least. We came in here for the fire."

"Well, if you're sure it's all right—"

"Of course it's all right," Doris said. "If our talking won't annoy you—"

"No, no." He found the desk with the gooseneck lamp on it, turned on the lamp, and put down the heavy book in the pool of light. Caroline's arm resumed its monotonous, rhythmic movement over Doris' bent head. Both of them made a

wonderful study: Caroline no longer the long-faced hounds-and-horses Englishwoman in jodhpurs, but now the exactly opposite type, tall, clear-skinned, capable of carrying a bare-shouldered evening gown with enchanting naturalness, yet in both avatars clearly the wife of the same man; Doris transformed from the bouncing youngster to the preternaturally still virgin waiting beside the lake, her youth not so much emphasized as epiphanised by the maternal shape stroking her head.

But for once in his life he had something to do that he considered more pressing than making a sketch for an abstraction. He turned his back on them and sat down, paging through the book to the chapter Lundgren had mentioned. He would have preferred studying it with Lundgren at his side, but the psychiatrist, wiry though he was, felt his years as the hour grew late, and was now presumably asleep.

The book was hard going. It was essentially a summary of out-of-the-way psychoses associated with peasant populations, and it had been written by some American who assumed an intolerably patronizing attitude toward the beliefs he was discussing, and who was further handicapped by a lack of basic familiarity with the English language. Foote suspected that sooner or later someone like Lundgren was going to have to do the whole job over again from scratch.

Behind him the murmuring of the two women's voices blended with the sighing of the fire in the grate. It was a warm, musical sound, so soothing that Footė found himself nodding at the end of virtually every one of the book's badly-constructed paragraphs, and forced to reread nearly every other sentence.

"I do believe you've conquered Tom completely," Caroline was saying. The brush went crackle . . . crackle . . . through the girl's hair. "He hates women who talk. About anything. That's hard on him, for he loves artists of all sorts, and so many of them are women, aren't they?"

. . . Within a few years I was able to show to a startled world that between sympathetic magic and the sympathetic-icomimetic rituals of childhood there are a distinct relationship, directly connectable to the benighted fantasies of Balkan superstition of which I have just given so graphic a series of instances. Shortly thereafter, with the aid of Drs. Egk and Bergenweiser, I was able to demonstrate . . .

"So many of them are pianists, anyhow," Doris said.

"Sometimes I wish I'd taken to the harp, or maybe the bassoon."

"Well, now, I sometimes feel that way about being a woman. There really is a great deal of competition abroad in the world. Your hair is lovely. That white part is so fashionable now that it's a pleasure to see one that's natural."

"Thank you, Caroline. You've been very brave and kind. I feel better already."

"I've never known a woman," Caroline said, "who didn't feel better with the tangles out of her hair. Does this affair really disturb you greatly?"

. . . in order to make it clear that this total misconception of the real world can have no REAL consequences except in the mind of the ignorant. To explain the accounts of the deceived observers we must first of all assume . . .

"Shouldn't it? I wouldn't have taken it seriously for a moment a few days ago, but—well, we did go out to hunt for Jan, and there really doesn't seem to be much doubt about it. It is frightening."

"Of course it is," Caroline said. "Still I wouldn't dream of losing my sleep over it. I remember when Brucey had the colic when he was five weeks old; London was being bombed at the same time by those flying things. Tom carried on terribly, and the house was full of refugees, which simply made everything more difficult. And Jan is really very sweet and he's been most effective in the World Federation movement, really one of the best speakers we've ever had; I can't imagine that he would hurt anyone. I know what Tom would do if he discovered he could turn himself into a wolf. He'd turn himself in to the authorities; he's really very serious-minded, and fills every weekend with these artists until one wonders if anybody else in the world is sane. But Jan has a sense of humor. He'll be back tomorrow laughing at us."

Foote turned a page in the book, but he had given up everything but the pretense of reading it.

"Chris takes it very seriously," Doris said.

"Of course, he's a specialist. There now, that should feel better. And there's Paul, studying his eyes out; I'd forgotten you were there. What have you found?"

"Nothing much," Foote said, turning to look at them. "I really need Chris to understand what I'm reading. I haven't the training to extract meaning out of this kind of study. I'll tackle it with him tomorrow."

Caroline sighed. "Men are so single-minded. Isn't it wonderful how essential Chris turned out to be? I'd never have dreamed that he'd be the hero of the party."

Doris got up. "If you're through with me, Caroline, I'm very tired. Goodnight, and thank you. Goodnight, Paul."

"Goodnight," Foote said.

"Quite through," Caroline said. "Goodnight, dear."

Then it was deep night again. The snowstorm had passed, leaving fresh drifts, and the moon was gradually being uncovered. The clouds blew across the house toward the North Sea on a heavy wind which hummed under the gutters, rattled windows, ground together the limbs of trees.

The sounds stirred the atmosphere of the house, which was hot and stuffy because of the closed windows and reeking with garlic. It was not difficult to hear in them other noises less welcome. In the empty room next to Foote's there was the imagined coming and going of thin ghosts to go with them, and the crouched expectancy of a turned-down bed which awaited a curiously-deformed guest—a guest who might depress its sheets regardless of the tiny glint of the crucifix upon the pillow.

The boundary between the real and the unreal had been let down in Foote's mind, and between the comings and goings of the cloud-shadows and the dark errands of the ghosts there was no longer any way of making a selection. He had entered the cobwebby borderland between the human and the animal, where nothing is ever more than half true, and only as much as half true for the one moment.

After a while he felt afloat on the stagnant air, ready to drift all the way across the threshold at the slightest motion. Above him, other sleepers turned restlessly, or groaned and started up with a creak of springs. Something was seeping through the darkness among them. The wind followed it, keeping a tally of the doors that it passed.

One.

Two.

Three. Closer now.

Four. The fourth sleeper struggled a little; Foote could hear a muffled squeaking of floorboards above his head.

Five.

Six. Who was six? Who's next? When?

Seven—

Oh my God, I'm next . . . I'm next . . .

He curled into a ball, trembling. The wind died away and there was silence, tremendous and unquiet. After a long while he uncurled, swearing at himself; but not aloud, for he was afraid to hear his own voice. Cut that out, now, Foote, you bloody fool. You're like a kid hiding from the trolls. You're perfectly safe. Lundgren says so.

Mamma says so.

How the hell does Lundgren know?

He's an expert. He wrote a paper. Go ahead, be a kid. Remember your childhood faith in the printed word? All right, then. Go to sleep, will you?

There goes that damned counting again.

But after a while his worn-down nerves would be excited no longer. He slept a little, but fitfully, falling in his dreams through such deep pits that he awoke fighting the covers and gasping for the vitiated, garlic-heavy air. There was a foulness in his mouth and his heart pounded. He threw off the blankets and sat up, lighting a cigarette with shaking hands and trying not to see the shadows the match-flame threw.

He was no longer waiting for the night to end. He had forgotten that there had ever been such a thing as daylight. He was waiting only to hear the low, inevitable snuffling that would tell him he had a visitor.

But when he looked out the window, he saw dawn brightening over the forest. After staring incredulously at it for a long while, he snubbed out his cigarette in the socket of the candlestick—which he had been carrying about the house as if it had grown to him—and fell straight back. With a sigh he was instantly in profound and dreamless sleep.

When he finally came to consciousness he was being shaken, and Bennington's voice was in his ears. "Get up, man," the critic was saying. "No, you needn't reach for the candlestick—everything's okay thus far."

Foote grinned and reached for his trousers. "It's a pleasure to see a friendly expression on your face, Bennington," he said.

Bennington looked a little abashed. "I misjudged you," he admitted. "I guess it takes a crisis to bring out what's really in a man so that blunt brains like mine can see it. You don't mind if I continue to dislike your latest abstractions, I trust?"

"That's your function: to be a gadfly," Foote said cheerfully. "Now, what's happened?"

"Newcliffe got up early and made the rounds of the traps. We got a good-sized rabbit out of one of them and made Hassenpfeffer—very good—you'll see. The other one was empty, but there was blood on it and on the snow around it. Lundgren's still asleep, but we've saved scrapings for him; still there doesn't seem to be much doubt about it—there's a bit of flesh with coarse black hair on it—"

James poked his head around the doorjamb, then came in. "Hope it cripples him," he said, dexterously snaffling a cigarette from Foote's shirt pocket. "Pardon me. All the servants have deserted us but the butler, and nobody will bring cigarettes up from the village."

"My, my," Foote said. "You're a chipper pair of chaps. Nice sunrise, wasn't it?"

"Wasn't it, though."

In the kitchen they were joined by Ehrenberg, his normally ruddy complexion pale and shrunken from sleeplessness.

"Greetings, Hermann. How you look! And how would you like your egg?"

"*Himmel, Asch und Zwirn,* how can you sound so cheerful? You must be part ghoul."

"You must be part angel—nobody human could be so deadly serious so long, even at the foot of the scaffold."

"Bennington, if you burn my breakfast I'll turn you out of doors without a shilling. Hello, Doris; can you cook?"

"I'll make some coffee for you." Newcliffe entered as she spoke, a pipe between his teeth. "How about you, Tom?"

"Very nice, I'm sure," Newcliffe said: "Look—what do you make of this?" He produced a wad of architect's oiled tracing cloth from his jacket pocket and carefully unwrapped it. In it were a few bloody fragments. Doris choked and backed away.

"I got these off the trap this morning—you saw me do it, Bennington—and they had hair on 'em then. Now look at 'em."

Foote poked at the scraps with the point of his pencil. "Human," he said.

"That's what I thought."

"Well, isn't that to be expected? It was light when you opened the trap, evidently, but the sun hadn't come up. The

werewolf assumes human form in full daylight—these probably changed just a few moments after you wrapped them up. As for the hair—this piece here looks to me like a blood-stained sample of Jarmoskowski's shirt-cuff."

"We've nipped him, all right," Bennington agreed.

"By the way," Newcliffe added, "we've just had our first desertion. Palmer left this morning."

"No loss," James said. "But I know how he feels. When this affair is over, I'm going to take a month off at Brighton and let the world go to hell."

"What? In the winter?"

"I don't care. I'll watch the tides come in and out in the W. C."

"Just be sure to live to get there," Ehrenberg said gloomily.

"Hermann, you are a black cloud and a thunderclap of doom."

There was a sound outside. It sounded like the world's biggest tea-kettle. Something flitted through the sky, wheeled and came back. Foote went to the nearest window.

"Look at that," he said, shading his eyes. "An Avro jet—and he's trying to land here. He must be out of his mind."

The plane circled silently, engines cut. It lost flying speed and glided in over the golf course, struck, and rolled at breakneck speed directly for the forest. At the last minute the pilot groundlooped the ship expertly and the snow fountained under its wheels.

"By heaven, I'll bet that's Newcliffe's bullets!"

They pounded through the foyer and out onto the terrace. Newcliffe, without bothering to don coat or hat, plowed away toward the plane. A few minutes later, he and the pilot came puffing into the front room, carrying a small wooden case between them. Then they went back and got another, larger but obviously not so heavy.

Newcliffe pried the first crate open. Then he sighed. "Look at 'em," he said. "Shiny brass cartridges, and dull silver heads, machined for perfect accuracy—there's a study in beauty for you artist chaps. Where'd you leave from?"

"Croydon," said the pilot. "If you don't mind, Mr. Newcliffe, the company said I was to collect from you. That's six hundred pounds for the weapons, two-fifty for the ammo and a hundred fifty for me, just a thousand in all."

"Fair enough. Hold on, I'll write you a check."

Foote whistled. It was obvious—not that there had ever

been any doubt about it—that Tom Newcliffe did not paint for a living.

The pilot took the check, and shortly thereafter the teakettle began to whistle again. From the larger crate Newcliffe was handing out brand-new rifles, queer ungainly things with muzzle brakes and disproportionately large stocks.

"Now let him come," he said grimly. "Don't worry about wasting shots. There's a full case of clips. As soon as you see him, blaze away like mad. Use it like a hose if you have to. This is a high-velocity weapon: if you hit him square anywhere—even if it's only his hand—you'll kill him from shock. If you get him in the body, there won't be enough of that area left for him to reform, no matter what his powers."

"Somebody go wake Chris," Bennington said. "He should have lessons too. Doris, go knock on his door like a good girl."

Doris nodded and went upstairs. "Now this stud here," Newcliffe, said, "is the fire-control button. You put it in this position and the gun will fire one shot and reload itself, like the Garand. Put it here and you have to reload it yourself, like a bolt-action rifle. Put it here and it goes into automatic operation, firing every shell in the clip, one after the other and in a hurry."

"Thunder!" James said admiringly. "We could stand off an army."

"Wait a minute—there seem to be two missing."

"Those are all you unpacked," Foote pointed out.

"Yes, but there were two older models of my own. I never used 'em because it didn't seem sporting to hunt with such cannon. But I got 'em out last night on account of this trouble."

"Oh," Bennington said with an air of sudden enlightenment. "I thought that thing I had looked odd. I slept with one last night. I think Lundgren has the other."

"Where is Lundgren? Doris should have had him up by now. Go see, Bennington, and fetch back that rifle while you're at it."

"Isn't there a lot of recoil?" Foote asked.

"Not a great deal; that's what the muzzle brake is for. But it would be best to be careful when you have the stud on fully-automatic. Hold the machine at your hip, rather than at your shoulder—what's *that!*"

"Bennington's voice," Foote said, his jaw muscles sud-

denly almost unmanageable. "Something must be wrong with Doris." The group stampeded for the stairs.

They found Doris at Bennington's feet in front of Lundgren's open door. She was perfectly safe; she had only fainted. The critic was in the process of being very sick. On Lundgren's bed something was lying.

The throat had been ripped out, and the face and all the soft parts of the body were gone. The right leg had been gnawed in one place all the way to the bone, which gleamed white and polished in the reassuring sunlight.

6

Foote stood in the living room by the piano in the full glare of all the electric lights. He hefted the T-47 and surveyed the remainder of the party, which was standing in a puzzled group before him.

"No," he said, "I don't like that. I don't want you all bunched together. String out in a line, please, against the far wall, so that I can see everybody."

He grinned briefly. "Got the drop on you, didn't I? Not a rifle in sight. Of course, there's the big candlestick behind you, Tom—aha, I saw you sneak your hopeful look at it—but I know from experience that it's too heavy to throw. I can shoot quicker than you can club me, too." His voice grew ugly. *"And I will,* if you make it necessary. So I would advise everybody—including the women—not to make any sudden movements."

"What's this all about, Paul?" Bennington demanded angrily. "As if things weren't bad enough—"

"You'll see directly. Get into line with the rest, Bennington. *Quick!"* He moved the gun suggestively. "And remember what I said about moving too suddenly. It may be dark outside, but I didn't turn on all the lights for nothing."

Quietly the line formed. The eyes that looked at Foote were narrowed with suspicion of madness, or something worse.

"Good. Now we can talk comfortably. You see, after what happened to Chris I'm not taking any chances. That was partly his fault, and partly mine. But the gods allow no one to err twice in matters of this kind. He paid for his second error—a price I don't intend to pay, or to see anyone else here pay."

"Would you honor us with an explanation of this error?" Newcliffe said icily.

"Yes. I don't blame you for being angry, Tom, since I'm your guest. But you see I'm forced to treat you all alike for the moment. I was fond of Lundgren."

There was silence for a moment, then a thin indrawing of breath from Bennington. "All alike?" he whispered raggedly. "My God, Paul. Tell us what you mean."

"You know already, I see, Bennington. I mean that Lundgren was not killed by Jarmoskowski. He was killed by someone else. Another werewolf—yes, we have two now. One of them is standing in this room at this moment."

A concerted gasp went up.

"Surprised?" Foote said, coldly, and deliberately. "But it's true. The error for which Chris paid so dearly, an error which I made too, was this: we forgot to examine everyone for injuries after the encounter with Jan. We forgot one of the cardinal laws of lycanthropy.

"A man who survives being bitten by a werewolf himself becomes a werewolf. That's how the disease is passed on. The pinearin in the wolf's saliva evidently gets into the bloodstream, stimulates the victim's own pineal gland, and—"

"But nobody was bitten, Paul," Doris said in a suspiciously reasonable voice.

"Somebody was, even if only lightly. None of you but Chris and myself could have known about the bite-infection. Evidently somebody got a few small scratches, didn't think them worth mentioning, put iodine on them and forgot about them—until it was too late."

There were slow movements in the line—heads turning surreptitiously, eyes swinging to neighbors left and right.

"Paul, this is merely a hypothesis," Ehrenberg said. "There is no reason to suppose that it is so, just because it sounds likely."

"But there is. Jarmoskowski can't get in here."

"Unproven," Ehrenberg said.

"I'll prove it. Once the seizure occurred, Chris was the logical first victim. The expert, hence the most dangerous enemy. I wish I had thought of this before lunch. I might have seen which one of you was uninterested in his lunch. In any event, if I'm right, Chris' safeguards against letting Jarmoskowski in also keep you from getting out. If you

think you'll ever leave this room again, you're bloody wrong—"

He gritted his teeth and brought himself back into control. "All right," he said. "This is the end of the line. Everybody hold up both hands in plain view."

Almost instantly there was a ravening wolf in the room.

Only Foote, who could see at one glance the order of the people in the staggered line, could know who it was. His drummed-up courage, based solely on terror, went flooding out of him on a tide of sick pity; he dropped the rifle and began to weep convulsively. The beast lunged for his throat like a reddish projectile.

Newcliffe's hand darted back and grasped the candlestick. He leapt forward with swift clumsy grace and brought it down, whistling, against the werewolf's side. Ribs burst with a sharp splintering sound. The wolf spun, its haunches hitting the floor. Newcliffe hit it again. It fell, screaming like a great dog run down by a car, its fangs slashing the air.

Three times, with scientific viciousness, Newcliffe heaved the candlestick back and struck at its head. Then it cried out in an almost-familiar voice, and died.

Slowly the cells of its body groped back toward their natural positions. Even its fur moved, becoming more matted, more regular—more fabric-like.

The crawling metamorphosis was never completed; but the hairy-haunched thing with the crushed skull which sprawled at Newcliffe's feet was recognizable.

It had been Caroline Newcliffe.

Tears coursed along Foote's palms, dropped from under them, fell to the carpet. After a while he dropped his hands. Blurrily he saw a frozen tableau of wax figures in the yellow lamplight. Bennington's face was grey with illness, but rigidly expressionless, like a granite statue. James' back was against the wall; he watched the anomalous corpse as if waiting for some new movement. Ehrenberg had turned away, his pudgy fists clenched.

As for Newcliffe, he had no expression at all. He merely stood where he was, the bloody candlestick hanging straight down from a limp hand.

His eyes were quite empty.

After a moment Doris walked over to Newcliffe and touched his shoulder compassionately. The contact seemed to let something out of him. He shrank visibly into himself,

shoulders slumping, his whole body withering to a dry husk.

The candlestick thumped against the floor, rocked wildly on its base, toppled across the body. As it struck, Foote's cigarette butt, which had somehow remained in its socket all day, tumbled out and rolled crazily along the carpet.

"Tom," Doris said softly. "Come away now. There's nothing you can do."

"It was the blood," his empty voice said. "She had a cut. On her hand. Handled the scrapings from the trap. My trap. I did it to her. Just a breadknife cut from making canapes. I did it."

"No you didn't, Tom. You're not to blame. Let's get some rest."

She took his hand. He followed her obediently, stumbling a little as his spattered shoes scuffed over the thick carpet, his breath expelling from his lungs with a soft whisper. The French doors closed behind them.

Bennington bolted for the kitchen sink.

Foote sat down on the piano bench, his worn face taut with dried tears. Like any non-musician he was drawn almost by reflex to pick at the dusty keys. Ehrenberg remained standing where he was, so motionless as to absent himself from the room altogether, but the lightly-struck notes aroused James. He crossed the room, skirting the body widely, and looked down at Foote.

"You did well," the novelist said shakily. "Don't condemn yourself, Paul. What you did was just and proper—and merciful in the long run."

Foote nodded. He felt—nothing. Nothing at all.

"The body?" James said.

"Yes. I suppose so." He got up from the bench. Together they lifted the ugly shape; it was awkward to handle. Ehrenberg remained dumb, blind and deaf. They maneuvered their way through the house and on out to the greenhouse.

"We should leave her here," Foote said, the inside of his mouth suddenly sharp and sour. "Here's where the wolfbane bloomed that started the whole business."

"Poetic justice of sorts, I suppose," James said. "But I don't think it's wise. Tom has a toolshed at the other end that isn't steam heated. It should be cold enough there."

Gently they lowered the body to the cement floor, laid down gunnysacks and rolled it onto them. There seemed to

be nothing available to cover it. "In the morning," Foote said, "we can have someone come for her."

"How about legal trouble?" James said, frowning. "Here's a woman whose skull has been crushed with a blunt instrument—"

"I think we can get Lundgren's priest to help us there, and with Lundgren too," Foote said somberly. "They have authority to make death certificates in Scotland. Besides, Alec —is that a woman? Inarguably it isn't Caroline."

James looked sidewise at the felted, muscular haunches. "No. It's—legally it's nothing. I see your point."

Together they went back into the house. "Jarmoskowski?" James said.

"Not tonight, I imagine. We're all too tired and sick. And we do seem to be safe enough in here. Chris saw to that."

Ehrenberg had gone. James looked around the big empty room.

"Another night. What a damnable business. Well, good night, Paul."

He went out. Foote remained in the empty room a few minutes longer, looking thoughtfully at the splotch of blood on the priceless Persian carpet. Then he felt of his face and throat, looked at his hands, arms and legs, and explored his chest under his shirt.

Not a scratch. Tom had been very fast.

He was exhausted, but he could not bring himself to go to bed. With Lundgren dead, the problem was his; he knew exactly how little he knew about it still, but he knew as well how much less the rest of the party knew. Hegemony of the house was his now—and the next death would be his responsibility.

He went around the room, making sure that all the windows were tightly closed and the crucifixes in place, turning out the lights as he went. The garlic was getting rancid—it smelled like mercaptan—but as far as he knew it was still effective. He clicked out all but the last light, picked up his rifle and went out into the hall.

Doris' room door was open and there was no light coming out of it. Evidently she was still upstairs tending Newcliffe. He stood for a few moments battling with indecision, then toiled up the staircase.

He found her in Caroline's room, her head bowed upon her arm among the scattered, expensive vials and flasks

which had been Caroline's armamentarium. The room was surprisingly froufrou; even the telephone had a doll over it. This, evidently, had been the one room in the house which Caroline had felt was completely hers, where her outdoorsy, estate-managing daytime personality had been ousted by her nocturnal femininity.

And what, in turn, had ousted that? Had the womanly Caroline been crowded, trying not to weep, into some remote and impotent corner of her brain as the monster grew in her? What did go on in the mind of a werewolf?

Last night, for instance, when she had brushed Doris' hair, she had seemed completely and only herself, the Caroline Newcliffe with the beautiful face and the empty noggin toward whom Foote had so long felt a deep affection mixed with no respect whatsoever. But she had already been taken. It made his throat ache to realize that in her matronly hovering over the girl there had already been some of the tenseness of the stalker.

Men are so single-minded. Isn't it wonderful how essential Chris turned out to be?

At that moment she had shifted her target from Doris to Chris, moved by nothing more than Foote's remark about being unable to progress very far without the psychiatrist. Earlier this evening he had said that Chris had been the most logical target because he was the expert—yet that had not really occurred to Caroline except as an afterthought. It was wolf-reasoning; Caroline's own mind had seen danger first in single-mindedness.

And it had been Caroline's mind, not the wolf's, which had dictated the original fix on Doris. The girl, after all, was the only other woman in the party, thanks to Tom's lion-hunting and his dislike of the Modern Girl; and Caroline had mentioned that Tom seemed drawn to Doris. Which was wolf, which human? Or had they become blended, like two innocuous substances combining to form a poison? Caroline had once been incapable of jealousy—but when the evil had begun to seethe in her bloodstream she had been no longer entirely Caroline. . . .

He sighed. Doris had seemed to be asleep on the vanity, but she stirred at the small sound, and the first step he took across the threshold brought her bolt upright. Her eyes were reddened and strange.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I was looking for you. I have to talk

to you, Doris; I've been putting it off for quite a while, but I can't do that any longer. May I?"

"Yes, of course, Paul," she said wearily. "I've been very rude to you. It's a little late for an apology, but I am sorry."

He smiled. "Perhaps I had it coming. How is Tom?"

"He's—not well. He doesn't know where he is or what he's doing. He ate a little and went to sleep, but he breathes very strangely." She began to knead her hands in her lap. "What did you want?"

"Doris—what about this witchcraft business? Lundgren seemed to think it might help us. God knows we need help. Have you any idea why Chris thought it was important? Beyond what he told us, that is?"

She shook her head. "Paul, it seemed a little silly to me then, and I still don't understand it. I can do a few small tricks, that's all, like the one I did to you with the smoke. I never thought much about them; they came more or less naturally, and I thought of them just as a sort of sleight-of-hand. I've seen stage conjurers do much more mystifying things."

"But by trickery—not by going right around natural law."

"What do I know about natural law?" she said reasonably. "It seems natural to me that if you want to make something plastic behave, you mold something else that's plastic nearby. To make smoke move, you move clay, or something else that's like smoke. Isn't that natural?"

"Not very," he said wrily. "It's a law of magic, if that's any comfort to either of us. But it's supposed to be a false law."

"I've made it work," she said, shrugging.

He leaned forward. "I know that. That's why I'm here. If you can do that, there should be other things that you can do, things that can help us. What I want to do is to review with you what Chris thought of your talents, and see whether or not anything occurs to you that we can use."

She put her hands to her checks, and then put them back in her lap again. "I'll try," she said.

"Good for you. Chris said he thought witches in the old days were persons with extra-sensory perception and allied gifts. I think he believed also that the magic rituals that were used in witchcraft were just manipulative in intention —symbolic objects needed by the witch to focus her extra-sensory powers. If he was right, the 'laws' of magic really

were illusions, and what was in operation was something much deeper."

"I think I follow that," Doris said. "Where does it lead?"

"I don't know. But I can at least try you on a catalogue. Have you ever had a prophetic dream, Doris? Or read palms? Or cast horoscopes? Or even had the notion that you could look into the future?"

She shook her head decidedly.

"All right, we'll rule that out. Ever felt that you knew what someone else was thinking?"

"Well, by guesswork—"

"No, no," Foote said. "Have you ever felt certain that you knew—"

"Never."

"How about sensing the positions of objects in another room or in another city—no. Well, have you ever been in the vicinity of an unexplained fire? A fire that just seemed to happen because you were there?"

"No, Paul, I've never seen a single fire outside of a fireplace."

"Ever moved anything larger and harder to handle than a column of smoke?"

Doris frowned. "Many times," she said. "But just little things. There was a soprano with a rusty voice that I had to accompany once. She was overbearing and a terrible stage hog. I tied her shoe-bows together so that she fell when she took her first bow, but it was awfully hard work; I was all in a sweat."

Foote suppresed an involuntary groan. "How did you do it?"

"I'm not quite sure. I don't think I could have done it at all if we hadn't wound up the concert with *Das Buch der Haengenden Gaerten.*" She smiled wanly. "If you don't know Schoenberg's crazy counterpoint that wouldn't mean anything to you."

"It tells me what I need to know, I'm afraid. There really isn't much left for me to do but ask you whether or not you've ever transformed a woman into a white mouse, or ridden through the air on a broomstick. Doris, doesn't *anything* occur to you? Chris never talked without having something to talk about; when he said that you could help us, he meant it. But he's dead now and we can't ask him for the particulars. It's up to you."

She burst into tears. Foote got clumsily to his feet, but after that he had no idea what to do.

"Doris—"

"I don't know," she wailed. "I'm not a witch! I don't want to be witch! I don't know anything, anything at all, and I'm so tired and so frightened and please go away, please—"

He turned helplessly to go, then started to turn back again. At the same instant, the sound of her weeping was extinguished in the roar of an automatic rifle, somewhere over their heads, exhausting its magazine in a passionate rush.

Foote shot out of the room and back down the stairs. The ground floor still seemed to be deserted under the one light. Aloft there was another end-stopped snarl of gunfire; then Bennington came bouncing down the stairs.

"Watch out tonight," he panted as soon as he saw Foote. "He's around. I saw him come out of the woods in wolf form. I emptied the clip, but he's a hard target against those trees. I sprayed another ten rounds around where I saw him go back in, but I'm sure I didn't hit him. The rifle just isn't my weapon."

"Where were you shooting from?"

"The top of the tower." His face was very stern. "Went up for a breath and a last look around, and there he was. I hope he comes back tonight. I want to be the one who kills him."

"You're not alone."

"Thank God for that. Well, goodnight. Keep your eyes peeled."

Foote stood in the dark for a while after Bennington had left. Bennington had given him something to think about. While he waited, Doris picked her way down the stairs and passed him without seeing him. She was carrying a small, bulky object; since he had already put the light out, he could not see what it was. But she went directly to her room.

I want to be the one who kills him.

Even the mild Bennington could say that now; but Foote, who understood the feeling behind it all too well, was startled to find that he could not share it.

How could one hate these afflicted people? Why was it so hard for equal-minded men like Bennington to remember that lycanthropy was a disease like any other, and that it struck its victims only in accordance with its own etiology, without regard for their merits as persons? Bennington had

the reputation of being what the Americans called a liberal, all the way to his bones; presumably he could not find it in his heart to hate an alcoholic or an addict. He knew also—he had been the first to point it out—that Jarmoskowski as a human being had been compassionate and kindly, as well as brilliant; and that Caroline, like the poor devil in Andreyev's *The Red Laugh,* had been noble-hearted and gentle and had wished no one evil. Yet he was full of hatred now.

He was afraid, of course, just as Foote was. Foote wondered if it had occurred to him that God might be on the side of the werewolves.

The blasphemy of an exhausted mind; but he had been unable to put the idea from him. Suppose Jarmoskowski should conquer his compulsion and lie out of sight until the seven days were over. Then he could disappear; Scotland was large and sparsely populated. It would not be necessary for him to kill all his victims thereafter—only those he actually needed for food. A nip here, a scratch there—

And then from wherever he hunted, the circle of lycanthropy would grow and widen and engulf—

Perhaps God had decided that proper humans had made a muddle of running the world; had decided to give the *nosferatu,* the undead, a chance at it. Perhaps the human race was on the threshold of that darkness into which he had looked throughout last night.

He ground his teeth and made a noise of exasperation. Shock and exhaustion would drive him as crazy as Newcliffe if he kept this up. He put his hands to his forehead, wiped them on his thighs, and went into the little study.

The grate was cold, and he had no materials for firing it up again. All the same, the room was warmer than his bed would be at this hour. He sat down at the small desk and began to go through Lundgren's book again.

Cases of stigmata. Accounts of Sabbats straight out of Krafft-Ebing. The dancing madness. Theory of familiars. Conjuration and exorcism. The besom as hermaphroditic symbol. Fraser's Laws. Goetha as an international community. Observations of Lucien Levy-Bruehl. The case of Bertrand. Political commentary in *Dracula.* Necromancy vs. necrophilia. Nordau on magic and modern man. Basic rituals of the Anti-Church. Fetishism and the theory of talismans . . .

Round and round and round, and the mixture as before.

Without Chris there was simply no hope of integrating all this material. Nothing would avail them now but the rifles with the silver bullets in them; their reservoir of knowledge of the thing they fought had been destroyed.

Foote looked tiredly at the ship's clock on the mantel over the cold grate. The fruitless expedition through the book had taken him nearly two hours. He would no longer be able to avoid going to bed. He rose stiffly, took up the automatic rifle, put out the light, and went out into the cold hall.

As he passed Doris' room, he saw that the door was now just barely ajar. Inside, two voices murmured.

Foote was an incurable eavesdropper. He stopped and listened.

7

It was years later before Foote found out exactly what had happened at the beginning. Doris, physically exhausted by her hideous day, emotionally drained by tending the child-like Newcliffe, feeding him from a blunt spoon, parrying his chant about traps and breadknives, and herding him into bed, had fallen asleep almost immediately. It was a sleep dreamless except for a vague, dull undercurrent of despair. When the light tapping against the window-panes finally reached through to her, she had no idea how long she had been lying there.

She struggled to a sitting position and forced her eyelids up. Across the room the moonlight, gleaming in patches against the rotting snow outside, glared through the window. Silhouetted against it was a tall human figure. She could not see its face, but there was no mistaking the red glint of its eyes. She clutched for her rifle and brought it awkwardly into line.

Jarmoskowski did not dodge. He moved his forearms out a little way from his body, palms forward in a gesture that looked almost supplicating, and waited. Indecisively she lowered the gun again. What was he asking for?

As she dropped the muzzle she saw that the fire-control stud was at *automatic*. She shifted it carefully to *repeat*. She was afraid of the recoil Newcliffe had mentioned; she could feel surer of her target if she could throw one shot at a time at it.

Jarmoskowski tapped again and motioned with his finger.

Reasoning that he would come in of his own accord if he were able, she took time out to get into her housecoat. Then, holding her finger against the trigger, she went to the window. All its sections were closed tightly, and a crucifix, suspended from a silk thread, hung exactly in the center of it. She touched it, then opened one of the small panes directly above Jarmoskowski's head.

"Hello, Doris," he said softly. "You look a little like a clerk behind that window. May I make a small deposit, miss?"

"Hello." She was more uncertain than afraid. Was this really happening, or was it just the recurrent nightmare? "What do you want? I should shoot you. Can you tell me why I shouldn't?"

"Yes, I can. Otherwise I wouldn't have risked exposing myself. That's a nasty-looking weapon."

"There are ten silver bullets in it."

"I know that too. I had some fired at me earlier tonight. And I would be a good target for you, so I have no hope of escape—my nostrils are full of rosemary." He smiled ruefully. "And Lundgren and Caroline are dead, and I am responsible. I deserve to die; that is why I am here."

"You'll get your wish, Jan," she said. "But you have some other reason, I know. I'll back my wits against yours. I want to ask you questions."

"Ask."

"You have your evening clothes on. Paul said they changed with you. How is that possible?"

"But a wolf has clothes," Jarmoskowski said. "He is not naked like a man. And surely Chris must have spoken of the effect of the pineal upon the cell radiogens. These little bodies act upon any organic matter, wool, cotton, linen, it hardly matters. When I change, my clothes change with me. I can hardly say how, for it is in the blood—the chromosomes—like musicianship, Doris. Either you can or you can't. If you can—they change."

"Jan—are there many like you? Chris seemed to think—"

Jarmoskowski's smile became a little mocking. "Go into a great railroad station some day—Waterloo, or a Metro station, or Grand Central in New York; get up above the crowd on a balcony or stairway and look down at it in a mirror. We do not show in a silvered mirror. Or if you are in America, find one of the street photographers they have there who

take 'three action pictures of yourself' against your will and try to sell them to you; ask him what percentage of his shots show nothing but background."

His voice darkened gradually to a somber diapason. "Lundgren was right throughout. This werewolfery is now nothing but a disease. It is not pro-survival. Long ago there must have been a number of mutations which brought the pineal gland into use; but none of them survived but the werewolves, and the werewolves are madmen—like me. We are dying out.

"Some day there will be another mutation, the pineal will come into better use, and all men will be able to modify their forms without this terrible cannibalism as a penalty. But for us, the lycanthropes, the failures of evolution, nothing is left.

"It is not good for a man to wander from country to country, knowing that he is a monster to his fellow-men and cursed eternally by his God—if he can claim a God. I went through Europe, playing the piano and giving pleasure, writing music for others to play, meeting people, making friends—and always, sooner or later, there were whisperings and strange looks and dawning horror.

"And whether I was hunted down for the beast I was, or whether there was only a gradually-growing revulsion, they drove me out. Hatred, silver bullets, crucifixes—they are all the same in the end.

"Sometimes, I could spend several months without incident in some one place, and my life would take on a veneer of normality. I could attend to my music, and have people around me that I liked, and be—human. Then the wolfbane bloomed and the pollen freighted the air, and when the moon shone down on that flower my blood surged with the thing I carry within me—

"And then I made apologies to my friends and went north to Sweden, where Lundgren was and where spring came much later. I loved him, and I think he missed the truth about me until night before last; I was careful.

"Once or twice I did *not* go north, and then the people who had been my friends would be hammering silver behind my back and waiting for me in dark corners. After years of this few places in Europe would have me. With my reputation as a composer and a pianist spread darker rumors, none of them near the truth, but near enough.

"Towns I had never visited closed their gates to me without a word. Concert halls were booked up too many months in advance for me to use them, inns and hotels were filled indefinitely, people were too busy to talk to me, to listen to my playing, to write me any letters.

"I have been in love. That—I will not describe..

"Eventually I went to America. There no one believes in werewolf. I sought scientific help—which I had never sought from Lundgren, because I was afraid I would do him some harm. But overseas I thought someone would know enough to deal with what I had become. I would say, 'I was bitten during a hunt on Graf Hrutkai's estate, and the next fall I had my first seizure—'

"But it was not so. No matter where I go, the primitive hatred of my kind lies at the heart of the human as it lies at the heart of the dog. There was no help for me.

"I am here to ask for an end to it."

Slow tears rolled over Doris' cheeks. The voice faded away indefinitely. It did not seem to end at all, but rather to retreat into some limbo where men could not hear it. Jarmoskowski stood silently in the moonlight, his eyes burning bloodily, a somber sullen scarlet.

Doris said, "Jan—Jan, I am sorry, I am so sorry. What can I do?"

"Shoot."

"I—can't!"

"Please, Doris."

The girl was crying uncontrollably. "Jan, don't. I can't. You know I can't. Go away, *please* go away."

Jarmoskowski said, "Then come with me, Doris. Open the window and come with me."

"Where?"

"Does it matter? You have denied me the death I ask. Would you deny me this last desperate hope for love, would you deny your own love, your own last and deepest desire? That would be a vile cruelty. It is too late now, too late for you to pretend revulsion. Come with me."

He held out his hands.

"Say goodbye," he said. "Goodbye to these self-righteous humans. I will give you of my blood and we will range the world, wild and uncontrollable, the last of our race. They will remember us, I promise you."

"Jan—"

"I am here. Come now."

Like a somnambulist, she swung the panes out. Jarmoskowski did not move, but looked first at her, then at the crucifix. She lifted one end of the thread and let the little thing tinkle to the floor.

"After us, there shall be no darkness comparable to our darkness," Jarmoskowski said. "Let them rest—let the world rest."

He sprang into the room with so sudden, so feral a motion that he seemed hardly to have moved at all. From the doorway an automatic rifle yammered with demoniac ferocity. The impact of the silver slugs hurled Jarmoskowski back against the side of the window. Foote lowered the smoking muzzle and took one step into the room.

"Too late, Jan," he said stonily.

Doris wailed like a little girl awakened from a dream. Jarmoskowski's lips moved, but there was not enough left of his lungs. The effort to speak brought a bloody froth to his mouth. He stood for an instant, stretched out a hand toward the girl. Then the long fingers clenched convulsively and the long body folded.

He smiled, put aside that last of all his purposes, and died.

"Why did he come in?" Foote whispered. "I could never have gotten a clear shot at him if he'd stayed outside."

He swung on the sobbing girl. "Doris, you must tell me, if you know. With his hearing, he should have heard me breathing. But he stayed—and he came in, right into my line of fire. *Why?*

The girl did not answer; but stiffly, as if she had all at once become old, she went to her bedside light and turned it on. Standing beneath it was a grotesque figurine which Foote had difficulty in recognizing as Caroline's telephone doll. All the frills had been stripped off it, and a heavy black line had been pencilled across its innocuous forehead in imitation of Jarmoskowski's eyebrows. Fastened to one of its wrists with a rubber band was one of the fragments of skin Newcliffe had scraped out of his trap; and completely around the doll, on the surface of the table, a pentagram had been drawn in lipstick.

The nascent witch had turned from white magic to black. Doris had rediscovered the malign art of poppetry, and had destroyed her demon lover.

Compassionately, Foote turned to her; and very slowly, as if responding to the gravitational tug of a still-distant planet, the muzzle of his rifle swung too. Together, the man and the machine, they waited for her.

Both would have to be patient.

This is an original publication—not a reprint. Printed in U.S.A.

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