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# *Weirdbook 29*

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## FICTION

- 4 PETER TREMAYNE, *The Foxes of Fascoum*  
 17 TIM ALLISON, *The Day Nothing Happened*  
 20 CHARLES GAROFALO, *The Latest Great Cliché Horror Story*  
 28 DARRELL SCHWEITZER, *Silkie Son*  
 34 D. F. LEWIS, *Encounters with Terror*  
 36 GERALD W. PAGE, *Shaken, Not Stirred*  
 39 KENDALL EVANS, *The Homunculus*  
 47 CYRIL BINDER, *And to Taste the Colour of Time*  
 49 JESSICA AMANDA SALMONSON, *The Novitiate*  
 50 JESSICA PALMER, *Cinderella Revisited*  
 53 BRIAN McNAUGHTON, *The Return of the Colossus*

## POEMS

- 16 ADAM DONALDSON POWELL, *Rage of Daedalus*  
 19 JONATHAN M. BERKOWITZ, *The Silver Moon*  
 46 BRIAN LUMLEY, *City Out Of Time*  
 48 CYNTHIA TEDESCO, *Spell for Returning Dreams*  
 52 RUTH E. GAMBETTA, *I Want to Sail With the Titanic Forever*  
 62 PETER SYDNEY KEMEL, *Above the Snow Line*

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## EDITORIAL

There has been a two-year hiatus between issues. I hope to do better in 1996-97. Perhaps we can blame the delay on the Schweitzer story, "Silkie Son," in this issue: before it was submitted to WEIRDBOOK it was accepted by three other small press magazines, all of which folded before they could use it. He did warn me that he was afraid to submit it here. Well, I hope the hex is wearing off, and will only delay the issue.

However, I think I have used this time interval to good purpose. By October, 1995 (the expected publication date for this issue) I shall have finished doing the entire set of Brian Lumley's "Cthulhu Mythos"

books (featuring Titus Crow et al.) in hard covers as I planned several years ago. (It wasn't a trivial task for a one-man business operated part-time on a shoestring.)

Since the previous issue of WEIRDBOOK, *Stardark Songs* (Nancy Springer) has appeared. So have the following Lumley hardcovers: *Clock of Dreams*, *Spawn of the Winds* and *The Compleat Khash II: Sorcery in Shad*. (Prices are the same as given below for the Schweitzer book.) The last of the "Cthulhu Mythos" series, *In the Moons of Borea*, is now at the printer and ought to be available by the time you read this. (Of course the final book in the "Cthulhu Mythos" series, featuring Titus Crow et al., is *Elysia: The Coming of Cthulhu*, and my edition of that has been available for several years, except for the slipcased version which is out of print).

Darrell Schweitzer's *Transients and Other Disquieting Stories* (illustrated by Fabian: \$8.95, paper; \$26.50, hard covers; \$42.50, deluxe edition) was nominated as "best collection" for a World Fantasy Award in 1994—the first such nomination in a professional category my press has received. A Ramsey Campbell collection beat us out, but that's hardly a disgrace.

I do plan to publish other books, but not at the two-a-year rate. The 1995 book will be a collection of dark fantasy and horror by Janet Fox. I do intend to devote more time and effort to getting issues of WEIRDBOOK out to you. Keep the faith!

Not to change the subject (at least not much), a year ago (July 1994) I attended *Necon* as I often do. Brian Lumley was a guest of honor. The dealer-room manager, a Providence rare book dealer, had two copies of my only out-of-print Lumley book, *The House of Cthulhu and Other Tales of the Primal Land*. One, a paper cover (originally \$7.50), was priced at \$60; the other, one of the 250 hard cover copies (there was no slipcased edition), was \$250 (originally \$20). They had been out of print about seven years. Brian and I had a good laugh at the prices... but my dealer friend had the last laugh, for both of them sold! Of course we signed them. Are these books really worth that much? Why didn't I keep a dozen of them squirreled away? It'd be a new way for a publisher to make a profit (something I could use!)

Any of my books mentioned in this editorial may be purchased without a shipping charge if you order in 1995. *WPG*

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# *The Foxes of Fascoum*

by Peter Tremayne

The guide book had told me that the Comeragh Mountains in Ireland were one of the last unspoiled wildernesses in Western Europe. The guide book was right.

How did I come to be camping in those mountains in early September?

Well, I am secretary of our local rock-climbing and walking club back in Sheffield and our members were eager to widen their forays in search of good walking and climbing country. That was why I came to be in the south of Ireland. I had been delegated to check out the area for the club and, should it prove suitable, make arrangements for the club's annual outing there during the following spring. I was going to go with our president, Tom Higgins, but, at the last minute, Tom went down with flu and I wound up going to Ireland alone. Not that I really minded. Matter of fact, I preferred it that way. I enjoy walking and climbing alone. Maybe it stems from a solitary childhood.

Anyway, the point I am making is that as soon as I arrived in the area I knew that it would be ideal territory for our club. Not only did it offer good trekking country but provided marvelous rock faces for climbing. The Comeragh Mountains constitute over two hundred square miles of mountainous wilderness. When I started into the area, south from Clonmel, I realised that the recommendation to our club had been correct. The mountains offered splendid walking country but were trackless and needed care and preferably previous mountain experience. The mountains here averaged about two-and-a-half thousand feet in height, the highest being a mound of a summit called Fascoum at 2,597 feet.

I was in the area a few days before I came to Fascoum. I carried with me a lightweight tent and sleeping bag and so could wander as I chose. There were plenty of fresh mountain streams and springs, even sedate rivers and lakes. No one would ever starve here for there was wild life in plenty and in

several places I could see brown trout near the surface of the waters, basking as if begging to be taken. However, I was well prepared with my own provisions without recourse to hunting the wild life. If I miscalculated, there were always one or two farms or cottages in the area, though not very many, where I could buy supplies.

Just beyond the broad sunlight-dappled slopes of Fascoum, with its jutting grey granite rocks ripping through the green carpet of grass and moss, I came across an overgrown path which meandered through stretches of brilliant gorse and fuschia. The wild life seemed abundant and unthreatened by the presence of the great predator — man. While the occasional deer, red squirrel, and grey mountain hare raised their heads warily at my passing, they did not flee from my presence. At one point I was surprised to pass near a rock a little way above me on the mountain side on which sat a dog. It was only when I gave it a second glance that I realised it was a wild fox, a large vixen staring down at me with pointed features and brightly reflecting grey-green eyes, the head surmounted by silver greying fur until it blended into the rusty red of its hide. I halted, delighting in the scene, staring back at the animal. It held its ground for a long while before throwing back its head, giving a sharp bark and disappearing.

I continued on down the mountain accompanied by the music of September bird calls which would now and then fall silent as I saw the black and white form of a darting hooded crow scavenging for food.

It was a beautiful, peaceful landscape.

It was nearing lunchtime and I had passed the skirts of Fascoum and traversed the valley towards the neighbouring height of Coumshingaun when I saw a small whitewashed cottage, with heavy weathered greying thatch. To my unexpected joy I saw it bore a brightly painted sign with the words "Dan's Bar" on it and I decided to stop for lunch.

There were only two men in the bar as I entered. The barman, who turned out to be the owner, and a man clad in workman's clothes. Ireland is a friendly place to the visitor and they greeted me in amiable fashion. We immediately fell to talking about the countryside, its merits for walkers



and climbers, and they recommended me to some out of the way spots which they thought I might gain profit by visiting.

The owner of the bar, Dan was indeed his name, was a tall, lean hooked-nosed sort of man. The type you would expect to see wearing an eye-patch and a pirate costume. The other, he introduced himself as Seán Duff, was diminutive and whimsical, a man who looked so familiar that I had to think where I could have seen him before. It was only after some moments of concentrated thought that I finally realised that he was the image of the late Barry Fitzgerald, the movie star.

The conversation progressed, as passing conversations in pubs do, and Dan, hearing that I was surveying the countryside for our walking and climbing club, mentioned that he owned some property nearby which could be rented as a base for our prospective tour of the area. We discussed the matter and Dan was more than willing to add to his income in this manner. We conferred on prices and then decided to exchange names and addresses for the official correspondence.

It was when I wrote my name and address and handed it across the bar to him that a strange thing happened.

He took it, glanced at it and his whole face changed. His good-natured smile vanished, his mouth went slack and his eyes widened. Then he stared at me searchingly. Finally, without speaking, he pushed the paper across to Seán Duff. The little man nearly fell from his precarious perch on the bar stool. His face wore a look of utter astonishment.

"Is it joking, you are, mister?" he asked coldly.

I frowned, having no understanding of what was wrong.

"About what?" I asked bemused.

"What is your name?" demanded Dan, framing his words carefully.

"It's there on the paper. My name is Trezela."

I thought that I began to see why they might be surprised. I am used to astonishment or some slighting comment when I tell people my name. I gave a deep sigh.

"My name is Harlyn Trezela. It's an old Cornish name."

But their expressions carried more than simply a questioning of my odd sounding name. There was awe on their faces and something else... something I couldn't quite fathom nor understand.

I gestured in irritation.

"I'm not Cornish," I went on, endeavoring to explain. "But my grandfather was. He settled in Sheffield at the turn of the century. That's where I come from."

Dan seemed to recover himself first and gazed intently on the piece of grubby envelope on which I had jotted down my name and address.

"Tell me, sir," he said quietly, "how long ago was your family connected with this place?"

I asked him what he meant by the question and when he repeated it I replied that my family had no connection with Ireland. In truth, I began to think he was rather weird and decided that I should drink up and be on my way. But he was staring at me in that curiously awed way. The little man, Seán Duff, was silent. It was then that I identified the look in his eyes. It was almost a look of animosity.

"No connection? Are you sure? No connection at all?"

"None at all," I said slowly, as if I were dealing with someone hard of comprehension. "The name's Cornish, not Irish. Why should there be a connection?"

The bar owner shook his head slowly.

"Mister, are you saying that you have never heard of the old Mountmayne house down the road here?"

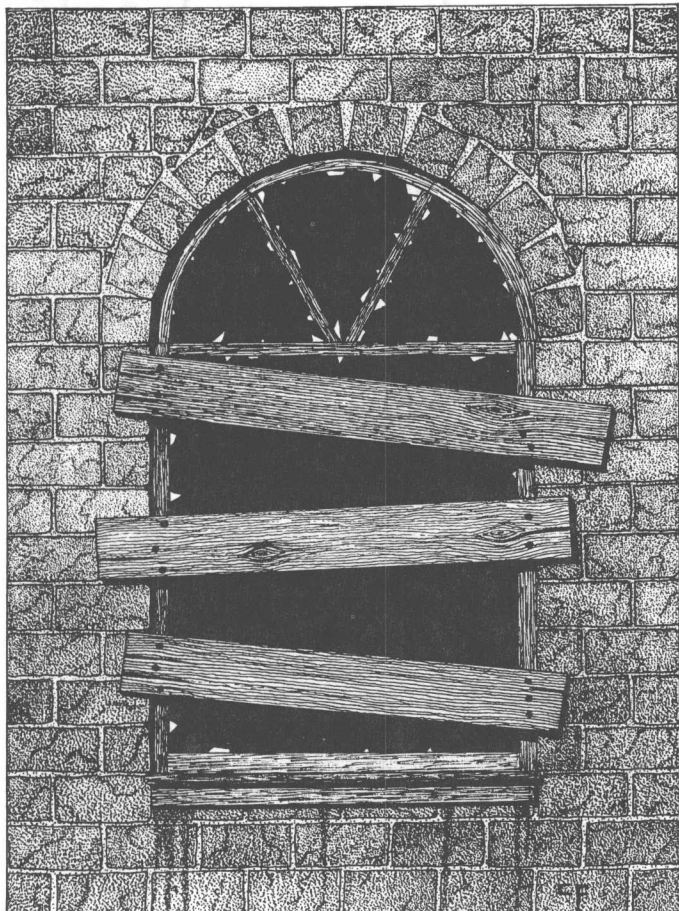
"Never," I affirmed. "Now what is all this about? Is it some kind of joke?"

Both men exchanged a long glance.

"'Tis no joke, mister." It was Seán who spoke now. "Castle Mountmayne is one of those old Anglo-Irish houses built in the eighteenth century. The earls of Mountmayne lived there until the days of the Land War. That was in the late nineteenth century when the old feudal landlord system was overturned in Ireland. You must remember... the times of the terrible evictions, the Land League, Captain Boycott, whose name has become part of the English language, and the dreadful happenings at Lough Mask?"

I sighed impatiently.

"I am not well versed in history. To be



honest, I fail to see what Castle... what's-itsname?... has to do with me."

"Aren't I telling you? Castle Mountmayne has been empty now these last hundred years. It is being demolished now and aren't I working on that demolition?"

Dan nodded, still staring at me strangely.

"Seán has been working up at the old place these last few weeks."

"Only this morning," interposed Seán Duff, "I was pulling down some cupboards in the old house when I found a tin box."

He paused and licked his lips. They seem to have gone cracked and dried.

"It was an old box, tucked away at the back of a wooden cupboard. The tin box had the name Trezela on it. Harlyn Trezela."

I started chuckling.

Now I knew that it was a joke. A tin box with my name in a house in Ireland, where none of my family had ever been before, and which just happened to have been found when I was walking through one of the most desolate spots on my very first visit to the country. Who were they kidding?

"Come on, then," I smiled. "What's the punch line?"

"It's true, I swear it," replied Seán Duff.

"What's the catch?" I insisted.

Seán half rose in temper but Dan motioned him to stay where he was.

Dan glanced at me and shook his head seriously.

"What Seán says is true. In fact, he brought the tin box here not an hour since, wondering what to do with it."

I had a superior smile on my face now.

"In that case, perhaps you'll show it to me."

That would put paid to this nonsense, I thought in satisfaction. We would come to the meaning of their silly joking now.

Without a word, the bar owner reached under his bar and placed an object on the top of the counter before me.

It was a small metal box, some nine inches by six inches by three inches deep. It was rusty and dirt covered and had obviously lain discarded for many years.

My eyes went to the still legible calligraphy on top of the box.

They grew wide and my mind began to race.

There was no doubting the truth of the men's statement.

There was emblazoned the name: *Harlyn Trezela, 1880.*

I shook my head with disbelief.

"It's not possible."

"You might be right, mister. We find a box a century old and the very morning we find it, along you come, claiming the same name and yet saying that you are a stranger to the country. Just who are you, mister?"

"I am who I say I am," I said, almost whispering, trying to understand the bizarre coincidence.

Dan smiled ruefully.

"Perhaps now, mister, we should ask you to prove you are who you say you are?"

In a stupor I reached into my pocket and handed across my driving license. Both men bent to examine it. Seán Duff let out a long, low whistle. Indeed, I saw his hand go up as if he were going to perform a genuflection. Then he let it fall.

"Tis true, then. True, right enough. But what can it mean?"

I was staring at the box a long time.

Eventually, Dan said: "It bears your name."



Perhaps you should open it. We have already done so. It contains a letter. I was only saying to Seán before you came in that he should take it down to the Guards at Lenybrien."

"The Guards?" I tried to draw my mind away from the hypnotic attraction of the box.

"The Gárda Síochána, the po'lis," explained Seán Duff in irritation.

"Is there anything inside besides the letter?" I asked.

"Only the letter in a packet. A packet in oilskins. We replaced it after we read it," Dan said.

I leant forward, rather in a dream, and eased open the rusty hinges. It was obvious that it had recently been inspected for the lid opened easily enough. And it was true what they had told me. Inside lay an oblong packet of oilskin. I carefully unfolded it onto the bar and out fell a yellowing envelope.

It was addressed to Peggy Trezela. The name meant nothing to me. I knew of no one in my family of that name.

Carefully, I drew out the folded sheets of paper which were inside the envelope and opened them. They, too, were yellowing and faded, and covered in brown spidery calligraphy. It was easy to read and I read, fascinated and oblivious to the impatient sounds from my two curious companions.

Castle Mountmayne,  
Co. Waterford

September 11, 1881

Dearest Peggy,

I am afraid that this will be the last letter that you will receive from me. I fear that my remaining days on this earth are not long. Forgive me, darling, therefore, if I write with brevity of my affection for you. Know, too, that my thoughts are ever with you. God keep you.

Darling, you know the circumstances of my coming to this place. However, I must needs repeat the occasion of my arrival here, in order, perhaps, to clarify matters in my own troubled mind.

I was invalided out of my regiment in November, 1880, having been wounded in

the disaster which overtook our British garrison in Maiwand, in that accursed country of Afghanistan. In July, the rebel, Ayub Khan, had stormed Maiwand, just west of Kandahar, and killed nearly a thousand of our men. I was one of a mere 160 left wounded who managed to escape to Kandahar. Kandahar was relieved by General Roberts some time later and I was transported to India and back home. But such was my wound, I was no longer deemed capable of service to Her Majesty's army.

What was I, an ex-infantry captain with a permanent limp, to do in life? What could I offer you, whom I had promised to marry and support on my return as a victorious hero from the Afghan war? Indeed, what could I offer now that I had returned merely a crippled man with no private income to sustain me?

That was when I renewed the acquaintanceship of Justin Mountmayne, who had been the colonel of my regiment. He was a good sort. A man of sensitive humor and joviality who, assessing correctly my predicament, immediately offered me a job on his Irish estates as his agent. He owned three thousand acres in Co. Waterford which produced an income of nearly nine hundred pounds a year. Apparently, Mountmayne had an intense dislike of Ireland and never went there, not even to visit his estates. Therefore, my task and duty was to ensure the estates were kept in order, live in the Mountmayne mansion, a strange stately pile called Castle Mountmayne, though anything less like a castle you cannot imagine. It is simply a grandiose 18th Century manor. In addition to this it was also my task to collect the rents from the tenant farmers.

How I jumped at the chance for it not only offered me a rent free mansion but also an income of one hundred pounds a year.

You'll recall, my dear Peggy, how we decided that we should marry immediately and then I should set out for Mountmayne alone to prepare the way before

you followed to our new home.

I was glad that I had gone on alone, as matters turned out.

Castle Mountmayne was a grim, dour and deserted place. The peasantry were suspicious and sullen. There were rumors of the illegal Land Leaguers active in the area but generally there was no trouble. No evictions. The rents were fair and Mountmayne gave as much security of tenure as could be expected of him to the poor tenant farmers. Yet there was a feeling of gloom and foreboding about the estate. The very name of Mountmayne seemed to inspire sullen hatred among the local people. I was appalled, for there was never a more worthy man than Colonel Justin Mountmayne.

To give you an example of the depth of feeling, when my carriage passed through the gates of the estate, there was a bunch of brooding peasants lined up to watch its conveyance to the house. I saw several fists shaken and one old woman leapt forward almost into the path of the horse and spat, crying: "Remember Black John's curse, Mountmayne."

It was then I discovered that the people had mistakenly thought I was the new heir to Mountmayne and when my true identity became known, the people became less hostile but still retaining a great deal of reserve.

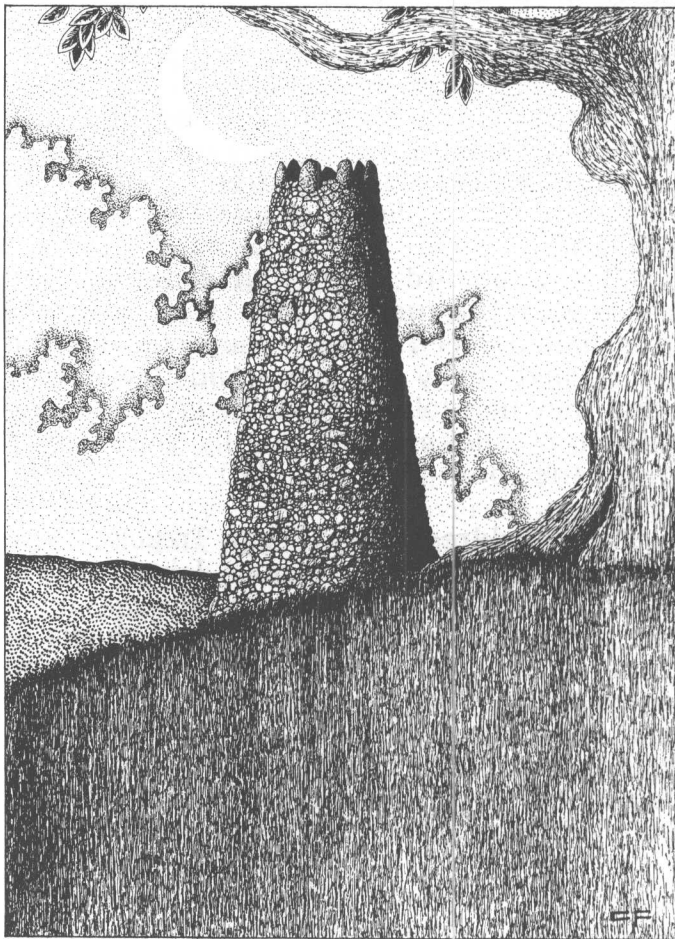
It was only after I had been here several weeks that I uncovered the dark secret of Mountmayne's family and the reason why Justin Mountmayne had never come to claim his inheritance in person. Three generations of his family had met violent deaths here. Jasper Mountmayne had been killed in a hunting accident in 1846; Jervis Mountmayne had drowned in a nearby lake in 1857 and Justin's elder brother, Jodocus, had died of a heart attack on Fascum mountain in 1879.

Clearly there seemed to be a curse on the Mountmayne family. The local peasants firmly believed it.

Well, as I say, things began to improve a little when I made clear that I was in no way related to Justin Mountmayne and

that I was merely employed as his agent.

Eventually, the overseer, a dour man called Roe, began to speak with me more freely and it was from him that I eventually learnt of the local belief concerning the Mountmayne curse.



It seems that during the years the locals refer to as "The Great Hunger," a period in the mid 1840's when a terrible famine gripped Ireland and destroyed two and a half million of its population, Jasper Mountmayne lived on his estate. He was the 9th earl of Mountmayne, a family who had won their title and lands at the battle of the Boyne while fighting for William of Orange. By all accounts, Jasper was given to an evil temper, was a wild, profane man who delighted in his feudal grip over the surrounding countryside. He was absolute lord of life and death on his estate.

The story went that one day, while out riding to hounds, which was a favorite occupation, his pack picked up the spoor



of a fox and followed it across the mountain of Fascum, which over-shadows the estate. The chase was tough but the fox was a young vixen and she was pregnant. The poor beast eventually holed up, exhausted.

Mountmayne and his hunting cronies gathered round for the kill.

It was then that a young peasant girl, Síle, appeared. She was pregnant herself, the wife of one of the tenant farmers named Seán Dubh, the name means Black John, Sheehan. She cried out, rebuking the huntsmen for chasing a pregnant beast and she placed herself before the pack of hounds, shielding the fox for a while and so managed to divert their attention that the vixen succeeded in slipping away to freedom.

The anger in Mountmayne, deprived of his sport, was so great that he slashed out in uncontrolled rage at the young woman with his whip, cutting open her face. The blood began to run. This terrible deed excited the hounds and they, thinking the poor woman to be a kill, leapt upon the unfortunate in attack. By the time Mountmayne's horrified companions managed to drag the hounds away, she was in a bad condition. One of Mountmayne's hunting colleagues took her in his own carriage to Waterford where she died within a few days not only from her terrible injuries but raving and insane from the experience.

Now a strange thing happened. Mountmayne had always seen human life on his estate as cheap, as, indeed, had his forebears before him, for they say that there had been no less than two hundred executions on his estate in the wake of the uprising in 'Ninety-Eight with the captured rebellious peasants being killed by boiling pitch being poured on their heads. Locally, this was called, in the Gaelic, a *cáip báis*, or death cap. The words have since entered English currency as putting the "kibosh" on something. Meaning to end it. Therefore, Jasper Mountmayne did not see the death of Black John's wife as anything to fret over, nor the death of

her unborn child as a matter of concern. Had they not ruined a good day's sport?

One evening, however, Black John stood before the house and called out Mountmayne. The man was hysterical from his grief. He cursed Mountmayne to the seventh generation. Fear and death would haunt the generations from Jasper through all his offspring. Jasper, laughingly, called for his overseer, had Black John whipped and thrown off his estate.

The next day Jasper went riding by himself across the mountain of Fascum, a place where he usually rode. The estate workers swore that day they heard the curious yelping cry of foxes on the mountain. That was unusual as foxes are a quiet, almost silent species which have come to fear man who hunts and destroys them. They are quick to avoid announcing their presence. Yet people swear they heard the wailing bark echoing a long, long time through the mountain stillness.

When Jasper Mountmayne failed to return by evening, his overseer and some estate workers conducted a search for him. They found him in a hollow below the mountain, his horse standing nervously by. He had been ripped to pieces as if by savage animals. One worker swore that only a pack of wild wolves could inflict such damage. But the wolf packs had been depleted in Ireland. In the 17th Century the English authorities had offered rewards: an English soldier could claim £5 for the head of a wolf or, incidentally, for the head of an Irish rebel. By the 19th Century wolves had vanished from the countryside.

The Royal Irish Constabulary, knowing of the curse of Black John, were not so superstitious about the matter. Black John was found in Waterford that evening, boarding a ship for America and arrested. Eventually he was released when the doctor made it clear no human agency could have torn Mountmayne limb from limb in such a manner. On his release, however, Black John repeated the curse that seven generations of the Mountmaynes would have to pay the price

for the death of his wife.

Eleven years later, Jasper Mountmayne's son, Jervis, who had inherited his father's estates but only then came to the area, arrived with a crowd of rowdy friends and a mistress, whose name, recalled Roe, my overseer, was Ella. Apparently, Jervis was already married to some titled English lady and had two sons, Jodocus and Justin, living in London. Jervis seemed as profligate as his father, Jasper.

A week after his arrival, Jervis disappeared and a search was made.

The search party eventually made their way across Fascum to Coumshingaun where lies one of the most impressive sights in these mountains, an upland lake set among a cirque of cliffs rising sheer from the water on three sides to a height of thirteen hundred feet. Locals will tell you that the dark waters are bottomless. That's as may be. The lake is certainly very deep, dark and dank. Some bolder spirits have fished there for brown trout but they are no good to the taste. Locals will tell you that the place is haunted and that the trout are the reincarnation of lost souls. No local would eat them.

It was in that dark, isolated lake that they found Jervis Mountmayne, floating face downward, fully clothed.

A local sergeant of the Royal Irish Constabulary reported that Jervis, judging from a series of footprints he had discovered nearby, had actually walked into the lake. The local doctor pointed to the fact that only the toes of his boots made an impression on the muddy shore which indicated that he went on tiptoe. No one could quite work out the reason why. The curious thing is that around the footprints, indeed, overlapping them were the prints of what were taken to be dogs. Yet the overseer swore that the Mountmayne's pack of hounds were in their kennels that day. The inquest found that Jervis, in walking or tiptoeing into the lake, had committed suicide while the balance of his mind was disturbed. But the coroner failed to mention what had

caused that disturbance and why a man in the prime of life, with no worries whatsoever, had taken his life.

Roe, the overseer, told me that Mountmayne's mistress, the lady called Ella, had soon after returned to London and rumor had it that she later gave birth to Jervis' illegitimate child.

Finally, and this is now only a few years ago, Jodocus Mountmayne had grown to manhood and went to Ireland to claim the estate. He was Colonel Justin's elder brother. He was barely on the estate two weeks when search parties were called out again for he was missing. He was found the next morning on the slopes of Mount Fascum. He was dead. His face was an immobile mask of fear. The local doctor was called out and averred that the man had died from a heart attack and that there was nothing sinister in the manner of his death.

The locals, who like to embellish a good tale, reckoned that they heard the jubilant bark of foxes all through the night.

And so, my dear Peggy, the Mountmayne estate, across the slopes of Fascum, has become the inheritance of Justin Mountmayne. I cannot blame the Colonel for not wanting to claim his inheritance in person. He did well to employ an agent, myself, to act as his representative while he remained in the safety of London where Black John's curse does not appear to extend.

That much I thought only a few days ago. Now I am not so sure. Things are happening which I do not understand.

I was out walking a few days ago when I saw, on the mountain slope about fifty yards above me, a large dog... or so I thought. Looking more closely, I saw it was a fox, slightly larger than the usual run of foxes. Its sharp features stared keenly down at me. It was a beautiful creature and I realised that it was heavy in pregnancy. A great vixen with steely, bright eyes.

I halted and examined the creature. After a while, it rose languidly, gave a yelp, and moved off sedately.



That night, I awoke from my sleep, and lay in my bed with sweat pouring from me and wondering what had disturbed me. To my ears came curious wailing sounds. At first I thought it might be a child screaming in the night, then I imagined a group of cats crying. The sound created such a weird tingling feeling on the nape of the neck. I lay fearful for a while. The noise died away and eventually I returned to sleep.

In the morning, my overseer looked troubled. He inquired whether I had heard the sound of foxes echoing from the mountain nearby. I replied that I had not realised the sound was that of foxes, never having heard the like before. Then he said a curious thing: he asked me whether I was sure that I was not a Mountmayne.

I did not understand then. I laughed and replied that I wished I was and that this beautiful estate belonged to me.

The following night the sounds once more roused me from slumber and my sleep was disturbed again.

That afternoon I was walking across the mountain side to one of the cottages of the tenant farmers when I encountered a girl sitting on a rock by the roadside. It was obvious that she was a local girl, dark of hair, white of skin, with natural red on her cheeks and eyes of bright grey-green. She had those attractive Irish looks for which the colleens, as they are locally called, are renown. Her feet were shoeless, her thin dress worn and she made no attempt to hide her condition — that she was pregnant.

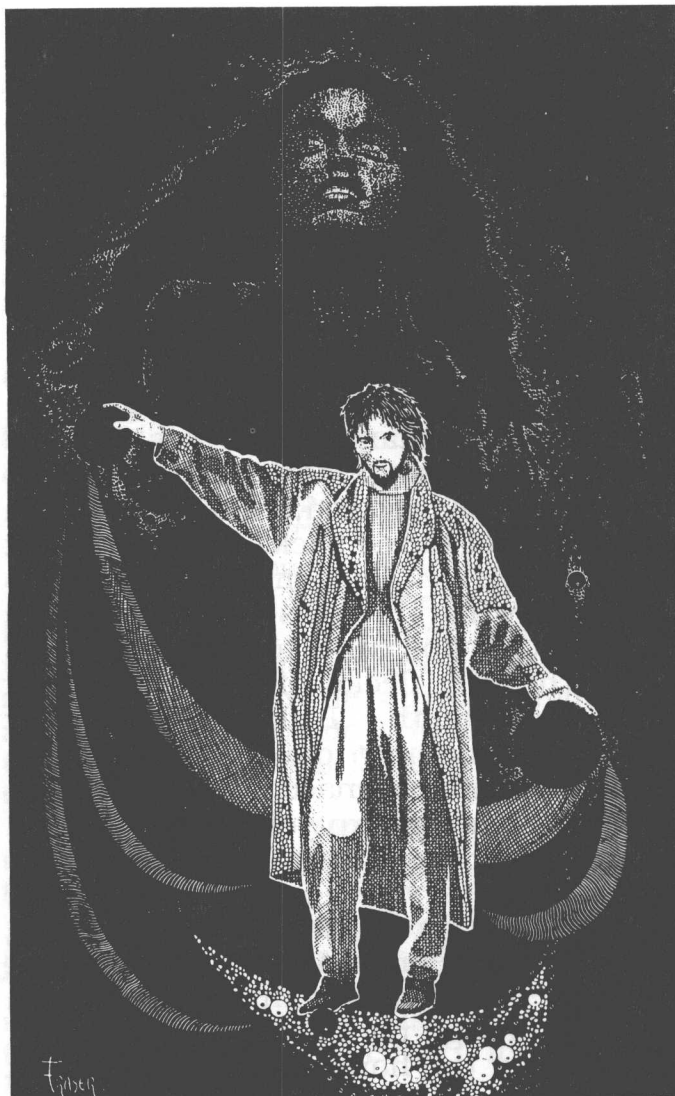
"Good afternoon," I said politely, raising my hat.

"Bad cess to you, Mountmayne," she replied, so sweetly that for a moment I thought she had politely returned my greeting, until the meaning of her words sunk into my brain.

I frowned in irritation

"Now what call do you have to abuse me?" I demanded angrily. "My name is Harlyn Trezela."

Her sweet, smiling expression did not alter.



"I have the right to curse all Mountmaynes no matter what guise they present themselves in."

"I am not a Mountmayne!" I stormed, my anger increasing. "When will you people get that into your heads? I have had enough of people making mistakes. I am Mountmayne's agent but I am not related to the family."

She chuckled. I have seldom heard a sound so devoid of humor.

"Remember the curse of Seán Dubh? Even unto the seventh generation."

Then she rose and walked away with a rapid pace which seemed incongruous to her condition.

I stood staring after her a moment or two and then shrugging continued my

journey.

Returning from my visit to the tenant farmer, I was passing along the same road when something made me look up the hillside. The sun was lowering in the sky and its feeble pale rays were spreading themselves over the grey boulders and the now muted colors of the gorse.

I halted.

Not far away, seated on its haunches on a rock, was a fox. I swear, it was the same large, pregnant vixen which I had seen a few days earlier. It was looking at me keenly with its sharp, bright eyes. For the first time, a thrill of fear ran through me. Yet I held my ground, raising my chin defiantly, and stared back. After a while, it rose languidly. This time it opened its jaws, showing its rows of sharp white incisors. My lips came together tightly as I saw the tiny flecks of blood on those white razor teeth. I glanced nervously about for something to defend myself with for I felt a terrible menace.

Then, with a sharp yelp, it turned and disappeared.

It took me a while to return to Castle Mountmayne for my heart was pounding and I had a feeling any time that I might collapse with the strain of the blood surging through my head.

I reached the house and went straight into the study, pouring myself a large brandy and slumping in a chair. The sweat poured freely from me. But gradually my heart ceased its cannonade and my pulse became less rapid.

I knew that something evil was dogging my footsteps. Dogging! The word had come ironically to my mind. That Mountmayne was haunted by evil, that the Mountmayne curse was real, I have little doubt now. But what can it mean, Peggy, that I have seen these things, can feel these things, and I am not a Mountmayne? Does Black John's curse apply to all who come to live in Castle Mountmayne? I do not understand. All I know is that I, too, am cursed, and shall meet an awesome fate which rolls remorselessly and inexorably towards me; I

know that I am helpless against it. I am doomed.

I scribble these lines now, in my study, as darkness approaches. I shall not survive long here.

But I do not understand why. Why me? Why me? Why should I inherit the Mountmayne curse?

My last thoughts will be for you, dearest Peggy.

Your loving husband,

Harlyn Trezela

I sat back, shaking my head in wonder at this astonishing document.

Dan and Seán were examining my expression curiously

"Is it a relative of yours?" demanded Dan.

I shrugged, more bewildered than certain.

"None that I know of. And I know my ancestry back to my grandparents. My grandfather was a Harlyn Trezela but his wife was named Cynthia and he died in 1956 at the age of seventy-five. So he could not have been this Harlyn Trezela who calls his wife Peggy."

"True enough," remarked Dan, scanning the yellowing pages again. "Your grandfather would not be born at this time. And this Harlyn Trezela had no children when he was writing. It seems that he had only just married before coming to Mountmayne."

"Nevertheless, it is a curiosity. Is it true what he says about Mountmayne?"

Seán Duff grinned wryly.

"Sure, there were stories of a curse which the old ones used to talk of. But they were stories. Mind you, it was about this time when Castle Mountmayne and the estate fell into disuse and broke up. Several people grabbed the land after the Land Purchase Acts at the end of the last century. They managed to get advances to buy their own small plots. Come to think of it, the last time Castle Mountmayne was used was in 1921 when it was converted into a barracks for the 'Black and Tans.' It was attacked by the republicans and set on fire. Several people were killed there, including the commander of the Tans, a Major Mayne. There was some talk that he was related to



the Mountmaynes. But Castle Mountmayne has been empty ever since."

While he was speaking, my mind was still racing as to who this Harlyn Trezela could have been? Some relative, that seemed likely. That much was obvious by the name. But what relation was he to me?

"Do you have a phone?" The idea came into my mind quite suddenly and I acted on it.

Dan nodded to a cubicle in the corner of the bar.

It did not take me long to get through to my Aunt Rita in Sheffield.

"What? You're ringing from Ireland? Isn't that expensive, Hal?" she demanded. The family always called me Hal.

I suppressed a smile.

"Not really, aunt. Look, you know a bit about the Trezela family, don't you? I mean, have you heard of another person called Harlyn Trezela?"

"My father, your grandfather, of course..." she began but I cut her short.

"No, not him. This Harlyn Trezela would have lived before grand-dad. His wife was Peggy. But I don't think he had any children."

There was a pause.

"No," Aunt Rita was clearly thinking. "No. All I know is that your grand-dad came to Sheffield from Truro. He was in his early twenties, and that was about Nineteen-Oh-Five."

"Do you know anything about his family before that?"

"No. Why is this important? You've hardly shown an interest in your family while over here and then you go to Ireland and start ringing up wanting your family history. What's happened to you?"

"Nothing, auntie," I replied patiently.

There was an audible sniff.

"Well, the only other thing I know about your grand-dad was that his mother was called Maggie and that his grandmother was called Pernel."

"Pernel?"

"That's right."

"There's some strange names in our family," I commented.

"Look, I have some old papers belonging to your grand-dad. If it's that important, I'll look through them. Why don't you give me a call this evening?"

I agreed to do so and went back to join Dan and Seán at the bar. Seán Duff had already left. He had, apparently, had to return to his demolition job.

"Well? Have you solved the mystery?" asked Dan with interest.

I smiled and shook my head.

"Not much of a mystery," I said. "This Harlyn could only have been some distant relative, if that."

"Yet you share the same name?"

"I know. It's odd. But a lot of people have the same name."

"Not one as distinctive as yours," smiled Dan. He glanced down at the letter, oilskin and tin box. "What will you do with these?"

"Well, it's not mine."

"But the name...?"

I sighed and thought for a while.

"Tell you what. I shall be in this area for the next few days. I'll return here soon. If you keep it, I'll come by here in a day or two and might have made up my mind. I'm asking a relative to do a little research on the family. We might be able to sort it out then."

Dan agreed and together we rewrapped the letter into the oilskin and returned it to the box.

It was late afternoon when I left Dan's bar and began to wander along the valley road. The curious letter was on my mind. Had my namesake gone insane? Had his mind been turned by the tales of a curse? Indeed, what had happened to him? Perhaps he had returned to his beloved Peggy.

Peggy! I suddenly halted. Peggy was a diminutive, a diminutive of Margaret. And Maggie was also a diminutive of Margaret. Maggie. Aunt Rita said that grand-dad called his mother Maggie. Could it be possible?

Was Harlyn Trezela's wife really called Margaret, and he called her Peggy? Had he not returned from Ireland? Had she borne him a son whom she also called Harlyn? And that son had grown up without knowing his father but hearing friends call his mother Maggie?

My mind spun in confusion

I had meant to leave the Fascum area that afternoon and make my way into the neighboring Monavullagh Mountains, the next range to the Comeraghs, to examine their highest peak at Seefin, but something

kept me in the area. Perhaps it was a longing to clear up the mystery. I spent the next few hours walking around the old Mountmayne estate. Castle Mountmayne was never a castle but a grand Georgian country house — or had been once. Now it was gaunt, blackened, with charred timbers, standing desolate and lonely in the countryside.

I spent a little time examining it from a distance, for I could see workmen employed on demolition work there and did not want to fall in with Seán Duff again.



Realising that evening was approaching, I decided to pitch my tent on the lower slopes of Fascoum and began searching for a good spot.

The girl was young and pretty and I did not see her until I came abreast of the rock on which she was sitting in the pale early evening sun. She had dark hair, pale skin and bright eyes whose color was difficult to determine, changing between grey and green as the light slanted against them.

"Good evening," I smiled, as I realised her presence.

She stared at me but made no reply. Unusual, I thought, for the Irish were usually courteous to strangers.

"I'm looking for a spot to camp near here. Is there a place with a fresh spring or stream?"

She stared at me silently, until I grew uncomfortable and was about to say something else, wondering whether she was deaf or dumb. But she raised a languid hand and pointed along the track.

I thanked her politely, thinking that I must be right, that she was dumb, and made on.

I'd gone only a few yards when I heard a female voice distinctly say: "Even unto the seventh generation, Mountmayne."

I turned swiftly round, confused and annoyed.

The girl was no longer on the rock. It was as if the earth had swallowed her. I bit my lip wondering why my imagination was playing me tricks. I'd had a long tiring day, it was true, and the curious events at Dan's bar had set my imagination rioting.

Time for rest.

I found a spot by a stream a little farther on and, a short way down the hill, I spied a small roadway and, of all things, a telephone kiosk. The Irish seem to have a habit of sticking telephone kiosks in unexpected, desolate places by roads that come from nowhere and lead to nowhere. The sight of the phone box reminded me of my promise to telephone Aunt Rita. I decided to pitch my tent and have a meal first.

It was a nice, scenic spot to camp, overlooking the ruins of Castle Mountmayne, still standing out dark and gaunt in the gathering dusk. A little way behind the house, quite near to the road where I had spotted the telephone kiosk, was a clump of trees in which I could see another ruin, an odd affair like an old church. I wondered whether it could be a family chapel or perhaps a grandiose piece of architecture for the stables of the house.

It was almost twilight when I went into the cream and green box marked *Telefon*, the interior lit by a dim, dirt covered light-bulb, and checked the direct dialling for Sheffield, England. I fed the coins and dialled. Aunt Rita answered.

"Well, you made me spent an interesting few hours with your grand-dad's papers. What's more it seems that we have a skeleton in the family closet."

"What do you mean, aunt?" I demanded.

"Well, grand-dad's father seems to have been illegitimate."

"Yes," I sighed, slightly impatiently, "but that doesn't sort out my problem, does it?"

"Hang on, Hal. I have your grand-dad's birth certificate. He was born in March, 1882. His father was Harlyn Trezela, deceased, and his mother was Margaret Trezela. Not Peggy but Maggie."

I groaned.

"But Peggy is a diminutive of Margaret," I pointed out.

"Is it, dear?" she replied absently. "Well, the main thing is that I found a birth certificate for another Harlyn Trezela. He was born in 1857. His mother was a Petronella Trezela. The boy was illegitimate. She named him Harlyn but he took her last name for there is no father registered."

I sniffed. "Well, that was happening all the time in the so called Victorian age of morality. Was he the Harlyn Trezela who I'm looking for."

"Well, whoever he was, dear, it would mean that he was only twenty-four when grand-dad was born but according to grand-dad's birth certificate, his father was already dead. It ties in but grand-dad called his grand-mother Pernel not Petronella. It's a different name. There's a reference to her in his papers..."

The beeps sounded and I had no more coins, so I quickly bade Aunt Rita goodbye and said I would be in touch soon.

I turned out of the dimly lit public telephone kiosk into the darkening September evening.

I began to turn my steps back slowly towards my encampment. I realised that it would be dark before I reached it but, thankfully, I had brought my flashlight with me.

I did not think there could be any doubt that Harlyn Trezela, who died when he was twenty-four, was the person who had written the curious letter. Could he have been grand-dad's father? His wife was Peggy, a diminutive of Margaret. Grand-dad's mother was called Maggie, also a diminutive. Harlyn son of Petronella was dead when grand-dad was born in 1882. So, too, was Harlyn, grand-dad's father. They had to be one and the same person. Which meant that Harlyn Trezela had not returned from Ireland. Grand-dad had been

born and brought up without knowing what had happened to his father.

So what had happened to Harlyn Trezela at Mountmayne? Had he fallen to the fabled curse? Had he been driven insane by a morbid fascination with the fate of the Mountmaynes, a morbidity clearly demonstrated in the document which I had been shown. But if he felt threatened by the Mountmayne curse... why? Why was he a victim of a curse which was only to affect the Mountmaynes? It seemed to make no sense at all, even if one believed in the curse of the Mountmaynes.

I suddenly realised that I had been so deep in thought that I had made a wrong turn at the stone wall which led up to where I had pitched my camp and, in the dusk, came to the old overgrown copse which I had spied from the hillside.

I stood, squinting into the darkness. I could just make out the dark shadows of the ruined building, Gothic in form, like an old chapel.

I realised that I had been right in my original assessment of what the building was and that I had wandered into what was once the private chapel and graveyard of the Mountmaynes situated behind the great house.

I was turning away when a headstone obviously newer than the rest of the ancient cracked and decaying memorials caught my eye.

I turned towards it, reaching for my flashlight, for the darkness had descended so quickly that it was no longer possible to read anything in the gloomy twilight.

A simple headstone. It was simply inscribed:

**HARLYN TREZELA, 1857-1881.**

Surprise went through me. Here was the grave of the man whose letter I had read. The man who had borne my name. The grave, I now had little doubt, of my great-grandfather.

I heard a whisper in the shadows. The voice of a woman mocking me.

"Even unto the seventh generation, Mountmayne."

I swung round, heart pounding, but could see nothing.

The hairs on the nape of my neck rose.



"Ridiculous," I said aloud, almost to give courage to myself. "If there was a curse on the Mountmayne family, it had nothing to do with the Trezelas."

I returned my gaze to the headstone.

I felt sorry for the man, this unknown ancestor of mine. If Aunt Rita had been right, he had a hard life. Illegitimate, yet he managed to become an officer in the army. Someone with influence, in those days, would have had to buy him a commission. Wounded in the Afghan wars, crippled and invalided out. Married. Given a job in Ireland as a land agent. He had died without seeing his wife again nor knowing that she was pregnant and would give him a son. A sad sort of life.

My mind suddenly seemed to stop at one thought.

My mouth went dry.

The word *illegitimate* had stayed in my mind, clanging like an alarm bell.

What was it that he had written? Jervis Mountmayne had arrived on the estate in 1857 "with a crowd of rowdy friends and a mistress, whose name recalled Roe, my overseer, was Ella... Ella had soon after returned to London and rumor had it that she later gave birth to Jervis' illegitimate child."

Ella! Ella! Petronella! Petronella Trezela! Oh God!

And grand-dad called his grand-mother Pernel. And what was Pernel, I suddenly recalled, but one of the accepted contractions for Petronella!

Harlyn Trezela had been a Mountmayne without knowing it. The son of Jervis!

"Even unto the seventh generation!" came the mocking sibilant laughter in the darkness.

Harlyn was the fourth to suffer the Mountmayne curse.

He was my great-grandfather. Grandfather, Father, and me — three more generations. I was the seventh generation! Even unto the seventh generation! The curse spoke of *generations* and not *heirs* of Mountmayne.

I felt a terrible icy fear grip me. Panic sent my limbs into action. I turned and began to run from the decaying old burial ground.

I stumbled and almost fell into a large hole which lay across my path. I regained my balance and, thankfully, I did not lose grip of my flashlight but shone it before me.

The hole was long and narrow. It had the appearance of a freshly dug grave.

There was a stone at the head. A fairly new quarried stone.

A man was standing behind it grinning in the darkness. It was old Seán Duff. Seán Dubh? Black John! He was pointing, pointing and grinning. I followed the indication of his finger.

Inscribed on the stone was:

**HARLYN TREZELA. 1952-1992**

Around me from the encompassing blackness of the mountains came a series of wailing barks, strange child-like cries in the night.

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## *Rage of Daedalus*

Quiet rage kindled by the foolish boasting of youth provokes restless itching palms to violent fantasy directed at the tender ivory pedestal of flesh and muscle precariously supporting the rose-petal cheeks and fawn-like eyes of Talus. The graceful movement of these floating detached hands through

undefined space and time betrays the choreography of a nightmare unfolding in slow motion; ending only when the terrified scream of the victim is echoed by that of the sweating dreamer and consciousness is restored once again

ADAM DONALDSON POWELL

# *The Day Nothing Happened*

by Tim Allison

At midmorning the sun exploded.

Cagal stopped without going off balance, waited. Street, storefront and parking meters stabilized from afterimage.

He looked up in time to see it fading, withdrawing: a major elemental large enough to achieve a perspective eclipse effect, or in this case, a nova. He shrugged. The moon had already fallen six times since daybreak. Daffodils along the roadways had nodded at his approach, gouted blood. He should have stayed in the office.

But there was no work there. He had invented, selected, the place just to keep him from the house during days. And this morning early spring had urged him away from the solar powered radio where he listened to static and the manual pawnshop typewriter where he composed notes-for-a-bottle.

At least he was getting some exercise.

Far in the east something rumbled. Another building collapsed. The elemental's energetic display must have been enough to nudge the structure as it poised over some new fissure crept in from the Gulf Rift. He knew by the time he walked there the place would have rejuvenated.

He had once camped out long enough to observe the Rift itself — opening in slow motion, the waters filling, turgidly, till a low tide meandered upstream, laved the highway along Riverside. Then the whole thing sealed. Once or twice he thought he had glimpsed the Chthon whose cyclical phase shift accounted for the activity. A real quake would have decimated this whole region.

On First Avenue a werewolf charged him. Daylight sensitive, the thing may have been blinded by false sun pyrotechnics, but they functioned primarily on smell anyway. There was no reason for it not to have recognized his smell. He rapped it on the nose and the beast fled, whining.

A block farther a combination Black Dog and Wild Goat had been trying to materialize. It sensed Cagal's mood was

unchanged from normal and erased.

He turned left, deciding on an early lunch.

His favorite restaurant was nearly exhausted but he found a can of chili in the storage room and heated it by a sticks and trash fire on the elaborately parqueted floor.

A football-sized cockroach watched him for a while and went away.

At a nearby liquor store he located a water-stained brown sack and filled it with random bottles. Brands ceased to matter when you did not have budgetary considerations.

A giant rat, possibly Sumatran, nosed from a second-hand clothing shop across the street. They shared looks of mutual disregard.

Once in the park, he broke open a fifth, found it to be cheap red wine. Uncritically, he noted his tastes had not changed much. He had chosen mostly domestic wine and even less expensive bourbons.

Griffins basked in the sunlight. A stone lion by the Library rose, yawned, resettled. The tongue of books negligently scattered across the archive steps chittered at him.

Considerably soured, Cagal decided to go home, carrying his sack and shambling like a derelict.

Dead weeds had lengthened a bit along the drive, more paint had peeled, a few more lozenges were gone from the old leaded glass windows. The place had a cobwebby look.

Two lots away water lethargically leaked into an old basement basin, scummed over. The Kraken was submerged except for one eye and several tentacles. It was picking frogs and slugs from the overgrowth, inspecting each and letting it go. Apparently it was looking for one particular organism.

Beyond the cemetery something howled. He had never found the source but by now it was too familiar to incite investigation.

Brevet-Major Foucault met him at the door, fully dressed as usual. He wore his parade saber and two feet of rope around his neck. Foucault had been hanged as a spy, denied a gentleman's execution and thereby doomed to wander. More importantly, as he was fond of relating, he was doomed to wander ever after in the uniform of a Yankee Captain. There is hell even after war.



Count Zaroff lay in his coffin in the parlor. The Count was daily growing more pale and wasted. Mostly he was having to live off insects and rodents, putting him in direct competition with the African Flesh Eater which tendrilled weak and cranky among the draperies. Well, Cagal had only so much blood to give. When he was gone they would have lean times indeed.

He stepped around the daily sacrifice in the kitchen to put away his liquor. The Covenanters had stretched a young and voluptuous woman on a makeshift altar and were ceremoniously disrobing and threatening her with steak knives. He ignored the clamor, which was rather muted anyway. They had done this so much they could probably carry on in their sleep — if they ever slept.

Outside a squadron of flying saucers strafed, flickering lights and making a grotesque turbine drone. They came by once more but, failing to attract attention, planed off, presumably to trouble national monuments or do mysterious things in the desert.

The Dweller Beneath snatched at his ankle from under a loose floor board, snapped its fingers. He kicked. The whole house shuddered with a lugubrious wail.

Cagal entered the den.

"Time of day for a drink, Suh. May I sarve you?"

Major Foucault poured sipping whiskey into the two tumblers, skimmed to the coffee table.

"Thanks."

"Mah pleasah, Suh."

"Well, can't you even say hello?"

Cagal turned in his overstuffed chair and sighed. The lamia, her sacrificial role complete, had resurrected without scars. Her gown was designed to emphasize rather than conceal and she posed, technically within the thing, in the doorway. Cagal eyed thrusting hips, gravity-defying breasts, hair as thick and long and dark as midnight reveries.

Major Foucault, who had been about to sit, leaped upright. For a moment he appeared entranced, devoted to scanning an appreciable expanse of bare lamia leg. He attempted to swallow. This was a reminder of his limited corporeality. Forlorn, he glanced to the whiskey, remembered he could not drink either, and nearly burst into tears. He finally sat.

An assortment of eyes formed and chased each other in the corner; a grating voice: "Beware, beware. He who calls upon me in his ignorance risks death; terrible, fast death on black wings."

"Hello," Cagal said to the lamia, and to the demon, "Go away."

"Beware, the ultimate curse —"

"Look, I'm not having any." Cagal eased farther into the chair. "So go away. None of you will hurt me, we've already been through that. Without me, you guys would have to haunt each other."

"Well." The demon showed a fanged maw, bruised visage and huge talons. "You don't have to be catty about it."

"Besides," Cagal added an afterthought, "I didn't invoke you."

"Hrump." It vanished.

Cagal had once taken the time to move part of his books to this room, having some plans for a bachelor's study, a hermit's retreat. The shelves were made of teak and gold bullion. At least one city corporation



had lost its conference tables and one bank stood bereft of intrinsic assets, empty of vault. An arm load of books shot off, skittered on the thick carpet.

Cagal ignored the poltergeist.

The closet door knocked.

"Oh, shit." He finished his drink, walked to the door. "I'm not back at the house for five minutes and everyone wants me to notice them." He wrenched the door and a murdered body flopped onto the floor like a broken ironing board, then obligingly sprang up to be re-enclosed. It had crashed a few times too many. Discolorations had run together, bones protruded, clothes had tattered. It looked like a once favorite toy fallen on bad times. Cagal slammed the door.

"You said you are all we have left." The lamia, pouting, called huskily, swayed toward him. "You still found none of the others?"

"Nope." He wiped his face, drank the Major's bourbon. The hanged soldier gave him a truly piteous glance and for a moment Cagal feared the old boy was going to lapse into one of his maudlin reminiscences about plantations and banjo-playing slaves and cottillions.

"Sometimes I think you don't hunt very hard."

She laid a long-fingered, heavily jewelled hand on his shoulder, massaged.

"Look, kid, it's the same old story. Nothing on the radio. I take a different route to and from work and there's no sign anyone has returned. Wherever humanity ran off to, they left no clue as to their destination and they show no sign of coming back." He smiled cruelly. "Like I said, I'm all you've got. Besides, let us not be circumspect. If humans came back you guys would stampede so thickly after the fresh meat I could follow your dust trail across the lake. I do not have to watch for humans. I only have to watch you."

"I don't like to cross water."

"Never mind." He poured another whiskey.

Through the window he noticed things were beginning to stir in the graveyard. Clods spurted, a marker-slab toppled and elicited a muffled groan. The dead were getting ready to rise. Which meant time had warped again. Which meant he had one

more boring, predictable night ahead. Ghouls would be next.

The Count would be up soon, grumbling about his diet.

Corpses would rattle up and down the sidewalks most of the night.

Sooner or later Foucault would forget himself and start to lament about the riverboats.

And of course he would drink enough to let the lamia seduce him. And of course she would try to startle him by turning into a moldering heap or a Hamadryad or something right in the middle of everything. And then he would have to spend a couple of hours consoling her and telling her what a really good joke it had been so he could get her finished off and get some sleep.

At least the Slime was still visiting kin on the east coast. He would be spared the nightly battery of checker games. I wish the damned thing was smart enough to learn chess, he thought. Foucault tried but the game always reminded him of some great battle.

He sat and leaned forward and let the lamia rub his back.

"Did you have *such* a hard day, then? Poor dear," she whispered.

"A day like any other. Nothing happened at all. Not a thing."

A noise like a freight train of tin cans went over as the house darkened.

Sunset had passed. The dragons were taking wing.

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## *The Silver Moon*

Driving somber country  
road stars hum and greet me  
with words of ancient night.  
Beyond the silent din  
of forest's breath streets  
scream mad and light demands  
attention. Heaven consecrates  
the full moon, his scarred face  
grins surreal in my mirror  
reflecting my derangement.

JONATHAN M. BERKOWITZ

# *The Latest Great Cliché Horror Story*

by Charles Garofalo

Old Flynn almost got him as he drove out of town. Jeff had been fool enough to take a side road, figuring there'd be fewer people around to see him slinking away. The old man must have figured on that. There'd be no witnesses that way either. He probably had a pal watching every other exit as well.

Flynn stepped from behind a tree and cut loose with a rifle as Jeff drove toward him. His shooting was a little off — it only put holes in the front windshield and seat. Jeff's action was automatic. Twisting the wheel, he gunned the car head on at Flynn, trying to hit him. Flynn just barely managed to get out of the way, dropping his weapon and stumbling over a root as he did so.

Jeff was only slightly relieved when he saw Flynn picking himself up in the rear view mirror. He didn't want to face a manslaughter rap, but God, it would've been satisfying to run the old bastard over.

He should've known they weren't going to let him go so easily. The papers were already screaming about the killer who beat the rap on a lousy little legal technicality. The cops had thought it only just to hold off arresting him a few minutes while poor Sally Flynn's father and two of his friends "worked" on her murderer. A couple witnesses admitted seeing the police stand by as the suspect was beaten and attempts were made to make him confess. It had been enough to get the case thrown out of court, reluctant though the judge was to let such an obvious killer get away with it.

Jeff felt the hate building up again as he thought about Sally Flynn. Vicious, black-mailing little bitch! He recalled those three bitter weeks before the murder. Stabbing had been too good for her!

He'd guessed it was only a matter of time before some of the local tough guys tried to pull the vigilante bit on him. Old Man Flynn now had the chance to accuse Jeff of purposely trying to run him over. In the frayed calm that followed the adrenalin

burst at Flynn's murder attempt, Jeff wondered if the police could arrest him for having a bullethole in his windshield.

*Eyes on the road, you idiot, eyes on the road!* He'd missed a tree by inches. Corby Road wasn't exactly a dirt road, but it had been a long time since they'd paved it. He was bouncing all over the potholes, little hills, and general irregularities in the neglected asphalt. He wasn't even sure where Corby Road went. Getting away had seemed more important than where he was getting to.

Jeff's cautious driving came to naught when a crow flew out of the forest and crashed into his windshield. Already weakened by the bullethole, it gave way and smashed inward. Jeff, his nerves brittle from the shooting attempt, screamed as the glass and the dead bird came tumbling in. He threw up his arms to protect his face and promptly hit a tree. For a while after that he just sat there stunned, not quite realizing he had escaped unhurt.

He swore when he finally got out to inspect the car. The grill was caved in, the radiator spurting, one of the headlights gone, yet, it was a tow job if ever he saw one. He didn't have any idea where he was, though he knew that the back roads were very good places for getting lost. Possibly Flynn was following him as well, for all he knew.

He looked up at a steadily graying sky. Thunder promptly rumbled, as if God had been waiting for that particular cue.

"Yeah," said Jeff quietly, "it figures."

No sense staying by the car. Even if he wasn't being chased, the busted window would let the rain right in there with him.

How the hell had he gotten into this? How did he manage to pick the road where Flynn was waiting for him? How could one lousy crow manage to smash a window like that? Christ, it was like something out of a novel or a movie. Coincidence on coincidence. Not only were the odds against him, but they seemed to have ganged up on him too.

Jeff started heading down the road, keeping by the woods so he could make a break for them if Flynn happened to drive up.

\* \* \*

By the end of the first hour Jeff had

worked himself into a vicious state of hostility. No driver had offered him a lift. No driver had come by, period. He hadn't found anything, not a house, not a store, not a phone booth, not even a sign to tell him where he was. For the past few minutes a light rain had been falling, and it was falling harder and harder every minute.

Jeff ran through his head the way the owner of the house he would eventually find would react. He, or she, would be hostile, suspicious of this wet, bedraggled bum claiming he wanted to use the phone. If, as was probably the case, the person'd seen his picture in the papers it would make a terrific scene. The angry citizen confronting the fiend who'd stabbed his girl-friend, then come around *his* neighborhood asking favors. Jeff almost hoped it'd be a guy and he'd be willing to throw a punch at the murderous punk. He was aching to take his anger out on somebody.

He had already discarded the idea of a store or phone booth. Too convenient, the way his luck was running.

Finally he spotted a house, set way back off the road. It didn't look occupied, with all the shades down and dark. It wasn't too inviting either, being one of these big imposing half-mansions they were so fond of back in the nineteen-twenties. Jeff could imagine some beer baron, or perhaps some dabbler in stock turned millionaire, having this big ornate horror built to show off, out here in the boondocks where no one could see it. He wondered how the original owners had fared when the depression hit.

Well, the rain was starting to beat hard, and the thunder was getting frequent and loud enough to get on his nerves. If there was nobody home, he'd stand there under the overhang. If they were there and wouldn't let him in, he'd ask them to call a taxi or tow-truck. If they wouldn't do that much for him, the hell with 'em.

When he got closer to the house he noticed there were lights on inside after all. The shades had hid the light at first. Someone was home after all. The house didn't look too run down at that... oh, it wasn't as clean as it might've been, and could've used a couple coats of paint, but it wasn't a completely neglected or deserted building. Wasn't quite as ugly up close either, where you couldn't see all those

unnecessary wings jutting out from the huge main building. There was no doorbell, just a large brass knocker. The door was one of those old solid wood models that seem to last forever.

Jeff only had to knock twice before the door opened. He had to look more than twice to believe what opened it.

If the house was from the nineteen twenties, the girl looked like she was from the late thirties or forties. If she was she kept her appearance a lot better than the house did; she still looked young. Jeff had been an old movie fan in his younger days, and recognized the long tight dress as roughly that era. Her wavy blonde hair was worn long, but in a style of that period. She was pretty enough to be one of those old movie stars in their prime, although her strong jaw and high cheekbones would've invariably stuck her in the role of the "bad girl."

She smiled. Not a big smile, but it looked sincere.

"Well," she began, "company."

"Uh, yeah. Had an accident down the road. Hit a tree, wrecked the car. Just want to use the phone, really...."

"Well, we don't have a phone here, but come in anyway, before you drown out there."

Gratefully Jeff entered the house.

It was better kept inside than out. Practically museum quality, if not showroom. The furniture was all fifty years old, if the way it was put together was any clue, but it looked as if it had just been brought home from the store. The carpet and wallpaper, both of which were blue and yellow floral patterns, might've just been put in from their condition.

"The name's Ellen Canino, if you're interested."

"I wondered who I should be grateful to," answered Jeff, trying to be flatteringly polite. "Mine's Jeff Dawson. Heard of me?"

Ellen shook her head negatively.

*Thank God for small favors*, thought Jeff. Possibly the girl was an eccentric, or the daughter of one, who didn't read the papers or watch the news. It would make sense. The house out in the boondocks and the dated clothing and furniture....

"I see you're wonderin' about this place and my getup," remarked Ellen hastily. "It's



my cousin Alex's place, really. I'm just visiting until I can land a job and get an apartment of my own."

"He likes the nineteen thirties?"

"Sort of. He's a novelist. Puts all his stories back in the thirties. I think he lives more back then than in today. Likes to keep his house this way for atmosphere. Even got me some old fashioned duds so I wouldn't look out of place."

"They look good on you."

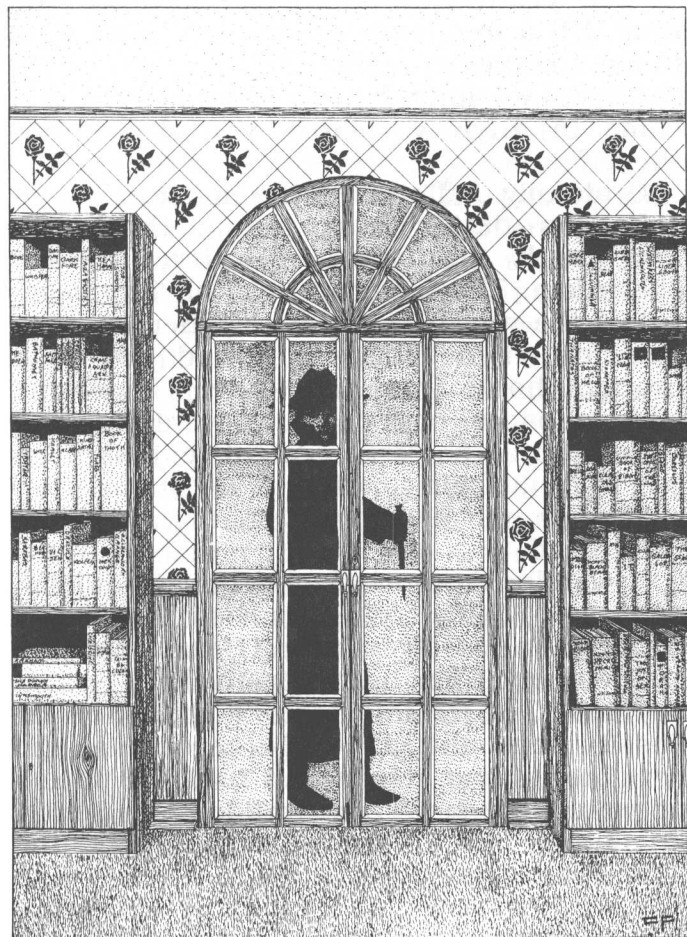
"My, you're quick with the compliments, Grandma."

"Well, it's true. Even though I gotta say it to avoid walkin' another four-five miles in this rain, I'd call the Witch of the West good lookin'."

Ellen's laugh seemed exceptionally hearty for a joke even Jeff recognized as weak and worn.

"You might as well see Alex now, at least so he doesn't come out later and get scared by you being here. Don't expect him to be too polite, though. He's busy *creating*."

"I'll try not to bother him, then."



She led Jeff to a room with a closed door, behind which the clattering of a typewriter could be heard. The room, like the rest of the house, was furnished in the style of the thirties, a study if those big ugly reading lamps meant anything. Alex was an extremely average-looking person, unremarkable in any way save the outlandish clothing he wore. With his old-style shirt, sleeves rolled up, green eyeshade and the office-model typewriter he banged away at, he could've been a reporter out of some *Front Page* type movie. He raised his eyes as they entered.

"Al, this is Jeff Dawson," Ellen began. "He had an accident on Corby Road. 'Fraid we'll have to put him up till the rain stops."

Al grunted, smiled at Jeff, and returned to his typing.

"Thanks," responded Jeff cheerfully.

"Al ain't so bad, really," Ellen explained as she shut the door on her cousin. "He just gets carried away by his work sometimes. He's been real good to me since I got kicked off my job. 'Course I get stuck with the cooking and cleaning, but that ain't bad with just two people. I don't do it in a dress like this, naturally. This is for company. I gotta admit, I was gettin' kinda crazy from boredom. That's why I put it on."

"Yeah, I see how you could get lonely in a place like this."

"It wasn't so bad the first couple weeks, even if I did have to drive or walk ten miles to use the phone or pick up groceries. That's how far you have to go before you hit civilization. Al's good company, and he's got a radio and a collection of books, but still...."

"I can understand that," said Jeff sympathetically. He decided to take a chance and put his hand on the girl's shoulder. She seemed to appreciate it — at least it didn't annoy her. Odd, she felt kind of cold to his touch. Like she'd been out walking in the wind and rain. Only she was dry.

"Say, as long as you're here I'm gonna make the most of it," continued Ellen. "News from the outside world, that sorta thing."

Jeff resolved there was one piece of news from the outside world she wouldn't get out of him. It might be a shabby trick on his hostess, holding back the fact that he'd just beat a murder rap on a technicality, but he was taking no chances on getting tossed out

till the rain stopped. Not that he intended to make any trouble for Ellen or Alex during his stay... if for no other reason than he didn't want any himself.

"Hey, you'd like a drink? We got a big cabinet full of booze. Or coffee if that's what you'd like. If you're hungry I can even scrape up a few leftovers from dinner."

"No thanks on the food, but a shot of something would suit me fine," responded Jeff. "Just to keep the cold off, you understand."

"Fine. You like Jim Beam?"

"Sure."

"I'll go get it."

She swept out of the room.

Jeff leaned back on the old-style couch, dazed with his sudden good luck. Things were really starting to turn for the better. That girl was so starved for company she did everything short of getting into bed with him, and if he broached it right, he suspected she'd be happy to do that too. He could *almost* feel sorry for her, cooped up with a goofy — well, artistic — cousin in a big house ten miles from anywhere. He'd probably be the same way after a few weeks in this place.

No, wait a minute. Even considering those circumstances, Ellen was a little too friendly, considering he was only a stranger. Jeff was no genius, but he knew the average person doesn't fall over a passing stranger like a long lost friend. Alex also seemed complacent about having him in the house. He immediately slipped out of his euphoria and started sniffing for the rat he felt sure was present.

He smelt something else instead. The scent of mold, of overage furniture, of decades of mildew. He looked around. How had he thought the furnishings were new before? The rugs, the chairs and tables, the couch he sat on, they were all in good condition for five decades old, but that was about it. They were old, past their prime, antiques starting to rot away. They were worn, faded relics of some thirties mansion.

How come they'd looked brand new when he arrived? Any shelter would have looked good then, but he would have noticed their age.

Before he could figure it out, Ellen returned with a bottle and a glass on a tray. Brother, hokey outfit or no, she was lovely.

Looked awfully pale though. Paler than when she'd left him two minutes before.

Ellen spoke the classic phrase, elegant in its beautiful simplicity: "Say when."

"About now," Jeff responded after she'd poured him a generous slug.

God, the booze tasted like nectar after the time he'd had.

"Hey, don't you want some too?" he inquired, noticing her glasslessness.

"Er... I had a couple with Alex before," Ellen explained hastily. "You wouldn't want to see me drunk, would you? Or would you?"

She hesitated.

"Jeff... I mean, Mr. Dawson... what's the matter?"

Jeff had just been hit by a sledgehammer realization of what was wrong. It was her refusal of the drink, most likely. The great old building with its quaintly dressed, strangely attractive occupant. The incredibly lavish hospitality coupled with odd behavior. The refusal of the host (or hostess) to drink.

"*I don't drink... wine.*" These words, in a thick Hungarian accent, echoed in Jeff's consciousness.

Ellen was coming toward him, concern — about him or about being discovered — etched on her features. No sense trying any simple tests, like looking at the floor for her shadow, now. That would really tip her off he was wise. Jeff realized instantly what he had to do. If he were wrong, if Ellen was innocent... well, it would be just another crazy thing to add to the list of crazy things he'd done in his time.

Providentially, as in the movies, there were weapons at his disposal. The room had a big, ornate fireplace (unlit; it was too warm), like the guest room of any old house. There were the usual poker and shovel.

Jeff sprang back from his astonished hostess, grabbed the tools... and formed a cross with them.

Ellen sprang back, her face distorting into a savage snarl. Jeff saw the long pointed eyeteeth.

*Jesus*, he thought, *I was right*. So much for his marvelous change of luck. Leave it to him to pick what was probably the only house in the state with an honest-to-God vampire in it.

"Get back, you!" he tried to growl. It came out more like a whimper.

"If you think you're gonna get outta here you're a dumber bastard than I suspected," hissed Ellen.

"Thanks for the compliment. Now get outta my way before I ram this cross up your anus, lady. Nobody's gonna stick me for drinks."

Jeff thought his ferocious speech might've sounded better if he'd been able to keep the quaver out of his voice.

Holding the makeshift cross in front of him, he started to advance. Mercifully, the vampire backed away. If he could hold her off till he got to the front door, maybe he could lose her in the woods. It was still raining out, as well. He wondered if that counted for running water. They were supposed to hate that, after all.

At least her cousin hadn't come charging in. He didn't know whether Alex was a blood sucker too, but he certainly must have known about his cousin's little habits. He'd hate to have them both on his neck... possibly literally.

Alex was staying out of it. Jeff could hear the typewriter going a mile a minute.

Then he tripped on a crease in the carpet. Or rather the crease seemed to spring up right in front of his foot. Jeff stumbled, dropped the poker and shovel, and fell flat on his face.

Good old Ellen was on him in a second.

They wrestled around the floor for a short time. Under other circumstances Jeff might've enjoyed that. But Ellen was strong for her size and trying to sink her teeth into his neck besides. And she was fighting in dead earnest, not playful-style.

He managed to get his arm under her chin and shoved her away. Ellen retaliated with a very hard, very accurate knee. Jeff shrieked and doubled up in agony.

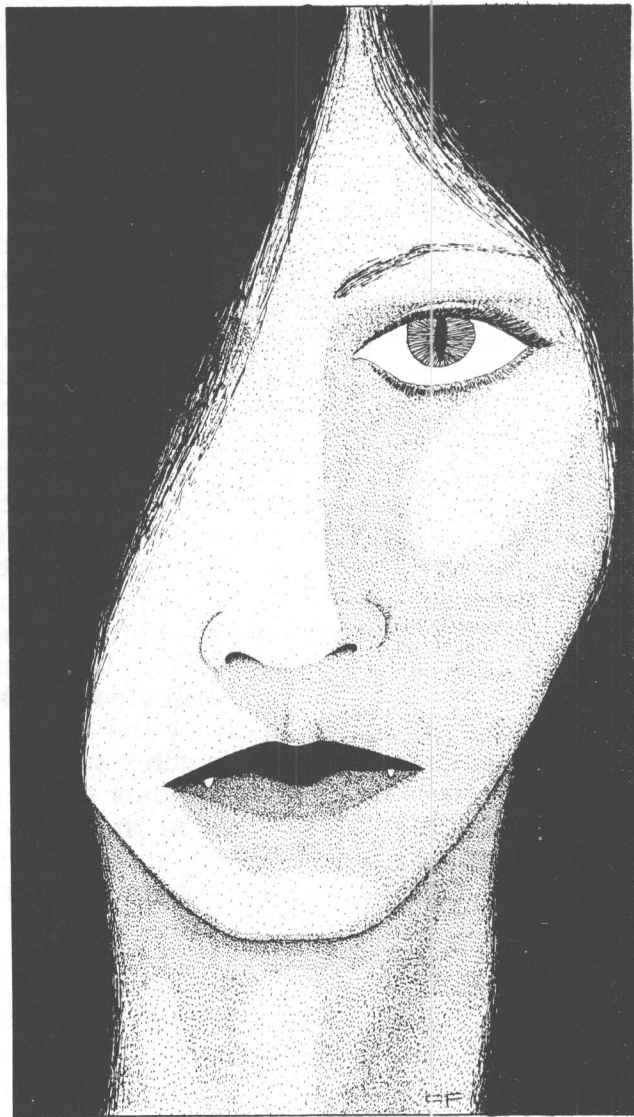
Through the pain he heard the girl laughing triumphantly. He tried to pull out of the fetal position but couldn't. Then the laughter stopped and he felt her kiss his neck. Then bite it. Jeff promptly fainted.

\* \* \*

Faints don't usually last forever, though Jeff's lasted long enough. He came to to find the sun shining down on his face. He was sore in a dozen places, especially where he'd been kneed. He felt an itch like a giant mosquito bite on his neck. He was also

apparently tied hand and foot, gagged, and left lying in an uncomfortable position.

Forcing his eyes open he managed to guess where he was. She'd left him on the couch in the guest room. Ellen was probably sleeping her binge off right now and getting ready to drain him again tonight. What time was it now, he wondered.



For want of something better to do he struggled at the ropes on his wrists. They gave, very slightly. Hey, that was one good thing. If he could get loose, there were all sorts of things he could do. He could bust a leg off a table and stick it into Ellen as she slept in her coffin. More reasonably he could put as many miles as possible between himself and this house. Jeff began working at the ropes.



A clock bonged somewhere in the house. Sure enough, they kept a clock that tolled the hours, just like in the movies. At least he now knew what time it was. Ten in the morning. He had time.

He struggled. He chafed and scraped. He cut his wrists on the rope. He tired quickly, being weak from his unplanned blood donation the night before. But slowly, painfully slowly, he was working loose. There, his hands were free! Now to get his feet and mouth loose so he could get going.

He heard a familiar sound then. Alex banging at his typewriter. God, didn't that guy care what was happening in his own house? Jeff wondered if he slept and ate in that den.

Then Jeff cried out, even through the gag. The ropes had somehow wrapped themselves around his wrists again and retied themselves. They felt a lot tighter this time, and no doubt were better tied. Then the feel of cords biting into his wrists disappeared and was replaced by that of two bands of warm, greasy metal. Handcuffs.

The ropes had somehow retied themselves, then turned into handcuffs.

A strange choking sound echoed through the room. Jeff recognized it as himself, trying to scream.

The rattle of the typewriter stopped. Alex Canino (or whatever his last name was) entered the room. His expression was one of savage glee. He sauntered over to Jeff and looked down, gloating.

"Nice trick, wasn't it?" he inquired. "With the handcuffs, I mean."

Jeff couldn't do more than give him a blank look.

"No, I guess you don't understand. An animal like you couldn't truly understand. Still, I suppose you deserve an explanation, if only because it may make you suffer worse.

"This entire house, furnishings, and events are creations of mine. You are in the middle of a cliché horror story."

Jeff forced himself to listen. It might lead to a way out.

"I started out trying to be an original, innovative author," Alex continued. "They wouldn't have any of it. Next I tried turning out formula tales like this one, give them what they asked for. No good. My style was artificial, the editors now said. They wanted

unbelievable fantasies with plots a thousand years old, but they wanted them told realistically.

"Well, I finally figured out how to give them what they wanted. My stories are trite, corny, but they're realistic... because they really happen. I can't explain how I can manipulate reality so my tales really happen — it's too complicated — but you can see for yourself that I can.

"Why do you think the girl's father was waiting for you on that particular stretch of road? How was that bird able to hit your bullet damaged windshield at just the right angle to break it? Why do you suppose you crashed where you did, with this place the only shelter for many miles.

"I arranged it all. I'd followed your exploits in the paper and realized you were a perfect candidate for a supernatural revenge story. Ever hear of those? Or read one? You must've. The one about the rotten character who either is destroyed by the ghost of one of his victims, or manages, like you did, to fall into the clutches of some monster because of his own actions, like leaving town for fear of being lynched. E. C. Comics used that kind of tale as their staple. Lots of the writers used that idiot theme again and again — Lovecraft, Derleth, Bloch, Stoker, Ellison, even King in some of his earlier pieces. If all those hacks can use that old saw, why can't I?

"You were a perfect candidate. A bastard who got his girlfriend pregnant and then killed her to avoid having to marry her. Beating the rap on a technicality clinched it for you. Folks are tired of hearing about killers getting off because of legal loopholes, insanity pleas, inadmissible evidence and the like. Everybody around here is going to think of Jeff Dawson if he or she reads this tale and they'll read it avidly to see when you'll receive the comeuppance they know you'll get in a story like this.

"To make sure it'll be a hit I'm even using the old vampire theme. Everything about it has been done a million times before, but the dopes that read these tales love it.

"Well, the story's over now. It ended when she bit you last night. That's where these stories usually end. While I'm doing the rewrite work, Ellen'll take care of you. She'll probably keep you around a few nights to feed off of, then burn your

body in the trash burner we've got behind the house. So you won't come back as competition.

"Me, now, I've been typing all night. I gotta get some sleep. You think it's easy to age the furnishings in a dozen rooms so they look like authentic period pieces? That's how long it took, once I realized the stuff was too brand new-sparkling-clean. Not to mention those tricks I had to pull with the carpet and the ropes when you started adding your own little variations to my nice classical plot.

"You know, Dawson, you're an awfully good listener when you have a gag in your mouth. If there's an afterlife I'm sure Sally Flynn will have a lot to say to you once you've gone to the other side.

"No hard feelings, though. I don't really mind murderers; it's just that you're so useful as a victim. See you tonight... if you're still alive."

With a yawn, Alex walked out of the room, leaving Jeff seething in helpless rage. He had to get loose now. He couldn't let anybody do this to him! He'd show 'em all! Nobody pulls Jeff Dawson down without hurting for it. Not Sally Flynn, not her old man, not a thirties-style vampire, not even a guy who could play God with a typewriter. He had to get loose just to teach 'em all.

But how? Even if he broke loose from the handcuffs and such, all it would mean was that Alex would rewrite the events. He was locked in a cliché horror tale.

Wait a minute.

A cliché horror tale? One that follows every convention popular writers have ever abused?

If Alex was right, if the story was following all the conventions, he still had one chance. There was one convention he might be able to use against them.

Jeff craned his head and managed to spot the poker on the floor. The odds against his rolling off the couch and getting to it without waking anybody up were astronomical. The chances of his managing to snap the chain binding his wrists behind his back with it were infinitesimal. But characters in formula stories had pulled off even more outlandish escapes than this. He'd never been much for praying, but he breathed a quick one now... that his secret

weapon would work.

\* \* \*

Ellen caught him trying to pick the lock on the front door. Actually he'd wanted to stay where he was, to have a final showdown with her and Alex, but he wanted them to think he was running scared. Not that it would've done him much good if he'd actually tried to escape. Forcing a door or busting a window would've woken up Alex in nothing flat.

"So you managed to get loose, huh? Well, it isn't gonna help you. You're mine now, lover boy, now and for —"

Jeff drew the twin weapons from under his shirt. They weren't too impressive to look at, being held together with rubber bands he'd found in the kitchen, but they were crosses. Silver or at least silver-plated crosses at that. Silverware in a vampire's house was odd, but he'd known it would be there. All mansions in fiction have silver knives and forks hidden away somewhere.

Ellen screeched and fled. Jeff chased her. On the way out they ran into a very confused-looking Alex. Jeff took time out from the pursuit to kick the author of his troubles in the stomach. It was a mistake. Alex (doubled over) ran off one way, Ellen the other, and before he could decide which one to chase they both got out of his sight.

Still weak from his loss of blood and the exertions of the day, Jeff pursued the two of them doggedly. He had to get them, or they'd get him.

He heard the typewriter again. Alex was trying to even the odds. He caught a glimpse of Ellen, bending over a small bureau in one of the bedrooms. She got the drawer open just as he came charging in, crosses raised. It was empty. Then a short barreled revolver materialized in it. Good old Al at work again.

She grabbed up the gun. In a desperate burst of speed Jeff reached her before she could aim it. He slammed the improvised cross down on her wrist.

As to be expected, she dropped the weapon with a catlike scream. Jeff caught sight of a red cross-shaped mark on the back of her hand before she... disappeared. In her place was a small, golden-blonde bat fluttering away from him, squeaking plaintively.

Jeff seized the gun. Ellen was out of the

fight, for a while anyway, but her crazy cousin, or creator, was still active. He could hear the typewriter clacking away in the den.

God! He had to reach that bastard before he figured out some new way of getting rid of him. With his powers, Alex could easily collapse the roof on him. Or call lightning down from the sky. Or make his heart stop beating....

Jeff raced to the den. The door was locked. Like a movie detective, Jeff blew the lock away with three shots. Kicking open the door, he raced in.

Alex didn't stop typing for a second, even as he gave Jeff a look of pure hate. Jeff sensed something materializing, coming into existence behind him. He didn't have to look to know it was big, ugly, and dangerous.

He aimed the gun and fired the last shots... into the typewriter.

The bullets pierced its thin metal casing. A weird noise, like a cross between groaning gears and a monster in mortal agony, came from the machine. Alex rose from his seat, stared a second in mute horror at the ruined typewriter, then collapsed.

The machine shrieked again, sighed, and was silent.

The pistol in Jeff's hand disappeared. So did the broken-chained handcuffs dangling from his wrists, though his skin remained red and swollen. The furniture vanished. The building almost vanished... there were some foundation stones left, showing that Alex had picked a site where a real house had stood at one point.

Jeff turned to look behind him and was relieved to see nothing there.

All that was left was himself, Alex, and the typewriter. The machine was going too, melting, dissolving into a puddle of stinking green slime.

"How did you... know... the machine was... the source of my... power," the writer gasped.

"I guessed I had to stop you typing," answered Jeff quietly. "I wasn't sure a bullet could stop you personally."

Despite the horrors that Alex had inflicted on him, Jeff found he could not hate the writer any more. The guy was obviously dying. He was turning green and mush around the edges already, just like the

typewriter.

"How could you have... got out of it? I had all the odds stacked against you. All the clichés of the horror tale. They're stronger than any man-made law. How... could... you... beat... them?"

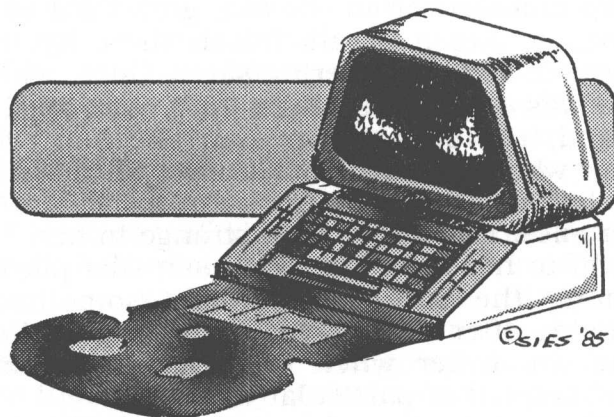
"You said I deserved an explanation before," Jeff told the slowly melting writer, "so I guess you do too. There's something about me you didn't know, something that guaranteed I'd win through overwhelming odds.

"You see, I didn't stab Sally Flynn. I wasn't even the one who got her pregnant. I don't know who did. He was probably the one who killed her, when she tried to put the screws on him. He couldn't've been much, the way she went after me, tryin' to make me acknowledge the brat was my own, to marry her. I may be pretty dumb, but I'm smart enough to know what you gotta do to get a kid, and she an' me hadn't done it. That's the main reason I was the prime suspect. A lotta folks saw us fightin'.

"So I'm the innocent man accused of a terrible crime. That's why your plot didn't work. I'm a powerful cliché myself."

With those words, he left the expiring author and headed down Corby Road, where up ahead, the police (who'd found his wrecked car) were looking for him, to tell him the real killer had been discovered by accident.

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# Silkie Son

by Darrell Schweitzer

There was a fisherman of the Shetlands named Peter Asmundson, a man of long lineage, whose forefathers came with the Vikings. Yet he was no mighty lord. Poverty forced him to wrestle with the waves for his living, like all his neighbors.

Still he remembered who he was and was proud of it; a large, fierce man, broad of frame and strong of limb, so skilled in every aspect of his trade that there was no greater boatman anywhere in his day.

But not even the greatest can control the wind and the sea. Did not the tide come in against even Canute's command? So it happened that one day Peter Asmundson's craft was caught in a storm and blown far from his home waters, to the south, and wrecked on the wild shores of Ireland. He alone of the crew survived, and after nearly a year of hardship returned to his own country, only to find his wife with child.

That was how it started.

\* \* \*

Christina stood alone on the beach, watching the dark clouds gather over the horizon like a blanket drawn slowly over the sky. She watched the waves as they foamed against two massive rocks that stood on either side of the tiny harbor. She tried to distract her mind with the tales she had heard concerning those rocks, how they were monsters from the sea, grown old with time, or pagan giants frozen there by the curse of some wandering saint. Once, when she was a girl, a stranger had come to the island, the only grown man she had ever seen whom she had not known all her life. He had compared the rocks to the Pillars of Hercules. His words were strange to her.

Off to her right her small son Olaf played among the sand and shells, sometimes chasing after butterflies, sometimes wading into the water when he spied something that seemed of particular interest.

*This is the day, she repeated to herself over and over. Three years are now passed, and on this day he will come. "I will feel my son's birth in my mind," he had said, "like a*

*lamp newly lighted, and for three years it shall burn ever brighter, like a beacon. Then I shall come for him."*



The boy found a large and brightly colored shell. He ran to show it to his mother.

"Look! Look what I found!"

"That's very pretty, darling."

*He doesn't know. He must feel the truth, even if he doesn't know it. He and the waves are cousins. Today he will be with his true father. It's better that way, for him and for me. It will hurt just as much, though. For me, and for him.*

They gazed out over the choppy gray sea, waiting.

\* \* \*

"You didn't have to *beat* him so!" she screamed, slamming the bowl of stew onto the rough-hewn table. "You are a monster. Only a monster would strip a child naked and whip him till the blood ran. I hope the Devil takes your soul for that, Peter Asmundson, if he doesn't own it already!"

He cursed and threw his mead cup at her. It missed and landed in the fireplace, sizzling.

"Silence, you faithless bitch, or I'll flog you too. The only monster around here is *your* son, not mine. The Devil is in *that* thing, not in me. I beat him to drive the Devil out. He'll bring bad luck."

"Monster!"

It seemed for a minute as if he would rise from his place and throttle her, but he held himself back. He gripped the edge of the table so hard his huge, reddish hands went white at the knuckles. His face seethed. Spittle formed at the corners of his mouth.

"Do you know what *your* brat told me this morning? Do you? He said the sea was alive and beautiful. He said that fishes talk to him and we shouldn't eat them because they're our friends. Well, fishes don't talk unless the Devil makes them, and the sea is just a lot of water. And if it were alive it wouldn't be beautiful. It would be a filthy, stinking bitch. Like you."

"Children dream. Can this be so wicked?"

"Is he just a child? Is he?"

She felt herself going slack with horror. It was just too much to bear. Her mind, her body could muster no defense anymore.

After a while she managed to whisper, "How could he be anything else? He's my son."

"Yes, yours. *Satan* is his father and you are the witch that spawned him. I should have denounced you to the priests long ago."

She wrung her fists helplessly. She bit her hand to hold back a scream.

Then she spoke once more. "Denounce us then. Stop torturing us and let them do it. Or do you just enjoy it too much?"

He bolted up from the table, wordless with fury, striding toward her, herding her into a corner. With one shove he had her on the floor. He stood astride her, a raging giant, more a thing of personified, malevolent, elemental fury than a mere man. He swallowed her in his shadow and just stood there. At last he spoke in a low, deliberate tone.

"I ought to kill you both. I ought to drive stakes through your hearts and burn you in a great pyre. That is the only way to deal with your kind."

"No! For the sake of Jesus, no!"

"What do you care about Jesus, witch?"

\* \* \*

He did not kill her that night, though for

a while it seemed that he might. She slipped between his legs and ran. He lunged after her and they circled around and around inside their tiny cottage. She fought him with anything she could find, pots, stools, his own harpoon. This last he merely snatched out of her hand when she tried to stab him with it. He laughed and tossed it aside. Finally he trapped her in the corner again, taking an added precaution so that she could not get away this time.

He stood on her hand, crushing it with his boot, hard enough to make her cry out, not quite breaking bones. Then he stared at her for what seemed an endless time, shrugged, and quietly went away.

He sat down on one of the few stools they hadn't broken in the course of the battle and glared at her for an hour without making a sound. All this while she huddled in the corner like one dead. Finally he yawned and went to bed.

She waited until she was sure he was asleep, then rose, and slipped into the loft where Olaf had screamed in unnoticed terror throughout the fight. Now he was on the threshold of sleep, feverish, whimpering softly from the wounds her husband had dealt him.

She took the boy quietly in her arms, wrapped him in a blanket, and hurried from the house.

The sky was overcast and low, like a ceiling pressing down, the wind harsh and cold. Bending against the wind, she wandered over the island a ways, across desolate, rocky slopes, until she came to the main part of the village. There she found a boat dragged up onto the beach, a boat small enough for her to handle.

She laid the boy gently into the prow, then pushed the boat out into the water and climbed aboard. After some further struggle, she had the sail raised and was on her way, unseen she hoped, and unheard.

Christina sailed over the sea that night, the boat leaping from wave to wave as if of its own volition. She knew little of navigation, but that didn't matter since she didn't know where she was going. Just *away*. She thought vaguely that she should go East, lest she wander aimlessly in the western ocean. Norway, Germany, any country in the world would do. She didn't care.

*Away.*

# *Silkie Son*

## by Darrell Schweitzer

There was a fisherman of the Shetlands named Peter Asmundson, a man of long lineage, whose forefathers came with the Vikings. Yet he was no mighty lord. Poverty forced him to wrestle with the waves for his living, like all his neighbors.

Still he remembered who he was and was proud of it; a large, fierce man, broad of frame and strong of limb, so skilled in every aspect of his trade that there was no greater boatman anywhere in his day.

But not even the greatest can control the wind and the sea. Did not the tide come in against even Canute's command? So it happened that one day Peter Asmundson's craft was caught in a storm and blown far from his home waters, to the south, and wrecked on the wild shores of Ireland. He alone of the crew survived, and after nearly a year of hardship returned to his own country, only to find his wife with child.

That was how it started.

\* \* \*

Christina stood alone on the beach, watching the dark clouds gather over the horizon like a blanket drawn slowly over the sky. She watched the waves as they foamed against two massive rocks that stood on either side of the tiny harbor. She tried to distract her mind with the tales she had heard concerning those rocks, how they were monsters from the sea, grown old with time, or pagan giants frozen there by the curse of some wandering saint. Once, when she was a girl, a stranger had come to the island, the only grown man she had ever seen whom she had not known all her life. He had compared the rocks to the Pillars of Hercules. His words were strange to her.

Off to her right her small son Olaf played among the sand and shells, sometimes chasing after butterflies, sometimes wading into the water when he spied something that seemed of particular interest.

*This is the day, she repeated to herself over and over. Three years are now passed, and on this day he will come. "I will feel my son's birth in my mind," he had said, "like a*

*lamp newly lighted, and for three years it shall burn ever brighter, like a beacon. Then I shall come for him."*



The boy found a large and brightly colored shell. He ran to show it to his mother.

"Look! Look what I found!"

"That's very pretty, darling."

*He doesn't know. He must feel the truth, even if he doesn't know it. He and the waves are cousins. Today he will be with his true father. It's better that way, for him and for me. It will hurt just as much, though. For me, and for him.*

They gazed out over the choppy gray sea, waiting.

\* \* \*

"You didn't have to *beat* him so!" she screamed, slamming the bowl of stew onto the rough-hewn table. "You are a monster. Only a monster would strip a child naked and whip him till the blood ran. I hope the Devil takes your soul for that, Peter Asmundson, if he doesn't own it already!"

He cursed and threw his mead cup at her. It missed and landed in the fireplace, sizzling.



"Silence, you faithless bitch, or I'll flog you too. The only monster around here is *your* son, not mine. The Devil is in *that* thing, not in me. I beat him to drive the Devil out. He'll bring bad luck."

"Monster!"

It seemed for a minute as if he would rise from his place and throttle her, but he held himself back. He gripped the edge of the table so hard his huge, reddish hands went white at the knuckles. His face seethed. Spittle formed at the corners of his mouth.

"Do you know what *your* brat told me this morning? Do you? He said the sea was alive and beautiful. He said that fishes talk to him and we shouldn't eat them because they're our friends. Well, fishes don't talk unless the Devil makes them, and the sea is just a lot of water. And if it were alive it wouldn't be beautiful. It would be a filthy, stinking bitch. Like you."

"Children dream. Can this be so wicked?"

"Is he just a child? Is he?"

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*Away.*

It would be hard. The roads were filled with robbers and trolls, the seas with devouring leviathans; and if men heard her story they would probably turn against her. Who would shelter a woman who fled from her lawful husband with a child that was hers but not his?

At such a time she could expect no mercy, no forbearance, even from God.

Still she pressed on, clinging to the tiller of the boat, trying to guide the sail with her hand. But in the first twilight of dawn the ocean itself rose against her, huge waves thundering for all the sky was clear and the wind had died, driving her back the way she had come with blow after unrelenting blow.

The mast was soon gone, the tiller snapped from her hand as the rudder tore away. She whirled about and it was all she could do to hold her son against herself while clutching the side of the boat.

A voice spoke to her, out of the green depths, out of the wild, dark sea, whispering impossibly in her head. *"I feel him like a beacon in my thoughts, and I shall come, soon. Go back. You cannot betray me."*

And for one dreadful, eternal instant, she thought she saw a familiar face gazing up at her, but before she could be sure, foam washed over it and the face was gone.

As the sky began to lighten, the boat was cast up on the very beach from which she had departed. The waves ceased as suddenly as they had started. The sea was calm. Gulls shrieked overhead. The wind blew gently, heralding a day of fair weather.

Christina staggered across treeless fields, her son quietly miserable in her arms.

She thought of God again, of the White Christ who drove out demons, and of his Mother, who lived. And she said a prayer to them, but got no comfort from it, no confidence.

Finally, in the broad light of morning, she stumbled into the house, haggard with exhaustion, her clothing clinging to her body and smelling of brine.

Her husband lay awake in bed. He stared at her and seemed to appreciate something of her predicament.

And laughed.

\* \* \*

The clouds were drifting closer. *He* always came with the clouds, she knew.

Only when it was dark and the waves pounded against the shore would he come. Only when the North Sea roared.

"Can we go home now, Mama? It's cold and it looks like it's going to rain."

"No, darling. Not yet. Your mother likes to sit and watch the sea when it's this way. Let's wait a little longer. You can sit by me and keep warm if you like."

Olaf climbed up onto a boulder beside her and pressed close. She wrapped her cloak around the both of them.

\* \* \*

On the day her son was born she had screamed aloud in her agony, yet no one came to help her. All the village knew she was about to give birth, and midwives came to her house, but Peter drove them away. He stood tall and unconquerable in the doorway, threatening to bash in heads with a shovel. Men came by later, bidding him let the women pass, but he repeated his threats and hefted his shovel, and no one dared fight with him, for he stood a full head taller than any one of them.

At last they all went away, and he walked inside, barring the door behind him. He glanced at Christina as she writhed and sweated on the bed.

"Now we'll have a look at your bastard, huh? Maybe we'll even learn who your filthy lover is. Will the brat have red hair like Snorri the smith? Or black, like your brother Thorstein? What is a little incest to one like you?"

For many hours he sat beside her. Not once did he raise a hand to help her. Not once did he whisper any words but curses. It was only when at last the infant came forth and began to cry that he said anything more, and then only two words:

"Ugly thing."

He spat on the floor beside the bed and left the house. Some while later Christina was aware of gentle hands touching her, and voices she had known all her life, but couldn't quite place. The midwives had returned. They took the baby from her. She didn't remember anything after that.

\* \* \*

She named her son Olaf, after the saint and king, and took him to be baptized as soon as she was well enough to walk. The

boy thrive, despite Peter's hatred. He seemed endlessly cheerful, even in the presence of that dull-witted brute. There was something clearly out of the ordinary in this child. Anyone, even Peter, could see that. Christina knew what much of that strangeness was, too, or where it had come from, though she dared not speak of it, lest Peter kill them both. At the best of times he only half believed the story she constantly told, how she had come upon a band of ruffian strangers by the edge of the sea and they had raped her.

Peter Asmundson couldn't possibly have known the truth, but he suspected more than he could understand, and hated the thoughts that constantly nagged him. Hate was all he knew. Hate was all he could deliver. He was good at it.

So he made life agony for Christina, and, when he could, for her son. Many times she wondered why he did not put her away as most men would a faithless wife, but always she came to the same, terrible answer. He would keep her with him always, so he could torture her.

\* \* \*

The storm clouds were overhead now, and a light drizzle began to fall.

"Mama, let's go." Olaf squirmed beneath Christina's cloak.

"No, wait. We must wait."

"What for? We'll get wet."

"For something much more important than not getting wet. For something I've known would happen since before you were born."

"But what?"

"Think for a minute. If a bird were kept in a cage all the time and never allowed to fly, would that be right?"

"No, Mama! There aren't any birds here! I don't understand."

"You will, very soon."

\* \* \*

Long ago there had been a time when she had found life with her husband at least bearable, even if she never loved him. When news came of the loss of his boat, she had actually grieved, and had even longed for him. One morning, a few weeks afterward, she had gone down to the harbor to watch all the boats set out. It was a cold and windy

day, the sky deeply overcast, and there had been much argument among the men about whether they should go out at all. On such a day as this Peter Asmundson had sailed, never to return.

Finally they did go out, but not beyond the Out Skerries, so they could get back quickly if a storm arose.



She walked out to the two great stones, the ones the stranger had called Pillars of Hercules. After all the boats had passed from sight around the edge of the island, Christina stood for a while, gazing at the rocks and little islets which rode the rough waves like ships. Once or twice she thought she saw something moving out there, sliding into the sea.

She scanned the horizon, hoping against all hope that she might spy a sail and it might be her husband's.

The open ocean was rough and slate-gray, flecked with whitecaps, but within the harbor behind her, the water was relatively calm, and green, then brown, then almost blue beneath the cloud cover and variable



light.

She turned back toward the village. The houses were within sight, but the village women had gone about their daily tasks. Among the crevasses and boulders she could only hear the sounds of the sea and the wind. She might as well have been on the moon.

A dark shape, perhaps a large seal she thought, flashed through the water about ten feet from shore, then vanished.

Curious, she waded out a little ways, to get a better look. She was sure it wasn't a shark or any other fish. It had to be an animal of some kind. A seal. Yet seals seldom came into the harbor or near the village. Men hunted them. Boats and human voices were to be feared.

She saw it again, in the water but so close she could have reached out and touched it. She felt a tinge of dread then, a terror that this was no natural thing at all.

It *was* a seal, a huge one, and stouter and darker than any she had ever seen before.

This seal was the size of a man.

It swam closer yet, almost brushing her legs, then passed her, circled, and came back. She stood perfectly still, horribly afraid now for reasons she didn't quite understand. She remembered old pagan stories she had heard as a child, about demons that came from the sea —

The outline of the creature began to fade, and for an instant it seemed an irregular stain on the water. Just a region of blackness, not a shape.

Then a naked man stood up, dripping. He was tall and immensely muscular, his wild hair and beard thick and tangled, like kelp.

His penis stood firmly erect.

"I am the King of Skule Skerry," he said.

\* \* \*

All her memories faded now, but the pain of them remained. Christina wept softly. The wind blew ever fiercer; rain whipped down on the two of them as they huddled atop the rock. Olaf said nothing, somehow sensing the urgency of something his mother could not put into words. She knew he trusted her. She tried to be worthy of that trust, to protect him this final time.

She held him close.

*Not much longer.* She closed her eyes and merely felt the presence of the half-

human child of rape she had come to love as her own. Soon Olaf would know his real father and his heritage. He would be what he truly was, gone forever as he had to go. *Because* she loved him, she knew, she must cast him from her, as a mother casts her child out of a burning house that it might live, even if she is to die.

They waited half an hour more as the storm worsened and the ocean seethed before them. Then she spied something long and dark swimming in to the mouth of the harbor, heading directly toward her.

He had come.

"Take off your clothes, Olaf."

"What?"

"Take off your clothes. It is time for you to go."

"Mama, why?"

"Because you must."

She helped him undress as the Silkie rose out of the waves and walked onto the beach. Christina saw her son's eyes widen with wonder as he beheld the seal-man, and beneath that wonder there was something else. *Recognition?* Did he understand his dreams at last, his visions, the voices he heard from out of the water?

"He is your real father, dearest. Go with him."

Olaf shivered, naked. Christina kissed him on the forehead.

"Mama —"

"Go. Try to remember me. You will never see me again."

The boy sobbed. He clung to her fiercely. "I will! I will! I'll come back!"

"No you won't. It will be enough that you remember that I loved you. Goodbye."

The Silkie placed his hand on Olaf's shoulder.

"Come," he said. "I will teach you how to change."

At the last minute he gave Christina a small leather bag. Her fingers worked the drawstring loose of their own volition. Several gold coins spilled out onto the sand and stones. They were faded and almost green, as if they had been underwater for a long time.

A nurse's fee.

\* \* \*

Two black shapes, one large, one small, sped out to sea. Neither paused.

"Where do I go now?" Christina said, whispering first, her voice getting louder until she was shrieking to the waves and the wind and the distance. "What about me? Don't go away and leave me. There is nothing for me here!"

She ran into the surf, wading into the bitterly cold, heaving water, struggling as it

rose to her waist, to her shoulders, to her chin, half staggering, half swimming finally as she shouted, "Take me with you! I want to come too! Please!"

She kept on going.

They didn't look back.

It was a new ending to a very old story.

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# Encounters With Terror

by D. F. Lewis

"There can be no past without a future and, of course, neither without the way station of the present."

Rachel Mildeyes.

The little boy, in short grey flannel trousers, was on all fours upon the Persian carpet, watching a clockwork train that couldn't escape from its rails. He laughed to himself, trying to imagine a *real* steam train chasing its own guard's van, with a huge heavy-duty key turning round and round in the side of its boiler.

A large mother loomed at the door, spoke words that were below the hearing threshold and retreated with a wave of the hand. The boy squinted along the line of tin soldiers that filed from the velveteen footstool towards the glinting rocking-horse in the dim corner. The fire suddenly spurted, as a coal dropped, causing red sparks to march up the back of the chimney, and he shivered to think how cold this room would become once he had tucked himself into the cot (which already had its barred side down for him). The fire would cease to be a friend, when the last glow died — but, in sleep, you needed no friends other than those you met in the dream, who would take you by your tiny hand and show you a path between the monstrous shapes that haunted the dream's edges....

The world is full of terror. It stares from every corner, impends from clear and gloomy skies alike, follows its subject like an invisible shadow, waits in the wings for situations and moods to develop.

Francis first came across terror when he was a new-born baby in his mother's arms, gazing up for the first time into her beautiful face and watching her red lips move in tune with some meaningful sounds. Terror stamps this memory upon his mind like a photograph blown up out of all proportion, since terror knows no boundaries, sometimes reaching into the womb and, at other times, into the grave.

He thus saw terror reflected in his mother's eyes: a baby with birth scars fit to frighten a seasoned surgeon. It leered at

him from her eyes, as if he were the evil changeling he could have become if different circumstances had prevailed. And so, in her bed of confinement, his mother cast Francis away to protect him from the creature in her eyes, but his umbilical cord became entangled with her diamante lizard brooch. For a few seconds he simply hung there like a lump of dripping butcher's meat.

He did not feel like mounting the rocking-horse. But there was a long time to pass, almost a lifetime to someone of his age, before the little boy would feel sufficiently tired to crawl into the cot. The clock on the mantelpiece which he was prevented from reaching (if not by the heat of the fire or the anger of his mother, but certainly by the shortcomings of his height) turned over its workings as if he were about to strike — but it never did.

He was tired of playing with his toys. He needed a pee badly, so he wandered out into the long landing, lined with paintings on one side that were too high up for him to make out their faces clearly in the half-darkness. His little feet padded on the thick pile, before he reached the blue door marked *Necessarium*.

His mother had tried to teach him to unbutton the front of his trousers, but he always used the side of the leg-hole. If he had only known all boys of his age did this little contortion, it would have made him feel less guilty.

The hiss of the stream against the side of the bowl had a temporary calming effect — but he never relished venturing far from his room at this time, when evening was putting on its night clothes. He frequently feared that a red-hot coal might drop from the fire, in his absence, and burn a hole in the Persian weave — then bore straight through the floorboards, right down into the kitchen, only to kill his favorite servant, Nancy, dead in the top of her head!

Terror can have no diary, since there are no words to describe it. However extreme and specific the event that engenders this orgasm of the soul, it will remain unwritten and vague, despite the vivid scars it leaves.

The next time he recalls truly making the acquaintanceship of terror, however, was in



his teens, although he knew that it was there all the time, whether seen or unseen. Parts of wall, insides of wardrobe doors, in most bathrooms: he tried not to look directly at it, but he knew it was there out of the corner of his eye.

Then, whilst at school, he was snatched from the changing-room shower one day by his sweaty peers, who proceeded to rumble him, frogged him to the cricket-gear cupboard and forced him to look terror in its one eye.

"Hello, Francis," it droned drearily.

"Hello," he replied through gritted teeth.

"I'm glad you've grown up like me, son..."

He managed to claw himself from his captors: most were helpless with cruel laughter, but some with kind tears.

As the little boy slipped back along the cold landing, he noted it had grown darker even in the short while he had been in the bathroom. He arrived at the door of his nursery bedroom and listened at the keyhole, a ritual he often enacted, for no evident reason. Except this time, the breathing was louder, deeper, longer in its rhythm. He entered, heart in mouth, and saw the horse in the corner rocking in the same rhythm as the breathing. The cot covers had been moved, he was sure, while he had been away, tucked tighter, neater, with a sheet lip where the silk pillow glistened. Nancy must have been in already — or it was another servant, the one with the big teeth and the long red tongue whom he always tried to put out of his mind.

He knew he would keep awake as long as possible, hurting his own tongue with his first childhood teeth to do so — in order that the day could be sealed with a goodnight kiss from his mother. But he felt tired enough to get into the cot. So, without clearing up the tin soldiers or retrieving the clockwork train from beside the jack-in-the-box where it had derailed itself, he climbed, with difficulty, between the taut covers that pinioned his body, whilst springs prodded his back. He stared up at the ceiling, ill-lit by the fire, and discovered a few crack. There seemed to be a new crack each time he studied its wicklow crazing. There were worlds up there... vast continents, warring nations, endless oceans and archipelagos... where

Nancy and he lived happily ever after.

Then comes his third and final encounter with terror. It was a war that he'd been told needed to be fought, since causes were everything: he was not exactly a mercenary, but more one of those innocently caught up in the onrush of hostilities. A tri-cornered affair with no causes other than hate. The last battle had been fought and he was the only one left alive.

His own bravery disgusted him: he had fought as man would if possessed by a ravening beast. He wept cruel tears, as he tried to prize his swollen hands from the blood-grimed rifle.

The corpse of the soldier Francis had just killed groaned in death as if it were a fitful nightmare he slept. The belly gaped upon wriggling innards as if these were new sexual organs the corpse wanted to be fondled and loved.

Then Francis dreaded that terror was the sky itself, staring down at him with one searing eye.

"Our Father up in Heaven...."

Except he knew it was a mother, not a father.

Francis muttered a nursery rhyme he had nearly forgotten from his mother's red lips. And by smearing the changeling soldier's blood and guts over his own life-long ugliness, he prepared himself for healing reunion with the extreme of terror itself: the unsurvivable past.

As the fire began to settle in the grate, the ceiling cracks faded. Just before sleep took purchase, the little boy managed to turn on his side within the tight covers and was sure he saw another little boy on all fours tidying up his toy soldiers in front of the fire, and through whom could still faintly be seen the stunted flickering of the fire's one solitary flame. The last thing the real Francis ever yearned for was the approach of his long-awaited mother's goodnight kiss, which would further ease him into deepest slumber — but he felt someone's big tongue and, then, the long teeth, instead.

*Terror has no diary, since Terror cannot write.  
Charles Maturin 'Melmoth The Wanderer'*

# *Shaken, Not Stirred*

by Gerald W. Page

Not only did I fail to see her approach, I was not aware of her standing beside me until she said, "I bet you like your martinis shaken." Taking my eyes away from the woman who really interested me, I looked at the speaker and told her, "I beg your pardon?" That was a mistake because when I looked back, my prey was gone.

"Your martinis," said my new friend, smiling coyly. "I bet you like them shaken, not stirred. Like James Bond. You look like James Bond."

"Which one?"

"Not the actors. Well, maybe a bit like Sean Connery, when he was younger. But I mean like the James Bond in the books. You look the way I always imagined he looked when I read the books."

Her drink that evening was not a martini — for the record, neither was mine — but scotch. She sipped some of it and glanced at me under her long, mascara'd lashes. She was small, blonde and not unattractive. My taste runs to mid-sized brunettes like Myrna Welch, the woman I was watching, but when there's time, there can be exceptions. I considered the fact that Myrna and I had already agreed on the time and decided an exception was in order.

The blonde said, "Can I get you one?"

"You mean a martini?"

"Of course."

"I never drink them."

"Then you can't be James Bond. Who does that make you, then? Phillip Marlowe, perhaps? Or maybe Superman?"

"There's no phone booth handy. You may never know."

"I think I will." Coy, again. "The night is young."

"Indeed it is."

"I'm Louise. Louise Kirk. Are you really Superman?"

"I'm told he and I have a lot in common. How's your drink?"

She took a moment to study her glass before answering. "It'll do for now. You need one, though."

"Not just yet. I like to wait awhile, first.

Anticipation."

"Oh. Anticipation."

I suppose you could call my watching Myrna a sort of finicky and unnecessary possessiveness. Small, blue-eyed blondes have their merits, especially energetically predatory ones with expressive mouths that give the game away. So I said, "Let's find a place to sit."

"In here?"

"Of course not. It's too crowded. Maybe out on the patio."

"That's a lovely idea," she said, taking my arm. As we made our way across the room, she asked, "Are you Harriet's or Walter's friend?"

"Neither."

She looked at me in amazement. How much that revealed about her. "Don't tell me you gate-crashed." She continued quickly before I could tell her anything. "No you couldn't have. It just isn't possible. You wouldn't have the nerve, would you? Wait, I've got it."

We were at the patio door now and I could see there was nothing to sit on, not that it mattered.

"It's that woman you were staring at."

"I was staring at a woman?"

"Don't be so cute. Her name is Myrna."

There was another couple on the patio. Louise saw them and made a face, but kept on squeezing my arm and talking. "Of course. Myrna came with someone else. What's his name, the dentist who plays bridge — that's not a joke. Monty. For God's sake, Monty Kellaway."

The other couple could not have known the earth was still populated, so interested were they in each other, but Louise guided me as far away from them as possible and whispered, "You did gate-crash."

"My secret is unveiled."

"Sure it is." Then, more thoughtfully, she added, "But you do have one, don't you? Just who are you?"

"I thought I was Superman. Or James Bond."

Trying but unable to hide her delight she said, "You're playing a game with me."

"It's your game."

"Then you have to play by my rules. Tell me something."

"Your eyes are beautiful in the moonlight."

"Not that kind of something. Not just yet, anyway. I mean, about yourself. You have to tell me something about yourself."

"About myself. You want a clue, is that it? Let's see. Once upon a time, I did something very like James Bond. In wartime."

"In Vietnam? Or the Middle East?"

"No. The war in Europe."

"You're not old enough."

"It's a clue."

"Then I've got it. You're a professional liar. Does it pay well?"

"You'd never believe me."

"You think you're so smart." She slipped her arms around me and I reciprocated. "But I'll learn your secret yet. Meanwhile, tell me more about my eyes in the moonlight."

"When we're alone."

"We are now."

Sure enough, while I'd been talking with Louise, the lovebirds had slipped away. So I kissed her. That done, I said, "I feel exposed up here. Let's go into the garden."

"Why the garden?"

I gave her another, longer kiss. "Have you ever made love in the moonlight, my dear? Men who make love by the light of the moon always seem to reveal their deepest secrets. Do you see that small grove of trees?"

She looked where I was pointing and said, "I can hardly wait."

She took my hand and led the way. It was a pleasantly warm night with just enough of a breeze to make it comfortable enough. I

sneaked a look at my watch.

In the concealing shadows of the trees, Louise turned and held her mouth up for me again. The kiss was long, alternately tender and passionate, very satisfying as those things go. Then I bit her neck. That was even more satisfying. She didn't scream. They never do.

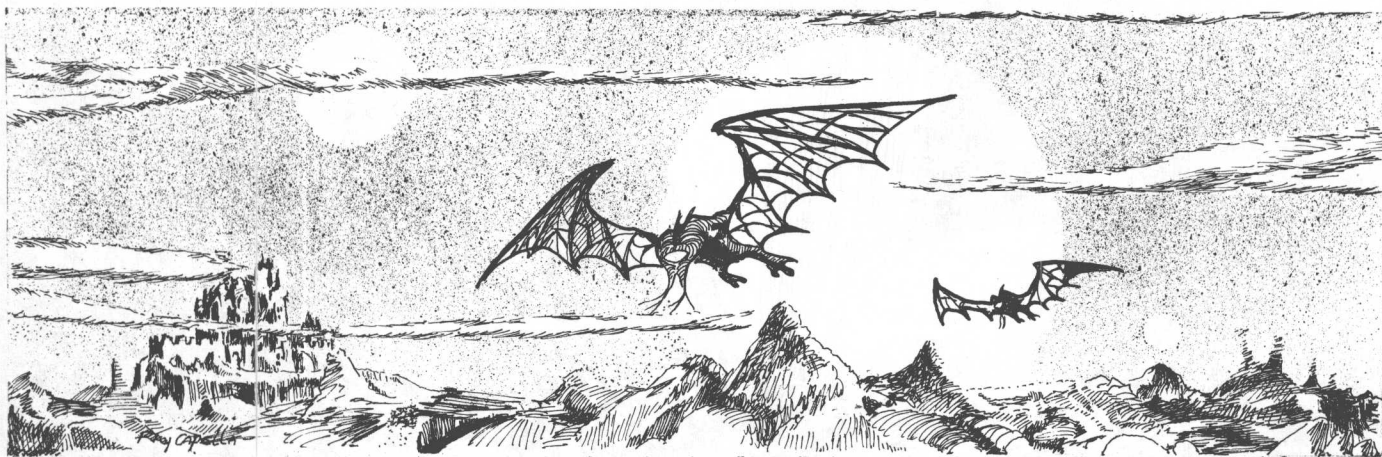
Back in my World War II days in the OSS, I was taught that the best way to take out a sentry was simply to put a knife in his kidney. It was usually fatal and the shock was always sufficient to prevent outcry. Being bitten by a vampire is something like that. When I was bitten, I gave no outcry, either. I'd so expertly — or so I thought — stalked and killed two sentries patrolling a Rumanian castle, only to discover that all unknown to the occupying Nazis, to say nothing of my people and myself, one of the castle's earlier owners still occupied its catacombs. And was better at stalking than I was.

As I finished with Louise, I gently let her to the ground. In the moonlight she was very beautiful. Behind me, I heard a sound. A gasp.

It was Myrna, of course. She had just arrived to keep her appointment with me. She was staring, very wide-eyed, at Louise on the ground, and she was obviously quite shaken.

That's all right, though. That's how I prefer them.

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# Homunculus

## by Kendall Evans

Time — this time — within this time upon once which we dwell, the old alchemist William Cowden wends his way along Chessborough Lane unseeing, past the chemist's shop; a tobacconist's (crude little sign in the window, "Imported Virginia Blends," above a display of ornate snuff boxes fashioned from polished wood and lacy metal), glancing at the display without fully perceiving it, lost in thoughts of: a recent but persistent cough unrelieved by medicants — should he see the doctor or delay a few days more? Wait, he decides. Give it time. — Also: an unpleasant disagreement with his housekeeper Mary this morning. He nearly dismissed her in a pique of anger; fortunately wiser restraint prevailed. Mary a good woman and he would hate to lose her. Occasional bouts of stubbornness are infrequent; alternate with her more normal state of easy domestic complacency.

... And yet, beyond these thoughts, he is occupied — preoccupied — reluctantly, by thoughts of John.

Bedlam awaits him.

Literally. It is his destination.

— And not a destination much to be desired. First, he needs courage. Preferably the liquified courage found in a pub. The relaxed gathering of energies. Yes, he affirms: I'll stop there first.

For: he is en route to visit John. Young John, he thinks fondly, emotions mixed; my son. Hatter-mad, half-witted ward of Bedlam. For some unknown reason he has decided to see John today, first time in over a year, and the sense of obligation long neglected weighs upon him heavily.

The interval itself must be his reason, William realizes. Time was, he visited John every month or two. But that was quite some time ago, the gap between visits widening gradually.

... Arriving at the pub surprises him. Legs unerring while his mind a-muddle. He has no memory of the last blocks walked; bundles his handkerchief around a coughing fit which takes hold, as if of his very soul, leaving him weakened in its passing.

The Crow and Kettle. Wooden sign dangling from a rusted wrought-iron chain. Painted image of a black bird, perched on the rim of a large kettle, posture challenging — daring passers-by within. Half-timbered wall; worn wooden door. Light-headed, he pushes inside.

Thinking: Augustus might be here. Someone

to talk to. Reminisce with. He craves conversation, but the pub is nearly deserted at this hour. He recognizes no one. Not the old dodderer with the walking stick. Not the middle-aged couple engaged in bored courtship.

So. He takes his pale ale to a table alone. A table he has occupied many times before, years past, when not only Augustus might be here but their whole circle of acquaintances; alchemists and inventors; occasional political rebels bemoaning social injustice; intellectuals. And even, twice or thrice, the poet George Gordon Lord Byron, outrageously outspoken as his reputation. And all, in memory, drank heavily, whisky and ale and other alcohols seeming to fuel their alchemical quests. The search for successful transmutation of lead into gold. An *elixir vitae*. They had seemed, in their moments of shared energies, to solve in turn each problem of the world.

Now they are, all, ghosts around him. (Though ghosts of men still, for the most part, to the best of his knowledge, among the living. Ghosts of his mind. Of memory. Excepting Edward Brinsley, who died in his twenty-eighth year, ever obsessed with his quest for an elixir of life, the *tinctura philosophorum*, as he referred to it. It was only in retrospect, after Brinsley's untimely death, that Cowden decided Edward's obsession with life eternal was likely the result of continual ill health, and vivid sense of death impending.)

He is tempted to engage them in conversation. As the dodderer at the bar now gestures his walking stick at bare air. In the manner of inmates at Bedlam he's observed, conversing with nothingness.

Instead: he sips his ale.

Have to stop on the way, he decides. For a treat. For John. A sweet roll or two.

Meditating upon the past, he touches his ring, the only piece of jewelry he wears, twisting it, an habitual gesture. Turning it, and then again, with the thumb of the same hand that bears the ring; repetitively, as if fingering worry beads or rosary. Symbol, perhaps, of his work. Emblematic, certainly, of failure. For the ring is fashioned from base metal, gold-tinted dross alloy, nor lead nor gold, valueless, result of one of his final, futile attempts at transmutation.

The rattle of carriage wheels upon cobble stones, stomp-and-clomp rhythms of horses' hoofs, reaches him as the pub's door opens. It closes as quickly, shutting out the sound: Augustus has arrived after all.

"William!" Augustus calls across the pub, uninhibited; "Will! I've a note from Percy!"

He watches Augustus order his drink. Silently watches his approach. "D'you have it



with you?" he asks as the other shifts his chair about at the table, getting comfortable.

Augustus Clough appears chronically ill, his complexion jaundiced. — But his eyes are alive as ever with youthful excitement.

"No. You'll have to stop by my quarters. Have a read..."

Briefest pause for Cowden to respond yea or nay; when he remains still, Clough continues: "He's been appointed to the University! A full Professor!"

"Well," Cowden says. Thinking of Percy Graves' proper way of speaking. Too proper, nearly. His University background. His botched experiments. "So he's a teacher, then. Always was a better scholar than alchemist. What's he have to say, eh?"

Clough considers. "Oh, not much. Other than how proud he is of the post, though he came to it rather late in life, which he admits; says he always was a disappointment to his father 'n now that he's finally done something as would impress 'im the old sod is dead."

"It's the way of life," Cowden philosophizes; smiles.

Augustus lights his pipe. Noxiously aromatic smoke billows, hovering in a visible cloud below the ceiling's open rafter beams, spreading leisurely. He, Cowden, contemplates his mug of ale, nearly drained. Impolite not to drink another since Augustus has just now arrived, though two are too much a strain of late on his constitution, leaving him flushed and palpitating.

— "I'll have another, then," he says companionably.

Once more settled, full mug to hand, he recalls Percy's demand—urgently expressed request, really — that Cowden be present when he delivered his homunculus forth from its incubation. But when Graves lifted it, gently and tenderly from its cauldron-like vat, his creation proved a fragile still-born travesty, soft and brittle, limbs crumbling apart in Percy's cautious grip.

Cowden nearly laughed aloud at the sight of it, holding his mirth within only for the sake of Percy's grim countenance.

Not merely stillborn, Percy's homunculus — it had never, quite obviously, approached the living state.

Shaking off the memory, Cowden realizes he's been asked a question. What?... Oh. About his researches; his work.

"No. Nothing at all, recently. There's been no time for serious experiments. I've a shop to run, and profits are down."

"I know you, Will. I know you too well. That shop of yours isn't enough; you can't be satisfied with selling dyes you've mixed a hundred times

before."

Painful truth; Cowden leans back and crosses his arms, distancing himself from Clough. Feeling, of a turn, argumentative.

"I don't know, Augustus. Times are changing. We hark back to van Helmont, and Reinburg, and Paracelsus. The early alchemists. But new ideas are taking hold. A new vision, inspired by Isaac Newton and his ilk. This young man Faraday, for instance — are you familiar with his bent? I've heard him speak; his arguments are most persuasive. I believe he'll do great things some day."

He does not come out and say, not wanting to quell Clough's enthusiasm: if anyone will succeed in extending human life, in transmuting lead into gold, men like Faraday and their philosophical descendants will accomplish the reality. But he thinks it; more and more it is what he has come to believe.

"Did I tell you I'm working on a new formula?" Augustus' pipe has gone dead; he rekindles it nervously, to the tempo of his words. "I feel I'm really on the right track this time. All hinging on the union of opposites. You remember Sir George Egerton's formulas for transmutation, just before he went off to Spain? I believe I'm on a similar course."

Sir George, thinks Cowden, with his prodigious drinking and womanizing. Of course, one had to give him credit; he'd devoted equal energy to his work. An amiable madman, Cowden felt; still, he'd liked the man. And when Sir George's experiments showed promise, the throne of Spain had offered to sponsor his endeavors. Egerton set off for the continent and they had not seen him, had not heard from him since. "Do you really believe he succeeded? I've heard no rumors of Spain's coffers overflowing."

Clough dismisses negatives with a shrug. "Mayhap. Perhaps the process is so complex that only small quantities of metal can be transformed at any one time. But, Will; forget Egerton. I'm certain this time that I'm close. I can feel it! I've already combined two promising derivatives of arsenic with lead and mercury for my latest metallurgic trial...."

Caught up in his words, gesturing, Clough bobs and weaves like a man in a street fight. "You should see the harmony of my symbols! The symmetry on paper! Such perfectly balanced equations cannot fail me!" The spell of the other's enthusiasm is contagious, and Cowden too is caught up, the ghosts about him seeming ghosts no longer but avid listeners, and he feels again the old feelings, not lost after all: his sense of himself as a formidable alchemist, a veritable sorcerer, controlling the elements and



elementals of Earth and Air, Fire and Water. And he thinks: why not? Why not attempt another homunculus? He's held off too long, mere diddling in his lab, trying to come up with a useful alloy for cooking pots and utensils. It's time he became serious once again.

Desire born anew. With the knowledge he's acquired over the years, might he not yet achieve his dreams? With the homunculus. With transmutation.

Sensing Cowden's profound change of mood, Augustus repeats his earlier invitation: "Say! What about stopping by? Have another ale with me, and a squint at Percy's letter."

"No. Promised myself I'd take the coach out to Lambeth this noontime."

"Ah. To Bedlam, you mean. To see John."

Cowden smiles; pushes to his feet. "You do know me well, Augustus. Too well. And I must go... but I'm glad I ran across you this morning. Truly. You've helped me set my mind a-right.... And I do want to see Percy's letter. I'll stop by some evening soon."

He gathers up his coat; his hat.

Up along High Street. Onto Drury Lane, beneath an overcast sky.

Running across Augustus was fortuitous; he's forgotten how inspiring the man can be.

... Past the flea market. Table displaying mismatched shoes. Scuffed leather. Eroded soles; soles with holes. Leaning racks of worn clothing, and then another table; fractured china and household utensils. Who would desire such wares? Not many: an ill-garbed few, marred by poverty, pick desultorily, like birds of prey half-heartedly pecking.

Next: an array of broken carriage parts. Metal in varying shades of brown, the stages of time's decline. Some wheelwright's work gone to rust.

He considers the mixing of a rust-colored dye: might the grains and particles of debased metal themselves prove of use?

Beyond, the stench of coal-smoke and city rankness is displaced by the odors of cooking food. Sweet smells from a bakery catty-corner across the way; predatory sale of rotting meat close-by. Fire-spattered drippings carry the scent.

He has entered the market-place proper. Shoppers more numerous here; appear healthier, happier. Dun burlap of stacked sacks of grain. Yellow-greens and green-yellows, vegetables heaped in baskets. A pyramid constructed of cabbage heads, oriental complexity of dove-tailing leaf within dove-tailing leaf, within.... Vendors call out, loud colorful enticements to passersby.

Where he had seen a goose this Christmas past, a rabbit carcass hangs, raw red and mottled white. He thinks: it's how my spirit's felt of late. As raw as that. As dead.

Cowden seeks and finds a gap in the line of product-laden carts, parked nearly hub- to-hub.

He crosses to the bake shop, narrowly avoiding an over-hasty carriage, and within, quickly selects two sugared rolls plus a small assortment of sweet-meats for John. A plump girl wearing a flour-dusted apron skillfully juggles demands from several customers at once. Though overweight — especially her dimpled arms — she's pretty. Accepts his money amiably. Cowden barely notices her smile, the glimpse of crooked teeth; enacts the transaction in his usual preoccupied state, uncertain whether his change is correct, concluding: best stop in at my own shop, too — it is, after all, more-or-less along the way.

Two blocks on and one turn further he enters a plain-fronted door. The door is unlocked; ajar. But the shop within appears deserted. Robert must be out back. With only a cursory check to make certain business is in order, his passes through and out into the yard, where he finds both Robert Bolton and his son Bob laboring over vats of dyes. Beneath the vats are rubbed burning coals: orange glow within the black of charred wood, the gray of ash.

"Good morning, sir," Robert calls good-naturedly. His expressionless face belies the tone.

"Morning," Cowden responds, watching father and son work.

The yard is enclosed by high fences, the rear of his shop and lab, a crude supply shed, and the back of the pottery shop which fronts on King Street. Low patches of bracken and gorse straggle at the periphery of the work-area, and wild heather grows up along one fence. But the center of the yard is barren, strewn with ash from the fires and poisoned by chemicals used to manufacture the dyes. Near his feet several clumps of brown grass, long dead, faded to the color of old hay.

The enclosed, cluttered yard is claustrophobic; the same overcast sky observed from the streets out front presses closer here.

Cowden approaches Robert Bolton; stands near his side. The other continues to work, stirring the cooking dye. His sleeves are rolled up. His face is sheened with sweat; sooty from the fire. His hairy arms are stained with streaks of dye: red and blue; a gold daub.

"How are the profits this month compared to last, Robert? Are the books up to date?"

Robert shifts his squint-eyes guiltily. "Through the end of April only."

"Would you enter the latest figures for me later today. It's urgent that I get them checked."

"Not today, sir. Impossible. We're low on some of the dyes; as you can see, I had to bring Bob along to help out, lest we might not get caught up at all."

"Tomorrow, then," Cowden allows. "Don't forget; we've got to keep a close watch on expenses."

Rampant changes in the textile industry, mechanized at such a pace it seemed overnight, had made him a prosperous man, never quite wealthy, though for a while it had seemed he might attain such status. His original dyes, oddly enough, had been a result of his experiments with transmutation — unforeseen. He'd become intrigued by the striking colors he found in the dross byproducts. Especially the metallic colors. Especially the gold. Indeed, he was best known for the metallic colors that his shop produced.

Gradually, however, the last decade, business had fallen off. Up until the time John was six years old, he had paid a weekly fee to a Mrs. Fitzsimmons to be his full time nursemaid; to care for him; mother him; and, so far as proved possible, to tutor the inadequate child. But financial set-backs had eventually forced him to send John off to Bedlam. A business man's clout, friend of a friend of a friend, provided necessary leverage, admitting John into an institution already overcrowded with England's dispossessed.

"How's the family, then?"

Robert's sudden smile, wholehearted, is the first to appear during their conversation. He is, above else, a family man. He works for his wages, he's a good worker, but he owns no interest whatsoever in Cowden's experimental efforts. "Margaret is fit, considering all the children she has to rear. Little Margie is our fifth — she's starting to talk sense now, not just a word here or there, but says things so-as you know she's thinkin' about it all — measurin' and considerin'."

Cowden lingers a moment longer; nods Goodday without saying the word.

He hesitates as he nears Bob, not standing at the boy's side, but well across the boiling cauldron from him; and broods a moment, searching for some words to say. "A bit more zinc in the mix, mayhap?" he suggests, gesturing at the roiling dye.

"Yes sir. Can't hurt."

Bob resembles his father. Unlike Robert, his eyes haven't gone squinty yet; but the features are similar, full nose and thin lips. Receding chin identical. And adolescence has already

given him the muscles of a healthy young laborer. Studying the youth, he avoids comparing Bob to Young John; comparisons too painful. And, although he shies from such thoughts, the realization is there, deep down, hurtful as a fresh wound. Cowden wants to say something more — another comment on the dye, perhaps; a bit of advice to keep the boy alert — but he feels another coughing fit coming on and holds it back, not wanting to appear weak in front of his workers, coughing like a tubercular old man.

Inside, he manages to close the door — then yields to the retching cough, doubling over, reflexively reaching for his handkerchief, attempting to muffle the explosions of sound within. When the retching finally subsides, he feels dizzy. No looking glass to hand but he knows his face is flushed, his eyes veined with swollen lines of red. He holds to the counter, gathering breath; gathering strength.

He wonders whether Robert will remember to enter the new figures tomorrow. More like, Cowden will end up up-dating the books himself. Not the first time he'll have left off a day in the lab to take a hand. Paperwork not Robert's favorite work; he plods his way through numbers, and unenthusiastically.

Yet Cowden needs to keep a grip on finances — if present trends continue he may have to dismiss his housekeeper, not out of anger, but out of grim necessity. Might even have to give up his lodgings and take up residence back of the shop.

He pushes through into the backroom, his laboratory. Shelves line one wall — the east wall — two simple bookcases constructed of joined, unornamented wooden planks. Upon the top shelf of the nearer cabinet: a row of six loaf-shaped ingots of metal, the most notable examples of his attempts at transmutation. None would pass for gold. The sample on the right matches, in color and composition, the single ring which Cowden wears on the ring-finger of his left hand. The shelves beneath the ingots are occupied by manuscripts of other, more famous alchemists, relating to transmutation, as well as several volumes of his own hand-bound, leather-bound notes.

Jars line the uppermost shelf of the second cabinet.

His homunculi.

A row of three jars, three homunculi, preserved in a concoction of his own devising, part alcohol, part boiled brine.

The homunculi resemble, in various stages of development, human fetuses. The homunculus floating in the jar on the right appears to be the most advanced. Yet it is not a situation of one

being more mature than the others; rather a matter of the growth and perfection of his experimental methods; his knowledge.

He examines, close up, the final specimen. The murkiness of the liquid, a contaminant of the homunculus' own internal fluids and dissolved tissues, is minimal; does not conceal details. The bulbous head, disproportionately large. The fragile, four-fingered hand uplifted where the death-rigor froze it. Knees bent and spine curved as if to fit a woman's womb, though no womb ever confined it. Scrannel limbs and larval white skin. Bulging, navelless abdomen. Filmed eyes gaping through translucent lids. When he had extricated it, kicking and squirming, the homunculus, from its cauldron of nurturing fluids, the struggles which Cowden mistook for strong signs of life proved to be its throes of death.

Beneath the jars, on the lower shelves, the manuscripts of Paracelsus, Simon Magus, et al, relating to the creation of artificial life. And, once more, his own bound notes and journals.

He lifts one of his own volumes from its particular niche, at random; opens it. The entries within fluctuate between extremes — entries of exemplary precision in a neat hand alternate with notes jotted in a fervor of experimental frenzy, some, no doubt, distorted by the extremis of fatigue, of ale-induced exhaustion.

"Forty days in a sealed retort," he reads — words written in his own hand — "are in no way beneficial. The stale environment promotes rather than prevents decay. Paracelsus' words have set me back months. While magnetizing the homunculus may be as crucial as Paracelsus suggests, the idea of storage in horse manure is nonsensical. I must seek my own methods; must abandon Paracelsus."

After nearly a year of wasted efforts, he had begun to suspect that Paracelsus, jealously protective of his secret alchemical knowledge, had provided deliberate misinformation. For, wasn't it Paracelsus who had written of "greater secrets, which will remain secret until the end of days?" Time and again, Cowden was forced to turn away from earlier alchemists, forging his own procedures, guided by intuitive experimentation.

He gazed once again upon the homunculi, buoyed in their liquid-filled jars. Earlier experiments, nor later, are not represented here. These three are the first to exhibit movements and other indications of life. Initially, there had been travesties, though nothing so comical as Percy's crumbling clayey doll of artificial flesh.

A fourth homunculus, also not present upon

the shelf, had survived just under three weeks after removal from the liquid bath. A constant struggle, a constant vigil, with the help of one Dr. Pennwick, to keep it alive even that long. Pennwick had insisted it would be better to let the poor monstrosity die; even to hasten its death; but Cowden's obsessive determination dissuaded him. And in the end — Pennwick believing to that end that it was the flesh-and-blood child of unfortunate parents — the Doctor had seemed as disappointed by the homunculus' death as Cowden himself.

After three weeks in the world, he decided, the homunculus had earned a burial — though not a strictly Christian ceremony, and not in hallow ground. He rode out into the moor-like hills with his secret parcel. He spaded up a shallow grave; erected a small, hand-made wooden cross. Spoke a word or two, in solitude, above the grave.

— Tomorrow, he promises himself, I will begin anew. To create a new homunculus. Yes. It will be a long and arduous task, yet joyous nonetheless. Visions of the accomplishment dance within. 40 days conception. 40 weeks gestation. 40 and 40, the magical numbers, as harmonious, as balanced, he is certain, as Augustus Clough's latest equations.

... He closes his manuscript. Re-shelves it. Glances about at the work table's orderly disorder. Re-positions a tool or two.— Departs.

Interminable wait in a cold stone room. At first, seated on that bench in Bedlam, his body seemed to rock and sway with the fluctuations of the carriage ride — memory, or after effect, of continued movement.

The door is open. He listens to distant frenzied shrieking, echoing along the hallways. The sound is a distraction, edging at his nerves, an irritation. He makes a deliberate effort not to hear it. His posture is hunched and stiff against the cold. His chest feels taut. The dampness of the chamber is an old-damp; he thinks of moisture seeping slowly, year-by-year, through porous stone.

He sets the treats upon the bench beside him; touches his hand to the unyielding toy concealed in his pocket, reassuring himself of its presence.

Sunlight has burned off the morning's overcast; spills through the room's only window, painting a lopsided rectangle of light, shadow-barred, upon the stone floor.

Tattered tapestry on the opposite wall. Depiction of bare-breasted Mary nursing haloed, holy infant. A significant portion of the lower right corner appears chewed away; he wonders whether some madman — or madwoman — has



literally gnawed upon the cloth. No doubt the tapestry is a relic of St. Mary of Bethlehem's history as a priory, before it became an asylum for lunatics.

A year after John's admittance, the hospital changed locations, moving to Lambeth. A less convenient location. Another excuse for visiting John less frequently.

One of the guards finally appears, severe of aspect, leading John by the shoulder.

"You asked to visit John?" the man asks, pleasantly enough. "John Cowden?"

Expressionless, William nods.

"We receive few visitors here," he states matter-of-factly.

Meanwhile John, excited to see him, trots all around the room. "Daddy, Daddy, Daddy," he sings, to the accompanying rhythms of his horsey canter. Which surprises Cowden; he had speculated whether, after so long, the boy would even recognize him.

The guard silently observes John's antics — remaining fixedly within the room.

"Please leave us now," Cowden requests.

Still the guard makes no move to depart. "He can be difficult at times."

Sternly, then: "I wish... to see.. my son. Alone." God's blood, he wonders; must I bribe the fool with a sixpence? A shilling? He does not like the guard's eyes — erratic meanness there, as if madness is a contaminant in the very air of Bedlam.

The other drops his gaze; turns to leave. "All right; all right. I'll be nearby."

The guard closes the door, but not completely. Cowden waits a moment longer before reaching for his gifts.

"Look what I brought you, John."

Seeing the treats, John continues to dance, but changes the lyrics of his chant:

"Sweets, Daddy, Sweets! Sweets, Daddy, Sweets!" Shrill song, half robbed of meaning. The canter gives way to dizzying spinning dance.

Finally John loses momentum — decides eating the treats will be more fun than singing about them.

John in motion is the same John as ever. But now that the boy has left off dancing, Cowden immediately notices changes. John walks with a limp; has he been beaten? By the same guard, perhaps, who led him here? Cowden has heard rumors of mistreatment of the mad within these walls.

Of course, too, the boy might have injured himself. The crippled right hand is evidence enough of that possibility.

But what's most startling are the shocks of grey at the boy's temples. And the shaggy hair along the sides of his head, brindled with grey.

John is only twelve years old, but his flesh is the flesh of an old man, hanging in skinny wattles beneath the bones of his arms. Seeing these signs of premature aging, Cowden feels certain the boy will never attain his sixteenth year.

But John is, and always will be, Young John; mentally no more than three or four. His face unseamed; his eyes as innocent as ever.

John grabs the rolls and squats on the floor with them, stuffing one whole roll and part of the other into his mouth, before beginning to chew. And chews with difficulty, his mouth too full. Cowden might think the boy's been starved, but knows he always eats like this. Mrs. Fitzsimmons constantly complained it was impossible to teach him manners.

Making quick work of the rolls, Young John returns for the sweet-meats. Drool runs down one side of his mouth. At least the sweet-meats are not such a mouthful. Cowden realizes he should have broken the rolls into smaller portions. No: let the boy enjoy himself. Not so many pleasures in the world, for one such as John. In Bedlam, fewer still.

If they cleaned John up before allowing his visit, there's not much evidence of it, though Cowden can think of no other reason for the delay. John's garb *might* be clean, but appears rumpled as if slept in, and the too-small shirt allows John's featureless little pot-belly to show, spilling over the waist of his tattered britches. Perhaps they washed the boy's face and hands.

Lost in sugary trance, still chewing at the sweet-meats, John gazes up at the tapestry. He appears, to Cowden, to be staring at Madonna's bared breast; experiencing some dim glimmer of manhood? Or envying the cuddled child, and longing to be so comforted?

— Or, more like, he does not see the tapestry at all.

Ever since John's arrival, Cowden has been searching for something to say to the boy. Now, inspired, he asks:

"Do you remember Mrs. Fitzsimmons?"

"Ma Fitz?" John asks. "Ma ma Fitz. Ma-ma-ma Fitz?"

"Yes," Cowden agrees, nodding. "Ma Fitz. I told her I'd be visiting you today. She asked me to wish you well. She said to say 'Hello.'"

It's a lie, but a well-intentioned lie. Not much compared to some he's told. Not much to say for a man who sometimes feels that he's living a lie — that, indeed, his whole life is a lie.

John does not smile or speak, but appears thoughtful, as if absorbing information.

Cowden recalls the phrenologist without recalling his name. For a while a part of their drinking circle, frequenting the Crow and Kettle Friday nights, when of a Friday night

Augustus mentioned Young John in conversation. "John is really something," Augustus said. "Babbling away, and lots of real words, too, when most his age would still be mewling or puking." And on Augustus had raved, extolling Young John's virtues, until the phrenologist must intervene, insisting upon an examination of the prodigy.

Those were the days. That first year, when John showed so much promise; so intelligent compared to other children his age. Cowden's pride and optimism soared; it was, quite possibly, the best year of his life.

The phrenologist — Henry something-or-other...? — spent an hour and more with the boy, fascinated, feeling of his scalp, intuiting the skull beneath, predicting a brilliant future, greatest of expectations for this knobbly-skulled son of William Cowden — Only, not his son at all, of course, Young John.

The last homunculus.

40 days and 40 weeks aborning.

He had never told anyone. Made up stories to account for the boy's origin. Percy and some of the others were fooled, he was sure, though he suspected Clough and Egerton suspected the truth.

Once more Cowden touches the toy concealed in his pocket. He brings it forth. "Look, John. Remember? Remember your toy carriage? It was always your favorite." Not very carriage-like, the wheeled toy. Simplified, blockish form of wood — but sturdier for it. And the wheels really *do* turn.

John yanks the toy away and begins rolling it back and forth, frenzied pace, upon the floor. The rolling becomes increasingly violent, the toy lifted higher with each sweep, the rolling becoming more of a pounding, until all he does is pound it upon the floor, John in one of his destructive fits, hammering down the toy again and again until it splinters in the grip of the same four-digit hand that is crippled from pounding on various floors in various rooms, an assortment of objects destroyed.

"Stop now, John. Stop. You're hurting your hand."

John looks angry; Cowden wonders whether there is a pattern of meaning to the anger — or is it merely a random seizure?

Finally, John stops.

He might have been heartened by John's so surpassing all previous experiments. But had not been. Rather: ashamed of his half-witted homunculus. Guilt-ridden that he had imparted life to a monstrosity. For — who knew of such mysteries? — Perhaps a healthy soul, a human soul, in search of unborn child and falsely lured by Cowden's creation, had therein taken root,

imprisoned by mal-formed flesh; condemned to partial, unfulfilled existence. How could any soul grow properly in such imperfect vessel? And might not this frustration explain John's bouts of seemingly reasonless anger?

Never again had he attempted an homunculus; better to toy with cold alloys of metal, than to work such cruel mischief.

So: his dream of beginning anew is only a dream.

Weary, Cowden reverts to habit — fingering his ring.

Fingers adhere briefly, sticky with syrupy residue of the sweets. He removes his already damp handkerchief and rubs at his fingers. Rubs between.

— Notices the crumbs and frosting smeared upon John's cheek and chin, and clinging to his upper lip.

"Let me wash your face, son. It's all sticky."

Cowden wets a corner of the cloth with his own saliva; brushes at John's cheek. But the boy pulls away.

"Hold still, son. Let me wash you. Hold still!" He puts his hand on the boy's head to restrain him; begins to scrub at cheek and chin. But John makes it impossible, wrinkling up his face and ducking aside, as if from something unpleasant.

"It stinks, Daddy!"

Angered, Cowden stuffs the handkerchief back into his pocket and turns away. "It's time to say goodbye now, son. I've got work to do at the shop. I can't stay any longer."

Because he cannot bear it any longer, John's presence. Even though he has not been here truly long at all; the carriage ride more lengthy; the wait in this same room, prior to John's arrival, longer.

No matter.

"Goodbye, John," he says again, making for the door. "Take care."

He hesitates in the doorway, expecting an answer, but John does not respond.

Cowden leaves, hurrying, but not wanting to appear hasty. He brushes past the guard, who lingers near the door. And finally hears John's singing, echoing along the hall: "Bye, Daddy, Bye. — Bye bye, Daddy, Bye."

He blinks away the sound; he seeks egress.

Grief and disappointment as if John had been his own flesh and blood; his true son. Nights when, alone in his chamber, he has wept unremittingly; in privacy; in pain. For himself. For John.

Had ever loved the boy. As best he might, though not perhaps as well as he should. Called him son; given him the name Cowden. Allowed him to keep the name, even after it became

apparent that all the boy's promise was false promise. A lie.

Poor John. John o' Bedlam.

His steps lead him through unfamiliar interiors; along a hallway. Beyond one door he sees inmates chained to the wall, like victims in a torture chamber. Abruptly, the hallway opens on his right, revealing a courtyard. Within the courtyard: lunatics at play, kicking a ball back and forth. Sequential glimpses of their game, perceived through one archway after another. They frolic in abandon, and yet — he cannot quite pinpoint — there is a wrongness in it, as if their joy is an anagram of normal human merriment.

The game is interrupted. And again interrupted, by inmates on the side-line, trying to steal the ball. Or walking through the game's center, blissfully unaware. A fist-fight breaks out. One tall, gaunt man walks out on the game, weeping in frustration, pounding his fists against his head.

Still in all, a relatively peaceful day in Bedlam. On other visits he's seen worse. Times when the madness reached riotous proportions, threatening to spill past the outermost walls — threatening to spill into his own skull.

Cowden halts, framing in one arch a group of eight or ten that catches his eye. Off to one side, laughing and watching the others, they appear to be brothers and sisters all. Yet he suspects they are not truly siblings. Rather, their particular madness itself a kind of relation.

— This is not the way. Not the way he came,

on the way in. Not past this courtyard.

He should have been more patient. Waited. Let the guard escort him out.

Bedlam becomes a maze, every turn the wrong turn, and so many turnings and hallways and doors. He longs to escape from Bedlam. To be on the outside, on the streets, among normal people. — Or at least, those who are less damaged than these. But he feels he's doing deeper in... deeper into the maze.

Lost in an old man's calm panic, he pushes on. Past a madman, frozen statue-like: arm outstretched, mouth agape.

Ahead in his path, a minor disturbance, a noisy confrontation. He walks to the extreme left of the way, eyes focused straight ahead, willfully avoiding involvement — And sees at last the entrance; his exit. His sense of insoluble labyrinth recedes, as does his heart's insistent hammering.

Mildly startled, two clerks leave off conversation to watch his departure.

Outside, he quickly crosses the street. And, staring back at Bedlam, lifts one hand in partial gesture of farewell. Knows now why he came today. Why he felt compelled to visit John: to say goodbye, finally and forever.

And as a reminder of why he promised himself, years before, to attempt no more homunculi. Guilt and regret prohibit it.

He will never again visit Bedlam... Unless it be: unhappily ever after, in grim senility...

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## City Out Of Time

by BRIAN LUMLEY

Betrayed by dreams I wander weirdling ways,  
Beneath the fronds of palms in jungles old  
When Earth herself was young and brave and bold.  
Where hybrid blooms sway serpentine I gaze  
On ruins which no other eyes have seen,  
Whose black foundations sink in primal green,  
A-crawl with efts of prehistoric days.

Beyond odd-angled ruins ceaseless pound  
The waves of frenzied ocean freshly borned  
Which never yet Man's ancestor have spawned.  
And here I find strange mysteries profound:  
These monoliths of which I stand in awe—  
Who builded them upon this primal shore?  
And what wild secrets have the ages drowned?

From books in waking worlds I know the name  
Of such a city lost in oceans deep,  
Where Ancient Ones in unquiet slumbers keep  
The lore of dark dimensions and the flame  
of elder magicks burning, 'til a time  
When upward from the aeon-silted slime  
Vast shapes will come as once before they came.

Aye, and that fane of evil was R'lyeh,  
Where dreaming Cthulhu lies in chains that bind,  
Sending his nightmares out to humankind,  
Drowning their noble dreams in nameless mire.  
And dreaming still I start as from the pile  
Snake tentacular arms and in a while  
A face that crowns the bulk of Evil's sire!



# *And to Taste the Colour of Time*

by Cyril Binder

Låron watched the stars wink on one by one. The clouds had parted; the clear sky shone with a million lights. It was the summer of his nineteenth year and Låron's journey was nearly at its end. In a few short days he would meet his teacher, the Mage Salas. All his young life Låron had dreamed of that day; to study the Magic Arts with the master. Finally, in the last bitter days of Twelfthmonth an answer had come. His petition had been approved.

Lying back against the roots of an ancient cypress, Låron considered his fortune. He had chosen this Path not for want of power nor out of some need or desire to control the world around him, but rather because he so loved the world which the Goddess had made for her Children. His real desire was to truly become a part of the whole, to be part and parcel of the rivers, the forest, the sky itself. He yearned to preserve, to explore, to revere nature. Perhaps that was why, at last, Salas had written the briefest of answers: "Come to Belcour at Midsummer's. I will teach you."

Though many might have thought the thousand league journey from Aman to Belcour difficult indeed, Låron found himself enjoying the solitude. To walk through the trackless forest, to follow the path of the winding river, to cross the rose hued plains of wind carved sandstone... these brought the greatest pleasure to the young traveler. Here beneath this blanket of stars, he found himself both filled with joy and enveloped by an almost ethereal peacefulness.

At length, Låron rose, walking toward the little river he had followed this day. He thought to wash the grit of the day's travels from him before he lay down to rest. Upon cresting a hillock which hid the river from his sight, he was most surprised indeed to spy a young woman kneeling at the river's edge. She held in her hand a wooden cup from which she shortly drank of the cool, clear water. Sensing something amiss, she

started when she saw Låron standing a few scant steps behind her.

The young man held up one hand saying, "Do not be alarmed; I mean you no mischief. I am a traveler bound from Aman to the Collegium at Belcour." He watched her face relax visibly. It was, he imagined, the most beautiful face he had ever seen. The eyes clear and blue, blue almost to excruciating violet, the hair neither red nor gold, yet both at once. She looked to be perhaps his own age; perhaps a year or two more. Finally she spoke in a voice soft and oddly musical.

"Blessings on you, young traveler. I am called Masarra, and I dwell just beyond the widening of the river. Often in the evenings I come to this place to listen to the dreams of the night sky."

From that moment forward, Låron's heart left him. As they sat talking beside the river they found in one another so many common threads that their weaving might have formed a bright tapestry of future days; of future years; future lives. In the span of a single eventide they formed a tacit bond few others might ever even aspire to, though whole lifetimes be spent in trying. At last Låron consented that they must part. Wishing her a good rest, he asked when they might meet on the morrow, having already resolved to delay his journey.

"I am sorry, my friend, but I fear I cannot see you again. Already we are so close that my heart gives me advice which I cannot follow. You have touched me in a way I believed might never come to pass, yet I dare not see you again." The young woman turned from him, looking out across the river. "I am betrothed to a kind and gentle young man. We have vowed to wed this fortnight hence. My heart cries for you, Låron, but it cannot be. I have given my word to him, and that is a vow which cannot be broken."

"And do you love this man?" asked Loran plainly.

"He is kind and loves me well. I know that his heart is true."

"Then I will wait for you, my sister. The fates move quietly in the hands of the Goddess."

Tears welled in Masarra's eyes, and Låron moved to her to hold her closely. An eternity passed before she looked into his

eyes saying, "I will see you again, my brother. Wait for me when the stars in the heavens have grown cold, and the world has gone to ashes. I give you my word that I shall meet you then."

The passage of forty years had not dimmed the memory of their parting. Låron studied well, devoting himself with a vengeance which even his teacher admired. He learned the ways of the Magic Arts as well as any who had gone before him. It was in the midst of preparations for Fifthmonth celebrations that Salas, his master, fell ill. The Mage's hundred years upon the earth were nearly over. Though Låron laboured to comfort the old man it availed him little. Finally, on the eve of Fifthmonth, Salas called Låron to him.

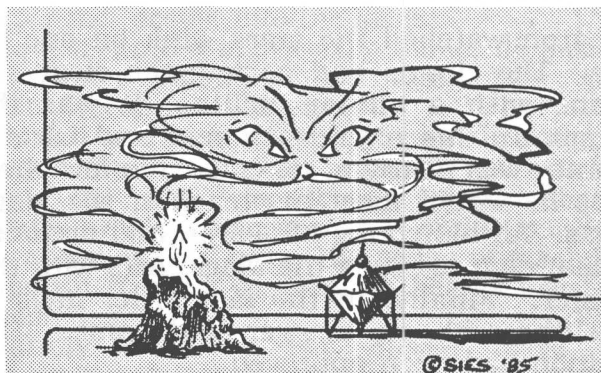
"You have learned well, my dear friend. You love the world and its beauty as much as learning itself. It has pleased me to impart to you what scraps of knowledge as were mine to give. I am going tonight to meet the Goddess, and our time together is past. There is nothing I have left to give you save for the black book here beside me. Keep it well, my son and student. It holds the keys to creation and destruction. You have proved your wisdom these eight score seasons. Here are the truths of the Arts; the Words of Power. The Word of Healing, the Word of Continuance, the Word of Extirpation. In simply using them I might live a thousand years, growing never a day older." The old man sighed deeply as if gathering his strength and said at last, "but we do not choose our fate. Be well, my son. The Goddess' blessings upon you."

And Låron was alone.

So it came to pass that Salas was committed to the embrace of the earth at Fifthmonth. When the small funeral procession had disbanded, Låron climbed a path with which he had become most familiar in his years with Salas. At the top of the hill overlooking the town of Belcour, Låron sat watching the sun go streaking down in the west. He thought of his friend and teacher, Salas the Wise, and of the old man's gifts of knowledge. He reflected upon the beauty of the world which the Goddess had made for her Children. He watched two bright red birds singing in the lone acacia on the hilltop. As the dusk gathered like a silent cloak about him,

Låron thought of Masarra, and of the words they had spoken at parting. The birds had grown quiet, and the clear sky shone with a million lights. Låron looked out over the peaceful valley and spoke a single Word, and watched the stars wink out, one by one.

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## Spell For Returning Dreams

Streaked with paint	across white stone
my dream returns	
from white mist	green leaves.
Wolf becomes deer	
deer becomes me	
in this forest	this world
revolved by song	
a frieze	a wood
where deer	run with wolves.
The nimbus	of our breath
illuminates	earth
so I	humming dreamer
see the path	
for hoof on fog	
tendon to snap	
chanting	chanting
the chase	without end.
Ozone and mulch	
scent the air	
when deer	to wolf
to self appears.	
The wolf's yellow eyes	
glare into mine	
his jaws open wide	
I give him my life.	
We run	we howl
at the dark	
then back at the tree	
he abandons me.	
I lay in sap	in amber crust
exiled	
from the cave of souls	
streaking paint	across wet stone.

CYNTHIA TEDESCO

# *The Novitiate*

by JESSICA AMANDA SALMONSON

In alpine monasteries in France it was the custom in ancient times to honor a dead brother in a particular and unusual manner. A monk's seat in the refectory could not be reassigned for one month following his death. During that period, meals were served as though the departed were still present. He was addressed from time to time in such phrases as required no reply but which assumed his attention. If he did not touch his meal, as obviously he could not, being already interred, the leftovers were thrown, along with other garbage, over a garden wall, beyond which beggars waited.

It happened that a young man recently of the tonsure made the acquaintance of two elderly and long-established brothers who subsequently died. Thus the novitiate found himself, each day, sitting between two empty seats in the refectory, while the other monks addressed him and the two vacant places with bland platitudes, as if all three were equally alive and present, or as if he were as dead as his two lost companions.

He found it difficult to eat in this situation. It had been nerves that drove him to seclusion in the first place. His meals, like those of his briefly known friends, were tossed to beggars.

The worse part of it was that he was himself expected to indulge in idle chat with the seats on either side. He was not allowed to express sorrow until the month was over. Not wishing to be rude or to fail long held tradition, he attempted to speak to the two monks, but worded things badly, having had no experience with this unusual rite. He found himself awaiting a reply which could not be forthcoming.

The established brothers offered no pointers as to the proper manner by which to hold one-sided discussions with the dead.

After three weeks, the novitiate was thin as a thread. He had started to stammer. He supposed the good brothers would remark upon his failing health exactly one month after he, too, had died. They would carry on splendid monologues in the direction of his empty seat. In the meantime, they took no notice of his growing infirmity, for to acknowledge its cause was to acknowledge

prematurely the death of the two old monks.

In one more week's time he could expect better and substantial company on the bench at his left and right shoulders. However, it was unlikely the nervous monk could last the final week.

That night in his cell, cold and ill, quivering and mumbling to himself in a horrified manner, he fancied his two friends came to visit. The wretched monk had gone long without sleep and was furthermore in the grip of fever and delirium, so that he could not tell reality from nightmare.

"We'll be on our way in another week," one of the dead monks reassured him.

"It has been kind of you to sit between us and keep us company," said the other.

The first rejoined, "But, my dear boy, you must not fast on our account. It is entirely unnecessary. Please eat heartily tomorrow or we shall be unable to rest peacefully."

The next day, the wan monk came to his seat between the two empty spaces on the bench. He forced himself to take sustenance. That night, he was even more desperately ill than before. He imagined it was due to the shock of finally placing food into his stomach. However, there was quite the emergency when several old monks began to drop dead of typhus.

The plague swept over the mountain, killing monks and beggars and people of the nearby village.

The young monk recovered somehow. He buried the dead and tried to uphold the proper traditions in their behalf. But in a very short time he committed suicide by means of a carving knife thrust several times into his eyes. This occurred one evening after dinner, when he found it too terrible to carry on, to sit alone in the refectory, the monastery's last survivor, talking to the men he had lately buried.

Today that monastery stands in ruins. It is occasionally visited by alpine travelers, who are told by natives of the region that it is still haunted by the last brother, who awaits his month of pleasant address from friends who went before.

I have this story on good authority and believe it to be true.

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# *Cinderella Revisited*

## by Jessica Palmer

The howl reverberated inside her head. Unearthly and macabre, a strident chord that plaited her dreams with the black thread of dolor and the brilliant scarlet of passion. *Love lost.* The clamor disrupted the flow of the woman's fair fantasy, sundering the pleasant fabric of dream with nightmare's dissonance and discord.

*Boo hoo. Boo hoo, hoo, hoo. Oh, BOO HOO!*

The distant weeping rent the night, reaching her even in her bed, and she awoke from her slumber with a start.

"Damn."

*Oh woe, woe, woe is me....*

The woman groaned, grabbed the pillow, stuffed it on top of her head and rolled over and tried to go back to sleep again, but the wail was relentless.

*Boo hoo. Boo hoo, hoo, hoo. Oh, BOO HOO!*

"Oh, bother and damnation," the woman said as she jerked into a sitting position and swung her legs over the side of the bed.

*... woe, woe....*

The woman grunted. "All aright, all right, all right already, I'm coming. Keep your shirt on." She rose, grumbling irritably. "Bloody hell, can't even get a decent night's sleep. I want. I want. Gimme, gimme. Gimme this; gimme that."

The old woman scratched her head, dislodging her cap from which a single pink roller wrapped in silver hair protruded floppily. Her knotted and gnarled hand moved to her bottom to claw at a particularly nasty itch as she yawned.

That was just the problem with being a fairy godmother. One of the disadvantages of the job. You were always getting caught up in other people's problems. Their whinges, their wishes, wafted about the planet constantly, borne upon the wistful winds of human imagination.

The good fairy could ignore them, sometimes. This was easier to do in the light of day when the hustle and bustle of daily activity drove desire from the mortal mind. But in quiet of evening's gloaming

when man's whims were at their strongest, they were insistent things that intruded upon her thoughts, interrupting high tea and trespassing upon her hours of sleep. And the fairy godmother knew she wouldn't get any rest until she answered the call.

She paced around the room. The walls flickered in the fire light, and she rebelled at another night lost. Then she cast an oblique glance at her frilly frock of gossamer pink that hung on the back of the door. Ridiculous raiment for a woman of her years. Complete with buttons and bows, and an uncomfortably cinched waist, it was the kind of dress that little girls dreamed about before time had muted their fancies, and they had developed the commodity humans called good taste. The kind of garment that no grown woman would be caught dead in. The standard issue uniform that went with the position.

The fairy godmother peered into the mirror at a lined and seamed face. The ruffled cap held recalcitrant curls hidden from view. Then with critical appraisal, she considered her dressing gown. It was also pink and had nearly as many gew-gaws and curlicues upon it as the frock. In fact, the two were identical except for the waist.

If you disregarded the rollers and the fuzzy pink slippers, you could almost forget that she hadn't changed. With a shrug, the fairy godmother opted for comfort. At this time of night, who would know or care if she hadn't dressed for the occasion?

"Right," she said, hiking up her skirts to glare at the slippers. "Hell with it."

With a sigh and sharp whistle to fetch her magic wand, the fairy godmother dissipated in a dazzling cloud of gold dust. The sparkle flitted indecisively around the room a couple of times and then streaked away, zooming across the night-dark patch of woods, field and stream to trouble's source.

The castle looked vaguely familiar, but dark, or darker than the last time she'd seen it. The shimmering mist hovered before a parapet, trying to remember when she'd been here and couldn't.

*Boo hoo. Boo hoo, hoo, hoo. Oh, BOO HOO!*

The billowing vapor zipped through the narrow slit of a tower window. As the fairy godmother spiralled into a human shape, words of indignation were vented from the

approximate location where her lips should be. She stepped fully formed from the glittering corolla.

"You!" exclaimed the fairy godmother, and she pointed an accusing finger at the human source of the heart-rending sobs.

"You!" retorted the weeping woman, in a voice even more petulant, if possible, than the other's.

"I've already done you," the fairy godmother said.

"I'll say you've done me, all right," the woman conceded.

The fairy godmother drew herself up to full height, all four feet of it. "Sorry, only one wish per customer. I'm afraid I can't help you again."

"Help me?" the woman parroted as she lifted a haggard face to gaze upon her nemesis. "You call this help?"

The fairy godmother grimaced. The woman did look terrible. The once blooming cheeks were the white of new fallen snow and hollow. Purple circles of exhaustion ringed eyes gone dull and dim with despair.

Mortals were always making such a mess of their lives. If they didn't, she'd be out of a job.

"Of course, I helped you," the fairy godmother explained as though talking to a thick-witted child. "I gave you your heart's desire."

"My heart's desire? You call this my heart's desire? I asked for someone to love me. Someone gentle, caring and kind. Someone who would treat me like a queen."

"And I did you one better than that," the fairy godmother said. "You are a queen."

"Of what?"

The fairy godmother paused to gaze around the tower, with its dirty rushes and greasy tallows.

"I wanted devotion. I wanted tenderness."

"No, I'm sorry but those concepts never entered into the equation," the fairy godmother informed her charge. "If I may quote you: you asked for a handsome prince, someone wealthy who could afford to take you away from the cinders and the ashes you had known to a palace rich beyond your wildest imaginings."

Cinderella stopped sobbing and looked around her. "Well, I certainly never

imagined *this*," she gestured vaguely around the grim castle.

"Well, it does look like the place has got a little run down through the years; but as lady of the manor, you are responsible for its upkeep."

"And what about my husband? Am I the only one to be held accountable? The only responsible party in the realm. I've got fifteen children to take care of. I've lost my shape."

The fairy godmother examined the once trim frame and nodded in agreement.

"And the hired help you get nowadays." Cinderella threw up her hands in disgust.

"The quality of the local labor is not my concern," the fairy godmother huffed. "I did, at least, give you the finest man in the kingdom. What you do with it..."

The light of rage gleamed in Cinderella's eyes. "My husband is a liar, a cheat. A dissembler of the first order. Duplicitous. I can't believe a word he says."

"All perfectly predictable, even laudable, traits for a royal who must enter into delicate negotiations in which honesty may be a distinct disadvantage," the fairy godmother remonstrated gently.

"All right, I concede that some deception may be required for a ruler, but what about as my husband?"

"Well, you married him, despite all the difficulties you put me through. What with losing the glass slipper, and all." The fairy godmother harrumphed fluffily and patted a flounce back into place. "Those things don't grow on trees, you know."

"If I'd've known, I'd have broken the damn thing." Cinderella hobbled about the room, baby clasped to her deflated breast.

"Well, I never," the fairy godmother sputtered.

Cinderella ignored her, continuing with her complaint. "He's a philanderer. You'd think that fifteen children would be enough..."

"A goodly number, I confess."

"... but he's got to spread his seed among every lady-in-waiting, serving maid or kitchen wench in the kingdom."

"That is the royal prerogative. One of the perks of the job, along with," she coughed genteelly into her hand as she studied Cinderella's stained gown, "er, fine clothes; sycophantic courtiers, this draughty old

castle and all the peasants you could rape and pillage in a lifetime. Believe me, I know, I've seen the job description."

"Why didn't you warn me?" she asked.

"It's not my place to explain the consequences of mortal wishes to a human."

"Oh." Cinderella wailed, a sound that sent chills rocketing up and down the fairy godmother's spine. And the fairy godmother decided she'd do anything to shut the queen up, even if it meant breaking a few rules.

Cinderella flopped down into a chair. The glowing brazier threw her face into stark relief, each wrinkle highlighted, each line underscored. "I wish I'd never listened to you."

The fairy godmother canted her head to one side to contemplate the woman, and she wondered if she dared stretch a point and grant the wish. With a shake of lace cap, the fairy godmother decided the whole proposition of turning back time was much too risky.

"I think I'd rather be back with my stepsisters, than here." Cinderella gestured around the dingy tower.

"Oh well," the fairy godmother said, "now *that's* something I can help you with."

With that, the fairy godmother rapped the ageing queen soundly on the top of her head. The woman began to waver, her image thinned as the molecules disbursed. Another howl echoed about the room.

The fairy godmother stared into the coals of the fire where she could view Cinderella as she rematerialized in the dank dungeon. The woman made a fist and shook it at the empty air. Then she deflated next to the cold grate of an empty hearth.

### *I want to Sail With the Titanic Forever*

Diamonds, pearls, emeralds sparkling,

Meeting the chandelier light.

Champagne flowing, wine and caviar aplenty.

Elegantly-clad ladies and gentlemen,

children running to and fro.

Happy music engulfing the gigantic ballroom.

Sumptuous party at night.

The virgin ship Titanic glowing.

Portholes lit, like stars on the ocean;

Vast field of waves,

Calmly pointing upwards, dancing with the host.

No watcher at the post.

RUTH E. GAMBETTA

"Sorry, kid, it's the best I can do," the fairy godmother said.

The mouth opened in a silent scream as rats clambered up the long skirts and onto Cinderella's lap. The head bent to rest upon bony arms and the thin shoulders shook.

*Weeping again. There was just no pleasing some people*

Good deed done, at least now the fairy godmother wouldn't have to listen to it.

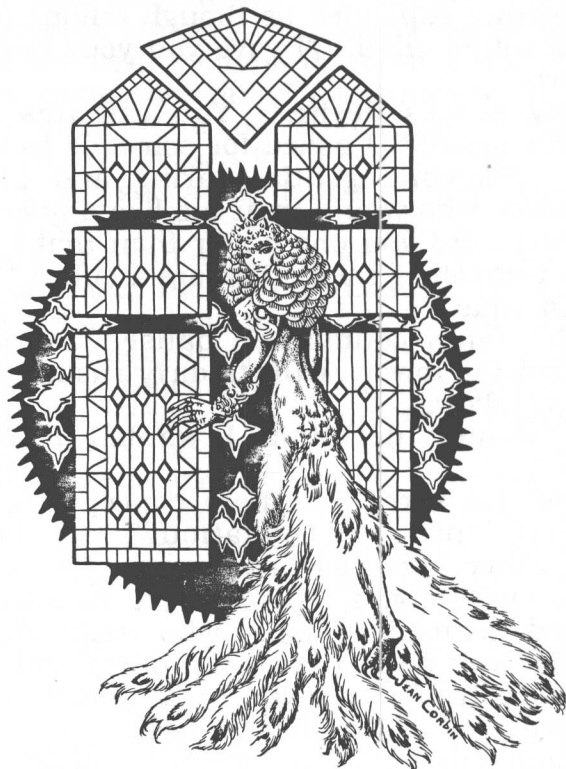
Peace at last, she thought as she, too, wavered and vanished.

When the fairy godmother next appeared beside the bed, the normally sweet, old-lady face had turned sour. Her lips twisted into a feral sneer.

No one ever really appreciated what she did, or just how hard she worked, chasing after mortal fancies.

The fairy kicked off the great pink slippers to examine the cloven hooves which were her feet. Then she yanked the cap from her head — pulling the candy floss of white curl wrapped in rollers with it — to reveal a knobbed skull and bald pate from which two curving horns jutted, proudly. And she wondered what she had done in life to deserve this.

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# *The Return of the Colossus*

by Brian McNaughton

Editor's Note: As a tribute to Clark Ashton Smith, and also to celebrate CAS' one-hundredth birthday, Brian McNaughton has written this sequel to "The Colossus of Ylourgne." And if this is the 102nd year, blame that on me, not him. (I still plan two issues a year, even though I haven't achieved that goal very often.) You might wish to dig out that story and re-read it before you proceed with the sequel, although it isn't strictly necessary.

WPG

*The situation was looked upon by the  
more superstitious as a veritable  
omening of the world's end.*

Clark Ashton Smith:  
THE COLOSSUS OF YLOURGNE.

In the spring of 1916, to his intense chagrin, Lt. Cyril Fairchild of the Royal Welch Fusiliers was seconded to an experimental warfare unit and despatched on what seemed a fool's errand to the untroubled province of Averogne.

Cyril was a very young man who looked younger, with the azure eyes and flaxen locks of a Botticelli angel. His men, who had attained their stunted trollhood in the shadows of lowering coal-tips, at first sniggered over the unspeakable uses to which such a lovely lad might be put in the pits. The blood that pinkened Cyril's downy cheeks and rose-petal lips, however, flowed undiluted from the veins of Hengest and Horsa; and in his first action, a trench-raid of medieval intimacy, he proved himself a very devil.

Whatever credit his daring earned him with his men was immediately squandered when he drew his Webley to keep them from bayoneting prisoners. His chivalry was rewarded with the nickname "Little Hansel," combining the slanders that he was a fairy-tale youth, too good to be true, and possibly an agent of the Kaiser. Cyril could sense the indictment in the whispered asides or sober expressions of the other

ranks. "They are basically decent chaps, and the gamest lot you would ever want beside you in a scrap," he noted in one of his frequent letters to his fiancée, Penelope Delapoer, "but lack a proper appreciation of their place in the natural order."

He had been looking forward to a big show brewing near the Somme for a chance to redeem himself when orders whisked him to a chateau in the rear, where a don-in-uniform confused him with hints, questions, tags from Horace and readings in decayed Latin from a mouldy book. A steel engraving in this book, of a piece with its depictions of gryphons and mermaids, showed a giant that was fabled to have ravaged Averogne in bygone times. As one



convinced that all legends conceal more than a grain of truth (the war may have distracted him from a quest for relics of the historical Cinderella), the unlikely officer actually believed this bollocks.

Cyril wondered if his detested nickname had not recommended him for this mission. "As we have no Jack-the-Giant-Killers

among our less indispensable subs, this is clearly a task for Little Hansel," he could almost hear Major Brashley telling the brigadier.

"Your men dig, don't they?" the don-in-uniform asked. Cyril was accompanied by a vexing trio, Privates Powell and Thomas and Corporal Jenkins, who insisted on viewing their respite from punishing the Hun as a lark. He answered, thinking of trenches and latrines, "Assiduously, Sir."

"Good, good. It's underground, or so this Father Nathaire tells us." He studied a letter but did not share its specifics. "Miners, they may be the thing, so send for as many more as you need. But first go to St. Azédarac, talk to this padre, and see what you can dig up." He gave a series of asthmatic whinnies, as if that were a rich joke.

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St. Azédarac was a toybox whose cone-topped towers and crenelated walls had yet to suffer from the tantrums of the adolescent century. The girls in starched linen and wooden clogs, the mustached widows in perpetual mourning, even the dray-horses that steamed in a prickling mist seemed to be waiting patiently for Albrecht Dürer to come and sketch them. Plucked from a world of mud and noise, Cyril found the green radiance of the surrounding hills, the bleating of lambs and the restive clanking of cowbells almost balefully alien to a modern sensibility. Jenkins and Thomas and Powell sensed this, too, for the archaic swagger they adopted in the cobbled streets suggested harquebusiers on leave from the Religious Wars, who would not be trifled with by civilian ghosts.

Father Nathaire suited his parish. His bulging eyes and translucent skin were those of an Inquisitor who had denied himself all in the dogged extraction of Truth. Expecting a steep descent into the dark hall of his rectory, Cyril nearly sprawled flat, for the priest's large and waxy face gleamed below the twisted shoulders of a child-sized body that a black cassock rendered nearly invisible.

The four young men were nevertheless forced to stretch their legs to keep up with his remorseless scuttle up the steep hill overlooking the town. When they paused gratefully for red wine, crusty bread and a

local cheese that Cyril found sublime — but, "This cheese smells like my feet," Thomas muttered — the priest said, "The Colossus was the work of Satan. To use it against his more evil creations is no more than just."

"The Boche, you mean?"

"As a splendid beginning."

"What, er, is it?" asked Cyril, who still didn't entirely believe his orders.

"A man, perhaps, a giant man, assembled and animated by sorcery —"

A nasty Welsh noise erupted from the throat of Corporal Jenkins, who then hastily begged the priest's indulgence.

"— or by a science that is still mercifully beyond our understanding," Father Nathaire continued, not pausing in his recitation even as he made an absolving sign at the corporal.



Cyril wondered at the priest's offhandedness and at Jenkins' apparent release from guilt. If the awful power of God, whom he had learned not to believe in as a student at Christ Church, could be invoked and dispensed so casually, this would be a greater miracle than any clockwork scarecrow from the Dark Ages.

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Their destination was not the ruin of a Cistercian abbey that crowned the hill, as Cyril had speculated, but a deep ravine athwart the upward path. The stream that

carved it had long ago been diverted, and the gap was filled almost to its rim at one point with the debris of an ancient rock-slide. Father Nathaire hiked up his soutaine and descended onto boulders balanced like jackstraws with the indifference of a spider. Uncertain whether to follow but unwilling to solicit advice, the lieutenant cast a blank look at the corporal, who cast it back with practiced ease. Deciding to press on, he was pleasantly surprised to hear the men picking their way down after him.

When it seemed that further descent was impossible, the priest ducked through a narrow fissure and disappeared into the heart of the pile. Cyril switched on his electric torch and followed into a descending tunnel of relatively recent construction.

Their guide bobbed onward with the aplomb of Dante's Virgil, nor did the Englishman feel any discomfort beyond that of damp and cobwebs, but the three miners' sons were most uneasy. Much muttering echoed in the tunnel before Cyril put a stop to it.

"I thought you lads would be used to this sort of thing," he chided.

"Not this sort of thing, no, Sir," said Jenkins. "Yon lintel, look you, the bleeders didn't know what they was about when they stuck it there. And it looks like —"

"Rats, Sir," said Powell, when the corporal hesitated, "bloody great — your pardon, Father — bugging rats."

"Spiders, Sir," said Thomas, "as big as

my Grammy Evans' Sunday dinner-plates, with —"

"— it was dug from the inside out," Jenkins concluded in a mutter, as if reluctant to advance this queer opinion.

They were right about the rats, at least, which followed them down to a cavern so large that it drank the torchlight. The floor sloped to a vast pit on whose very lip the priest stood rubbing his hands as debonairly as a fly. Lacking his assurance of a glorious afterlife, perhaps, the Britons all but hugged the floor as they inched to his side.

"It was said that the component parts of the Colossus rebelled against their bondage, forcing it to lie down and decompose." Smirking into the abyss, the priest added, "But that, as you see, was not so."

Cyril peered over the rim into what looked like a mass grave from the Middle Ages, a compacted hill of cadavers that had been twisted into a mare's-nest of intertwined limbs. The pile was domed at the center, sloping down to black emptiness at the sides, and a cool breeze flowed steadily from the depths. It carried a scent of rot that seemed remarkably strong after the demi-millennium the bodies must have lain here.

"No rats?" Cyril said, for he saw little evidence of verminous damage. Eyes, flat and dull as common stones, reflected the light of his torch. Some of the bodies were no more than leather and bones, but a few looked alarmingly fleshy. To make a symmetrical dome, they had been packed every which way; buttocks and pudenda thrust at him in a mockery of temptation, a frozen image of an orgy in Hell.

He shivered off this unhealthful fancy and repeated his question. Father Nathaire shrugged and waved a hand at the shadows, no longer pinpricked with red eyes.

"They are French rats. They know what is good for their livers, if not their souls."

"Bloody hell," said Jenkins, and Cyril at the same time noticed a change in the atmosphere. The breeze from the pit had stopped, and now it resumed in the opposite direction. The downward flow of air was accompanied by a long-drawn stridulation, as of a sarcophagus being furtively dragged across a stone floor.

Jenkins said, "It's breathing, Sir. Snoring."

"It? What do you mean, it? There's





nothing here, just old bones..."

Cyril had extended his torch over the edge to descry the limits of the pile. His voice faltered as he tried to comprehend what he saw. The central dome, vast as that of St. Paul's, which rose almost to the top of the pit, did not limit the charnel. It rose high above a lateral field of corpses that had been tamped down just as tightly. He discerned a pattern, a monstrous architecture of interwoven bodies.

"Good Lord! It's a head. And those, down there —"

"Yes, those are his shoulders. But there is more, much more."



The direction of the air-current changed again. His men looked sick, but Cyril doubted that the recurrence of the vile odor was entirely to blame. "It's a trick of the ventilation, that's all," he told them briskly. "Look alive, then, we have to inspect the damned thing."

Cyril accepted the fact that men are

expendable, subalterns slightly less so. He held no foolish illusions about giving orders he himself wouldn't execute. But he could see that they believed he was acting from some such romantic notion when he ordered them to secure a rope and tie a harness around his chest, and he was willing to take credit for it. So much for their bloody *Little Hansell*!

In fact, he perceived no danger, and his curiosity was uncontainable. No weapon lay here, nothing at all in the line of "experimental warfare," but a morbid wonder did, a macabre creation of medieval zealots to rival any Wonder of the Ancient World. If by some odd chance the Pyramids had gone undiscovered until the present, he who found them would achieve immortality; and Cyril stood in that man's boots. The war seemed suddenly far away. More closely glowed a peacetime world where he would present measurements and considered speculations to the Royal Society.

"You'll want a gas-mask, Sir," Jenkins said.

"He'll want a canary," said Powell. "A canary, Sir, that's your one sure defense against mephitic exhalations."

"Take this," Father Nathaire said, offering a wooden cross.

It was no standard crucifix, but the image of a martyr who had been nailed upside down, his feet spread on the crossbar in a most undignified way and his face wearing an expression, either through indifferent craftsmanship or Gallic whimsy, that looked sardonic. As he stuffed the fetish into his blouse, Cyril suppressed a smile at the absurdity of taking a tiny image of a dead man to a mountain of real ones. Although he would never have carried the one nor visited the other, he felt this was rather like importing a naughty postcard into a Paris brothel.

Instructing the men to play out the rope slowly and, should he give two sharp jerks, to haul him up at once, he descended gingerly over the forehead and brow-ridge. He feared the old bones might collapse to powder under his boots, and where would such vandalism put him in the eye of posterity? To his relief, the cadavers were as solid and firmly fixed in place as stone blocks. That they might be stone, and this a conventional sculpture, briefly dismayed

him, but a closer look gave reassurance. Black, brown, yellow, some shockingly fresh and white, they were very real corpses whose various degrees of decomposition had been arrested. No sculpture could have duplicated in all their infinite gradations the effects of mould and decay, of insect damage and rodent predation, on so many twisted limbs and staring faces.

"Are you all right, Sir?"

"Yes, yes," Cyril said, but cursed a trifle shrilly as his cap tumbled away and his hair riffled in the downward draft, the indrawn "breath" of the abyss, when he stood perched on a hillock that comprised the bridge of a vulturish nose; a nose that was not unlike Father Nathaire's. The four figures at the rim of the pit — three of them bending forward in earnest concern, but the clergyman displaying the aloof serenity of a maniac — seemed very far above him, and an infinity of darkness extended below.

He shone his torch down over the twin shields of the breasts, each large as a wall of the British Museum, but its beam dispersed before it could reveal them fully. On the floor of some immeasurably remote Avernus, could the giant be flouting the laws of physics by standing on two feet? Of course this was only a Gargantuan bust, but he couldn't shake the conviction that a descent with a longer rope would reveal a complete anatomy.

"How many thousands — tens of thousands — bloody millions of corpses?" he muttered, and he cut short a giggle of grisly impropriety.

That question could be solved by a mathematical formula, yet to be devised. *Why* remained a mystery, though not beyond the scope of all conjecture. The Black Death had killed every third person in Europe. The world had suffered nothing like it since; its dread light still flickers when we bless one who sneezes.

The survivors would have had all the material they needed for this Colossus. Infected by the vision of some mad artist, some Arcimboldo of necrophilia, they had assembled it in terror and desperation. The subject, the sum of all the specific men and women, was an abstraction: Man. No immortal hero flaunting marble thews at the heavens, just a heap of decayed meat, this image of its makers was fittingly buried in a

forgotten pit.

He thought the artificers would have been forced to use a finer material for the closed eyelids, but he saw that these had also been fashioned from corpses. Except for a few grotesqueries that mocked the human form in the marbled pattern, they had been stamped or rolled so flat as to lose their shape. Unflattened fingers extended from the edge to suggest lashes.

When he took a step back for a better look, these lashes twitched. The eyelids then lifted like the curtains of an infernal stage.

As a foeman armed with a Mauser automatic against his trench-knife, set suddenly face-to-face in a disputed worm-hole, had not made him do, Cyril screamed. He didn't know whether to reach for his revolver or the crucifix, and in his confusion he forgot to signal before he tripped over his boots and fell into the abyss.

"Have a care, Sir!" called Powell, who thought, or who affected to think, that his fall had been an exuberant leap, that his cry had expressed high spirits. An attempt to validate this interpretation kept Cyril silent even when the harness bit cruelly into his armpits and he was bounced upside down at the end of the rope. Before he could right himself he swung against the lower lip of the monster and halfway into its intolerably moist mouth. Disgust mingled with terror in the thin sound that squeezed through his gritted teeth.

"Darkness visible," he muttered as he slipped and slid in a vain effort to escape the wet underlip, "darkness visible," nor could he at first say why.

Scores of crowded faces had composed the irises of those terrible eyes. Each face had been turned towards him. Each human eye — even the blind milky ones, even the blank sockets, but, most frightfully of all, the ones that glittered with awareness — had focused on him. In the center of these clustered faces had stared the pupils, made of no human material, made of an indescribable *nothing*. That was it! Milton's description of Hell's illumination, "not light, but darkness visible," described those pupils. He knew that he could never again enjoy Milton, for he had looked into Hell.

His future reading pleasures were a moot point, however, for the lips had now closed

on him and squeezed him in a slimy airless embrace. They worked at him, rolled him; at any moment he would know the touch of the teeth, huge slabs of calcified flesh that he had not dared to look at closely on his way in. He tried to kick, he tried to draw his pistol, but he couldn't move. His eyes felt ready to burst like tormenting boils.

And then, with a contemptuous flick of its tongue, the Colossus spat him out.

\* \* \*

No one had witnessed his panic; he had done most of his screaming inside his head. Physically incapable of speech after he was hauled from the pit, he made no answer to questions about the soggy state of his uniform, and his silence was taken for the calm reflection of a man whose thoughts could never be distracted by mere terror. His quiet monotone, wrung dry of all feeling, and his banal words, the only ones he could at length form, enhanced this image of casual heroism: "I rather suspect we've found it."

The men turned whiter even than Father Nathaire's normal shade, and for an instant it seemed they might bolt, but Jenkins managed to laugh, "God help Fritz," and then they all laughed, none louder than Cyril.

\* \* \*

Lying under canvas that night, he was plagued by dreams of an elusive but consistent flavor. When at last he woke fully, after a lifetime of startled outcries and sickly delusions of waking, he fancied that he had dreamed of London, but that belief faltered under scrutiny. The locations remembered could not be matched with Belgravia or Piccadilly or other places he knew; these were foreign scenes, but in the context of the dream so familiar that he had taken scant notice of them.

The real likeness to the greatest of cities lay in the innumerable multitude of in-nominate humanity that had babbled about him. It was as if he had spent the night pushing through crowds whose every stranger had been determined to detail him and confide in him matters of vital importance. Whatever they had told him, he had understood little, for they had spoken in dream-French.

Not only had he not understood, he hadn't wanted to. He woke with the impression that all those importunate strangers had earnestly desired to talk about the sort of things one didn't talk about: to speak passionately of failed hopes, lost loves, secret sins and lonely obsessions. Embarrassment compounded his confusion until he abandoned politeness and fought his way forward in a near frenzy to be left alone.

Of all those thousands, he recalled only a scholar's drone, a bully's strut, a girl's glimmering eyes, a hag's incongruously mellifluous voice. All these and more flashed brightly for a moment before fading and flaking into ashes from which they could never again be retrieved.



But a soldier in a war has no time to brood on his dreams, and he was soon mired in the details of exploiting his discovery. He hoped to organize the local civilians, but Father Nathaire advised him that no native would go near the place. "It gives them nightmares," the dwarf explained with a smile no more knowing than usual.

The only telephone in town ornamented the priest's study, where Cyril wasted the morning trying to cajole or threaten a line to the experimental warfare people through a succession of operators as ephemeral and



cryptic as the spirits of his dreams. Failing miserably, he tried to reach the government in Paris to demand men and equipment.

Although he managed to worm his way to a very junior clerk in a department of public works, he had only begun to recite his list of requisites before being dismissed as a prankster. Shortly after this functionary had sputtered his denunciation of English drolleries and rung off, the phone went completely dead. Cyril believed that the government had thus flicked him off like a flea, but the priest averred that such interruptions were common; and that they often lasted for weeks.

Cyril returned to the site in late afternoon, mulling over impracticable schemes for sending the news by carrier pigeon or heliograph. He mused aloud to Powell that they would need a crane, disassembled at some dockyard and carried hundreds of miles overland, to lift the rocks and the thing beneath them. In the absence of any lorry or railway wagon big enough to hold it, the monster might be hoisted by balloons — it was dashed inconvenient that England had no proper Zepps — and lofted to the front when the wind was right.

"You'll live in history like the builders of your Stonehenge, Sir," the Welshman rhapsodized with what Cyril suspected only later of having been irony.

"It's alive, then, isn't it?" Jenkins said. He added a corollary inevitable to any non-com: "Why not get it to march, Sir?"

Cyril thought this ridiculous; he suspected that Jenkins did, too. The fearful tension they hadn't dared admit was released in unmilitary hilarity when Cyril agreed to have a go at it. They raced one another down the precipitous rockpile and into the menacing tunnel like schoolboys on holiday, and not even the enormous cavern, nor the smell and sound of the monster's breath, could sober them.

"Right, then, you sodding excuse for a giant!" Jenkins shouted into the pit. "On your feet, you horrible little man! Alley-ooop, Alphonse!"

The vast sound of breathing neither faltered nor quickened. In the silence that followed the last echoes of these commands, it seemed newly ominous.

"Give it a dose of your French, Sir," Thomas suggested, and the timidity of his

whisper confirmed the sudden death of everyone's jolly mood.

Why not? "*Venez ici, Monsieur Colosse! La Patrie vous require.*"

Nothing happened: nothing, at least, that the others sensed. But from the darkness of the cavern Cyril saw and heard the folk from his dream returning, beseeching, a host of Ancient Mariners who ached to unburden themselves.

This time he identified their language as Old French, their dress as medieval, and a superstitious man would have further recognized them as the ghosts that still haunted their curious grave. But Cyril knew them for hallucinations brought on by exertion in bad air, no more real than Alice's vexatious playing-cards, and he dealt with them as firmly.

"Stop it!" he cried. "Go away!" and he was obeyed. And obeyed, too, far beyond his intention, when some impulse led him to employ a Biblical turn of phrase: "Colossus, come forth!"

The Colossus raised its arms from the pit and pressed its palms to the ceiling of the cavern, a precarious heap of interdependent boulders, lifting it "like Mr. Lloyd George doffing his silk hat," Powell later said, but it was more like a circus strongman hoisting some heterogeneous weight. The bulging of muscles gave the component parts of the monster an illusory life as hundreds of legs stretched, arms unfolded and sightless heads rolled loosely. Corpses slipped everywhere like swimmers — or, more precisely, like drifting corpses caught in an irresistible sluiceway — to arrive at new positions in the overall fabric. Limbs or heads popped out and flopped here and there, but they marred the outline of the rippling muscles no more than hairs on the arms of a man.

For the first time in centuries the sun, bloodied by its setting and hazed by a storm of dust, burst into the abyss. The rats ran shrieking, a whirlwind of bats exploded, the four men screamed unashamedly and tried to crawl into one another's arms as boulders fell around them like hailstones, only to bounce and fall again. The Colossus hurled aside the rubbish to trigger an avalanche that went unnoticed by all but those in the valley below.

Cyril had expected a roar of Miltonic magnitude to accompany the thing's efforts,

but the sound it made, though loud enough for Satan, was less evil than eerie: the sighs and groans of a multitudinous choir in the reverberant loft of its throat.

When the dust had settled and the boulders come to rest, when the men had sheepishly disengaged their tangled limbs and stilled their chattering teeth, they found themselves standing in the shadow of a foot whose arch seemed high and wide as the great door of Westminster Abbey. Far, far above them, the face of the Colossus was turned toward the crimson ball of the sun with a look of resignation and distaste.

\* \* \*

"The men were wondering if you mightn't christen it," Cyril told Father Nathaire when he joined them on the hill at twilight.

"Christen it?" He seemed scandalized. "One does not baptize the dead."

"Like a ship, look you," Jenkins said. "With a bottle of champagne, Padre. Where's the harm in that?"

The priest surveyed it, requiring him to lean back so far that he stumbled and might have fallen if Cyril hadn't taken his arm. With exasperating literal-mindedness, he said, "It is not a ship."

"They want to name it after me, Padre," Thomas boasted, and Jenkins dealt him a surreptitious kick. Cyril ignored this. He knew very well why the men called it "Big John Thomas." He had overheard Powell suggesting that it would play hell with the victory parade down the Champs Elysee if the Colossus were suddenly inflamed by the wanton display of its only suitable mate (aside from a lady called Jane Ellis, of Rhondda), the Arc de Triomphe.

"In exceptional circumstances, however," the priest said, "those who are about to die may be received into the bosom of the Church."

Just then the sky blackened and the earliest stars blinked out. The shape of the monster changed like a black cloud; it took Cyril a moment to grasp that it was lowering itself to one knee. He assumed the priest's offer had been directed at the giant. Was it signalling acceptance? No: its intent became obvious as it laid its hand, palm upward, on the ground near them.

"For England and St. George!" Cyril

meant to shout, but the words stuck in his throat as he bounded into the palm and urged the men onward with a wave of his pistol. Slowly, laboriously, retching and grimacing, they followed.



The priest raised his hand as if to bless them at last, but Cyril was struck by the odd fancy that this was a gesture of command. The Colossus rose at that very moment, like a child with a handful of toy soldiers. He peered over the edge to see Father Nathaire vanish into the shadow of the foot, although it seemed in the uncertain light that he vanished like a burrowing worm into the foot itself.

\* \* \*

Cyril gave no orders, but the Colossus turned its face to the northeast and strode forward with a steadily-increasing velocity that soon grew alarming to the men perched on its shoulder. Its feet pounded the earth like a great hollow drum as it devoured leagues of field and forest. The splintering crashes that rose from the darkness were trees underfoot, Cyril told himself, though sometimes a chorus of thin cries suggested that they were trampling buildings. A bridge collapsed beneath them.

Water boiling to its waist, the Colossus pressed on without missing a step.

Terror gave way to exhilaration. It was impossible to share his impressions with the others in the blasting wind of their passage, but he believed he heard the men laughing; and sometimes it seemed that other voices joined in the laughter. Their speed increased even more when, beyond the horizon, Cyril saw what he would once have called heat-lightning. That phrase belonged to a scarcely remembered world of fireflies in the green gloom of summer evenings, when such tinpot charades as thunder and lightning had seemed awesome.

He heard even louder thuds than those of the mighty feet.

\* \* \*

Brigadier Sir Rolf Hunt-Barker, Bart., seemed not fully appreciative of the wonder that Cyril had brought him, due to his apparent state of elevated confusion. But the lieutenant was unwilling to fault the mental condition of a superior officer who had been deprived of the fealty of twenty-two thousand men before lunchtime that day, all of them marching with full field packs and in measured cadence up to the muzzles of the German guns, or as close to them as their individual fortunes had permitted.

It would be impossible to maintain secrecy for long. The Colossus had arrived before dawn, and that afternoon a Fokker *eindecker* had determinedly buzzed the rear area where it lay under camouflage tarpaulins. Sir Rolf decreed that it should attack the enemy trenches shortly after nightfall. He rejected Cyril's pleas that its way be paved with an artillery barrage.

"Surprise the sods, that's half the battle," the brigadier said. "One track minds, that's the Huns' weakness. Ever listen to their bloody awful Wagner, on and on and on for eight hours at a stretch without one tune you can whistle? Throw a surprise at Fritz and he's like a schoolgirl with a thumb on her button, he lapses into coma and lets you have your way. 'This vass not in the battle-plan, Herr General.' Haw! Beer and music, that's all they're good for, and they can keep their music. We'll beat their swords into ploughshares for them, and we'll do it with their thick skulls. Surprise!"

The brigadier wanted the Colossus to carry a howitzer, but the difficulty of converting a field-piece to a side-arm, to say nothing of training the irregular conscript to use it, soon became obvious. In the end a Lewis gun was strapped to its shoulder, which Cyril could man while traveling behind like a Red Indian's papoose. Five knapsacks of grenades would ride on the monster's back beside him, to be distributed at his discretion.

The only other equipment Sir Rolf allowed, indeed insisted upon, was a pair of Union Jacks draped fore and aft on the giant's loins for modesty and "to make sure Fritz knows who's stamping his kraut-crammed jowls into the mud."

The French, who might have been said to own the Colossus, were too late in advancing their vehement objections to this.

\* \* \*

Cyril thought that Sir Rolf had relented and he was getting some artillery support, however minimal, when he heard the distinctive *crump!* of a mortar behind him. Then the star-shell burst overhead. Within minutes it was joined by a leisurely descent of parachute flares like Pentecostal tongues in the enormous night. The brigadier had wanted Fritz to see what was coming for him, and he did, but instead of lapsing into coma he woke in a chaos of whistles, sirens and bugles and opened up with a dozen machine-guns and a thousand rifles.

"Mind you don't muck up our wire," the brigadier had said, but in the stark light of wafting flares Cyril saw that the Colossus dragged hundreds of yards of it from his ankles, along with its attendant stakes and entangled soldiery: as if a plucky detachment of today's dead had joined the medieval corpses to march against the arch-foe of Western Civilization. This image was spoiled when he noted that the march was more like a madhouse quadrille, a flopping, rolling and continual shedding of loose parts and individuals, along with a sporadic recruitment of bloated things that the draglines wrenched out of the mud.

"I gave as good as I got," Cyril said aloud as he composed a letter to Penelope to keep his mind at one remove from his descent into Hell, but that was untrue. He could give only a sputtering cackle of small-calibre



bullets while getting the massed firepower of an army that had long been pining for one big target. The giant thrummed and creaked like a ship battered by wind and wave. A rain of bone fragments rattled on Cyril's helmet as the vast ear above him was whittled away.

A whole German division saw his pathetic gun as the likeliest aiming-point on the monster. He released the grips and slid below the shoulder, where he found himself pressed against a woman: as dead as anything could be, but writhing in a mockery of passion as part of the muscles that swung the ponderous arms in time to the stride of the Colossus. He wrenched his mind from thoughts that made him unworthy of Penelope and surveyed the mud behind him, where he noticed for the first time that his chaps were cheering him on.

The foe brought larger weapons into play. The Teutonic delight in skipping shells off the ground and counting on air-borne concussion to do all the damage seemed less efficient than would have been direct aim at the solar plexus. Their method had little effect on the inexorable legs and feet. But as each scorching wind roared against its chest from exploding shells, Cyril grew more aware of a stench of roasting carrion. As the heat was transferred through the shoulders, the bodies around him began noticeably to soften, to weep and bleed unspeakable fluids.

"Turn back!" he screamed, not thinking what this would mean to his own position vis-a-vis the enemy, but only of the knights and scholars and lovers and laborers of his dream, who were being punched to pieces by the steel chisel-point of a universal fusillade. "They're killing you!" In sardonic response, the mouth of a nearby corpse flapped suddenly open as its liquefaction quickened.

Unwilling to cringe at the rear any longer, he heaved himself back to the shoulder, his boots now sinking like one climbing a muddy slope. He seized the gun and opened fire on the Hun trenches, shaking the weapon and screaming as if to lend the piffling spray of lead the force of his outrage. The gun jammed. He tore open the nearest sack of grenades. Before he could grasp one he found himself tumbling helplessly through a world of white light.

For a short while, he sensed the presence

of countless companions.

\* \* \*

"Bloody fucking hell," said Private Thomas, who had witnessed the direct hit to the chest of the Colossus from the questionable safety of a firing-step. He had wagered heavily that Little Hansel would win the war single-handed, and he saw the sudden blossoming of the monster into a cloud of tumbling bodies and wafting flags as a symbol of three months' pay strewn to the winds.

"It was a lucky shot," Powell said with false sympathy. "Our Colossus should have taken a round from Big Bertha in the belly without so much as rescheduling his bowel movements."

"Shut your bloody holes and look sharp for the attack!" Jenkins shouted.

"Our attack, he probably means," Thomas groaned, and he was dead right.

\* \* \*

No part of the Colossus remained intact, no giant leg or foot to prove that it had walked the waterish waste, only corpses. Rain fell all that night, mingled with occasional showers of high-explosive shells and sleet-storms of machine-gun fire. The dead rose from their graves to be rearranged and reburied. The landscape was smudged out and redrawn again, the soup of mud and men and steel replenished and stirred yet again, until no one could have said with any certainty which were the new corpses and which the old.

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### *Above the Snow Line*

Currents of thought converge  
on this peak at the world's ceiling,  
the true Olympus of olden lore.  
Listen in awe.  
Listen. And gradually  
grow aspects of Otherness.  
Adjust your mind to alien dimensions.  
These places of deities are deadly,  
for holy essences linger  
like Celestial fallout  
although the gods have fled.

Peter Sidney Kemel





